

## Greetings



# Affirming Our Identity



By Dr. The Hon. Rodger Samuel  
Minister of National Diversity  
and Social Integration

**T**RINIDAD and Tobago has always recognised the contribution of the diaspora which comprises our rich diversity of cultures, religions, ethnicities and which has contributed in no small measure to our social stability and economic development. As such, emphasis continues to be placed on our treasured indigenous peoples.

We proudly join with the indigenous community and the rest of the world in commemorating the United Nations Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

While the international indigenous population exceeds 370 million, in Trinidad and Tobago, our numbers have dwindled over the years to a few hundred. Despite this, the contributions of our indigenous peoples remain significant to our cultural fabric, traditional beliefs, customs, and social and national development. All indigenous groups are recognised as citizens and their rights and freedoms are fully enshrined under the Constitution of our Republic (in Act 4 of 1976), which makes provision for the protection of the fundamental human rights and freedom for all of our people of Trinidad and Tobago without discrimination. As such, our indigenous peoples possess the rights of security, equality, respect, freedom of thought, expression, association and assembly, and full participation in political, economic and cultural life.

In June 2012, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago established the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration as its advocate for diversity, nationalism, and greater inclusion. As part of its mandate, the Ministry is responsible for treating with the issues affecting indigenous peoples and their unique needs consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to which Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory.

Through, the establishment of The First Peoples Development Committee, the Government remains committed to co-operating and consulting with indigenous groups. This Committee provides a platform for facilitating consultations and ongoing dialogue, for effecting policy recommendations and the establishment of key linkages, as well as the provision of research and technical support.

Our Government has provided the necessary acreage to establish a model Amerindian Village. This Village will be a reflection of the way of life of our indigenous peoples inclusive of agriculture and cuisine, food manufacturing with a cassava processing plant, their creative skills, medicine, religious practices and traditions, music, dance, and language. The intention is that there will be an acknowledgement of the distinct cultural traditions of our indigenous peoples while creating increased awareness of their contributions as foundations of our origin as a nation.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has been pursuing the inclusion of a module at the Secondary level of education entitled, "Indigenous Societies". We have also established a Thematic History



Queen...  
Jennifer  
Cassar

## Time for Solidarity

*Message from the Queen of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community*

**I**T IS with great anticipation that I welcome the national, regional and international community to the Fourteenth Annual Celebration of First Peoples Heritage Week.

In this week, First Peoples embrace the opportunity to showcase the wealth of culture and traditions that have survived the cruelties of colonisation. It is also an opportunity for descendants of First Peoples in this country to gather from all parts of Trinidad and Tobago to build solidarity in the journey from isolation and under-development.

In observing the determined actions of the First Peoples in defending their homeland, one writer, as far back as 1776, was convinced that "A courageous Chief only is wanted".

Our Ancestors paid the price. Let us now stand tall on their shoulders and move forward to the recognition and development that is long overdue.

May the Great Spirit Tamushi Adayali Wachinachi and those of our ancient ancestors continue to bless us all and this land Kairi - Trinidad and Tobago - the heartstone of our world view.

Committee which will engage in the re-writing of the history of Trinidad and Tobago to allow the transmission of the history, languages, traditions and beliefs of our indigenous peoples at all levels of the educational system. This supports inter-generational transfer of indigenous knowledge.

In 2013, Trinidad and Tobago hosted its first International First Peoples Conference with the theme: "Exploring the Heritage, Consolidating Traditions, Creating Legacy". This allowed for regional and international cultural exchanges with delegates from Guyana, Suriname, Belize, Venezuela, Dominica, St Vincent, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Ecuador, Canada, the United States of America and Trinidad and Tobago.

In 2000, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago designated October 14 as Amerindian Heritage Day in recognition of the presence and contribution of our indigenous peoples. This celebration is highlighted with an annual Heritage Week of activities. This year, we will be issuing a commemorative stamp on the 377th Anniversary of the defense of the home-

land of our First Peoples, Kairi, by renowned Chief Hyarima.

The Government has provided increased resources for the hosting of Heritage Week celebrations, promoting regional and international indigenous cultural exchanges, facilitating further research, documentation and publication, and advancing development through workshops, lectures and publications on indigenous language, song, dance, and music.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, will continue to recognise the value of our cultural diversity inclusive of our indigenous population. As we build upon our affirmation of our national identity, we seek to inculcate pride in heritage, cohesion, and sustainable development in each and every citizen of our Republic.



# Memory and Justice

By Ricardo Bharath Hernandez  
Chief, Santa Rosa First Peoples Community



*"The axe forgets, but the tree that is cut, remembers."*

THIS ancient proverb aptly describes the condition of the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago, 522 years after Columbus interrupted their long centuries of existence here, dating back to 7,000 - 5,000 BC, as evidenced by the unearthing of "Banwari Man".

With just two months remaining in the United Nations Second Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the quest for recognition by the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago has taken several steps backward.

One year ago, the International Conference of First Peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas on the theme "Exploring Heritage, Consolidating Traditions and Creating a Legacy", issued a strong call for October 14th to be a public holiday in honour of Chief Hyarima's defence of Kairi (known today as T&T) against Spanish colonisers. This Resolution strengthened the earlier call of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community. The Community's petition to the Government for a one-off holiday was not favourably considered. There could be many reasons for not granting the holiday, such as the cost to the State and the already large number of public holidays in this country. But, it might also be the result of a view of the First Peoples as a "minority group", insignificant in comparison to other major groups whose celebrations of Emancipation, Indian Arrival, Diwali, Eid and Shouter Baptist triumphs are all officially enshrined by national public holidays.

First Peoples are asking, not for an annual holiday, but for a "one-off" national holiday in or-

der to focus the country's attention on the First Peoples' past and present, and to raise public awareness and recognition of this community. We will relentlessly pursue this issue.

Imagine every year on the Day of Recognition, when First Peoples gather at the Hyarima Monument, people wonder aloud whether Carnival has started so early! As recently as August, 2014 in Rio Claro, the First Peoples' contingent was mistaken for a Parang Band. Such incidents speak loudly to the fact that we are a long way off from the recognition for which we strive. We are not artefacts of the past; we are here, alive and present and living our culture. When soliciting support for our projects, most members of the corporate sector simply know nothing about the First Peoples. Our requests are dismissed, even though the support we seek is for long-term human development and not short term activities.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms that "Indigenous Peoples are equal to all other peoples". Indigenous groups took this issue into account, and as a result States within the UN system were asked to focus on indigenous peoples over the last two decades.

A second major concern of the First Peoples is land – ownership and use. Why is land so important? Because it is the means of survival. Indigenous people of every country have a unique inherent right to the land that is recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The First Peoples of today are "landless". How the Amerindians of Arima lost their land is a topic that has been well-researched by Professor Maximilian Forte. The Deed or title for land in Arima that many hold today did not come directly from the

person who owned the land. It was part of land originally owned by First Peoples and stolen by the Colonisers. This may sound distant and far-fetched to many. It is indeed distant – rolling back over five centuries, but it is by no means far-fetched. The Axe forgets, but the tree that is cut, remembers.

Today, the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community requests land, not to give back to descendants but on which the First Peoples' way of life can be practised.

Apart from preserving heritage and culture, it is a space for creating an understanding of sustainable development based on First Peoples principles. Products are in demand, but we are unable to supply. The opportunity for economic gain is lost leaving the community overly dependent on the Government and restricted in pursuing its own development path.

## UNDER-DEVELOPMENT

It may be argued that the major groups that enjoy public holidays have made and continue to make significant contributions to the development of the nation. Like the "Axe", the decision-makers forget that the foundation of this nation was laid by the First Peoples - not by either the European colonisers or the heroes of Independence from Britain. Where then is the recognition? The descendants of the wounded First Peoples remember.

It is true that the First Peoples had not explored oil, but they used what the Creator had given – Agriculture. They, too, laboured and created profits that built other nations, as was the case with the Africans and East Indians who came and met us here.

When the newcomers arrived, they

seized the lands the First Peoples had already cultivated in cocoa, cassava, maize, arrowroot, cotton, etc. – the backbone of the economy at that time. They had a start, and went on to build wealth at the expense of the First Peoples who were reduced to a state of poverty.

In making the claim for development in general, and through Reparation in particular, the historical records show that when the Intendancy of Venezuela was established in 1776, the Intendant was instructed to ensure that each Indian head of family possessed a plot of land according to the size of his family and that it was maintained in cultivation. The land was to pass from father to son with uncultivated land reverting to the community for re-apportionment.

In 1777, Governor Falquez inspected the 12 villages to ensure the Indians possessed sufficient lands and, again in 1783, Chacon stipulated that every Indian over 16 years of age should have three fanegas of land (22 acres). In addition, they were to cultivate communally two lots of land, one in "plantains, maize, manioc, beans and rice" and another in cotton, for the needs of the community, with any surplus being sold by the Corregidor for the benefit of the village. Most of the Indian villages failed to cultivate effectively the extensive lands they had been assigned in the late sixteenth century because of the decline in their populations due to Native Genocide. To make the lands available for colonists, the Indians from Tacarigua, Arauca and Caura were moved to Arima in 1765.

## LINEAGE & CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION

It is commonly argued that the descendants of the First Peoples are not "pure" in terms of



blood line, and therefore do not have a claim to the rights we enunciate. The question is, who is responsible for this miscegenation or mixing of blood? Through no fault of their own, our Ancestors were deliberately "married into other races" so that their offspring could be termed as "Non Indio" and disenfranchised from their land.

In response to the challenge that questions authenticity based on the purity of blood, there is a guiding precedent set by Canada, where the Aboriginal status of the Metis who were also called "Half Breeds" were constitutionally recognized in the Constitution Act of Canada 1982, Section 35, along with the Indians (First Nations and the Inuit).

The Constitution of Canada is clear in recognizing and affirming the aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada.

Through its actions in granting the Day of Recognition and other rights to the First Peoples, the State has acknowledged the presence of First Peoples in this country Kairi before its name was changed to Trinidad and Tobago. On their behalf I respectfully submit that the next step is recognition of First Peoples within the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. It is perplexing that after a series of Consultations, the Constitution Reform Committee does not have a firm recommendation on First Peoples.

Further, the Preamble to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes "the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples

which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources". (My emphasis)

Articles 2, 3 and 8 of the Declaration are equally strong in stating that:

"Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals, have the right to self-determination, the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture, and prevention of and redress for any action which has the aim of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples".

It is therefore a sign of mis-education that well-intentioned Trinidadians, including persons in ministerial positions, express doubts and question the authenticity of those of us who identify as Amerindians or First Peoples. They deny the existence of Indigenous Peoples in this land. It was presumed that indigenous people either died out or went out of existence by the process of inter-marriage and 'miscegenation' or mixing of blood.

On the issue of names as an indicator of heritage, the Trinidad and Tobago First Peoples were Hispanised – through no fault of ours, but in another deliberate attempt by the colonisers to disenfranchise and assimilate the First Peoples. This is also the case in Guyana where many Indigenous people have English names

and, in the case of Suriname, Dutch names. In the case of Santa Rosa First Peoples Community, our first Carib Queen – Delores Gopaul – married an East Indian. In Guyana a leader with a full Hindi name was the Chief over a village of pure-bred First Peoples. Why then should such a fuss be made about the lineage of the First Peoples in Trinidad and Tobago? F.E.M. Hosein, a former Mayor and Legislator, was an East Indian, who unreservedly took a fatherly interest in the welfare of the "Indians".

Should he not have assisted because he was an East Indian? The debate over "purity" is yet another argument to deny the descendants of the First Peoples their rights.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was approved on September 13, 2007, states that Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are "those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of societies now prevailing in those territories or parts of them".

First Peoples must enjoy their unique status as defined. This unique status comes with our rights as Indigenous Peoples, and not a proclamation that we are higher than other citizens. Yet it is a unique status that should yield for the First Peoples an independent seat on the Arima Borough Council.

Successive governments have played a

part in our march to recognition. It was Dr. Eric Williams, who in 1976 approved a grant of \$157.50 to enable registration of the Community as a company. This was a princely grant considering that the only other direct contribution to the community was \$200 from the Arima Borough Corporation for the Santa Rosa Festival. Subsequently, every political party in office has provided some support to the Community. Formal recognition came under the government of the National Alliance for Reconstruction, led by Prime Minister Arthur N.R. Robinson. The psychological and financial breakthrough came with the emergence of a champion in the late Mr. Peter Harris, a white man. Can we ponder on this for a while? A champion for the First Peoples emerged from the ranks of the British colonizers! His assistance in preparing a project outlining the plight of the First Peoples led to a quantum leap in the progress of the Community.

It is therefore incumbent on First Peoples throughout Trinidad and Tobago to identify with their heritage, and build that critical mass to move us forward. Major recognition is yet to come, and should not be delayed for too long into the future.

It was former Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams who said that "Democracy is not just the right to vote, but recognition of the rights of others."

Can we honestly say that the Rights of the First Peoples are so recognized?



# Celebrating Our Fundamental Connections

As T&T's indigenous telecommunications solutions provider, **blink | bmobile** and the People of our First Nation share a common connection to a strong past and a commitment to a boundless future.

In spite of various challenges, you preserve the connection with your ancestry and shape your modern identity, all of which form part of the rich tapestry that is the heritage of our twin-isles.

**blink | bmobile** salutes Trinidad and Tobago's First Nation's Community!



# T&T's First Citizen

*In December 1971 a team of archaeologists made a find of extraordinary historical importance at Banwari Trace in South Trinidad with the discovery of the oldest human skeleton in the West Indies. The excavation was a joint initiative of the Trinidad and Tobago Historical Society (South Section) led by the late archaeologist Peter Harris, and the Museo del Hombre Dominicano of the Dominican Republic led by Marcio Veloz Maggiolo. Promptly christened "Banwari", the skeleton is currently on display at the Zoological Museum at UWI, St. Augustine. The following description of the find was presented by Peter Harris in 1978.*

IN NOVEMBER 1969, the Trinidad & Tobago Historical Society began a sample excavation into a pre-ceramic site at Banwari Trace, San Francique in South Trinidad. In July 1971, they presented a report showing 2000 years of occupation carbon dated at BC 5200-3200, the then earliest dates for humans in the West Indies.

The settlement appears to have been small, covering approximately 500 square meters. Its economy was based on shellfish hunting and fishing, and some utilization of plant food implied by the presence of handstones and grinding slabs. The remaining tool list included arrows, awls, needles, a probable weaving tool, and an axe. The culture involved the use of pestles shaped from imported stone for some specific pounding process; and use of the hill-top as a cemetery towards end of occupation.

Two unexpected pieces of data were: a date of BC4400 for the Gulf of Paria completing its post-glacial rise in the sea level; and early evidence of travel relationships with Guyana, Venezuela and the Lesser Antilles shown by the artifacts of overseas stone.

Archaeologists from the University of Santo Domingo were quite excited by this data. Their second earliest culture, carbon dated from BC 1500, shares with Banwari the characteristics of: coastal mangrove location; pestles- some of which are identical to Banwari; and axes- which appear to have developed from Banwari-type ancestor.

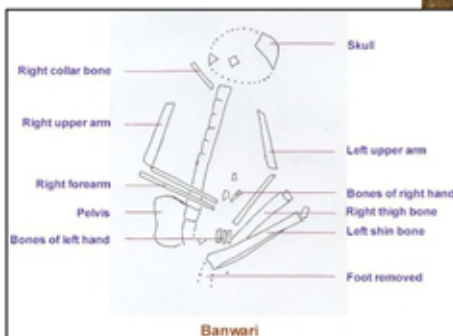
In December 1971 they sent down a team led by Professor Marcio Veloz Maggiolo to investigate the skeletal remains with the Society.

An adjoining excavation was opened and at 15cms, six groups of bones were revealed. The largest group consisted of several long bones, whose disposition suggested the bundle of a secondary burial (reburial of selected bones after decomposition has taken place). An-

other group consisted of a pair of femurs. Underneath the latter, to everyone's surprise, lay the battered remains of the skeleton on view here. It lies on its left hand side, in a typical crouching position, along a northwest axis. Its feet were higher than the rest of the body, and unfortunately were excavated and bagged separately. Only two items were associated, a round pebble by the head and a needle point by the hip. Its situation in a shallow pocket of humus, apparently excavated into the shell midden, and subsequently covered by normal shell refuse, places burial shortly before end of occupation, say approximately 3400BC.

The skeleton was painted with cellulose-in-acetone preservative, boxed in, and a 1/4" steel plate jacked sideways underneath to recover it in its matrix for further research.

Banwari man or woman is still the oldest skeleton in the West Indies, and its survival for 5000 years at 20 cms below the surface is nothing short of miraculous. The Society is prepared to wait, preferable a somewhat shorter period, for research on this unique survivor and the other bone material to be done locally. The hope is that its presence in the Zoology Teaching Museum will stimulate the development of students with sufficient competence in Physical Anthropology to do this research.







By Skye Hernandez

**WHEN a friend of mine returned from his first trip to Guyana, he called me with, "Girl, I saw your relatives when I was there. I now know where your face comes from. That is your country."**

I'd been there a couple of years before, also for the first time, and was overjoyed to see so many indigenous people and learn first-hand a bit more about the rainforest and that heritage. I was more than thrilled when my Arawak guide told me that I had "animal karma", because during our hike so many of the shy creatures came out to see us. I thought at the time that the "flat", beautiful faces of

our original peoples were missing from most of the Caribbean islands. These are the faces you don't see, and that many people forget exist. And yet here was someone telling me that the indigenous ancestry was plain to see in my own face, once he had a context. People often ask me if I'm from Arima or Maracas, St Joseph because I have that face, the Spanish "Carib" face, and I say I have close family there (my father grew up in Williamsville and Arima).

What is the actual thread? My dad told us his grandfather was a "mestizo" from Venezuela, half indigenous. He would probably have been one of the "cocoa panyols" who came over to work on the cocoa estates, and generally

thought to be "Spanish" – for who would claim "Amerindian" ancestry in those days? My dad said he had high cheekbones and Asiatic eyes. We are trying to find out more.

I don't know much about this part of my heritage (nor really about any of the others), but I have always felt proud of it, always had a deep connection to the earth, the trees and rivers of our land. When I first signed up for Facebook and it wanted to know my religion, I wrote "Tall Trees".

It is in their respect for and oneness with the natural world that the legacy of our indigenous people lies. There and in the traces and faces of our First Nations people. We haven't gone anywhere. We are still here.

## Face With A Story

# The Long Walk

*My desire to right/write the story brought me to this place. This walk brought me to the place where I lectured to university students, having never attended university myself. Now I was writing in the books they would study.*



By Tracy Assing

**MY GREAT grandmother Clemencia was one of the founding members of the Santa Rosa Carib Community, now known as the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community.**

We have a large family and members settled in Caura, Lopinot, Brasso Seco, Paria, La Laja, Tamana, Morne La Croix, Mammoral, Blanchisseuse, Sangre Grande and Arima. Community has always been important to us. It was natural for her to gravitate toward having a role in creating something that would reinforce our sense of connectedness. We could never doubt who we were. We have always been proud of our heritage.

She liked to walk. Walking paths along the Northern Range, her footsteps kept the family connected.

This simple example is my main inspiration. When I made the film *The Amerindians*, which premiered at the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival in 2010, my primary purpose was to strengthen community.

The film, which took two years to complete, left me exhausted, emotionally, mentally and financially.

A contemporary telling of the indigenous story of survival in Trinidad had not been told in this way at all. Working through various media genres I had written pieces for the *Trinidad Guardian*, *Caribbean Beat* magazine and the *Caribbean Review of Books*. Having worked as a producer and presented for various television series I thought a documentary film a natural progression. I didn't want to be on film but it turned out to be the only way to tell the story.

I had to decide very early on how much I really wanted to reveal about myself and my

# AMERINDIANS

A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY TRACY KIM ASSING  
RE-DEFINE HISTORY RE-BECOME NATIVE

FUNDED IN PART BY: THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FILM COMPANY AND THE AMERINDIAN PROJECT COMMITTEE

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# STRONG CASE FOR REPARATION

## For Arima First Peoples

By Angelo Bissessar Singh

THE current reparation movement which is sweeping the region seeks to find financial amends for the descendants of the victims of the Transatlantic Slave Trade which ended formally in the British Empire in 1834. Committees have been appointed at a national and regional level to examine the question and put forth plausible avenues of appeal. Indeed, the agglomerated effort is concentrated on a Caribbean task force headed by the formidable intellect of Sir Hilary Beckles whose seminal work, "Britain's Black Debt: Reparations for Slavery and Native Genocide" not only addresses the Afrocentric aspects of the reparations matter but treats with an even older claim and perhaps one that is even more indelibly written in blood.

This is the entitlement of the First Peoples of the region to compensation for the systematic and progressive genocide that was perpetrated on their ancestors. The simplistic view of the matter would be to lay blame for the mass extinction of Caribbean first nations squarely at the feet of the discoverer himself, Christopher Columbus, and the monarchy of Spain for whom he was a de facto agent. A closer analysis of the problems associated with this somewhat infantile summary of the conquest of the Indies would reveal that though the end result of genocide was common to all territories, the historic events surrounding them vary greatly.

For instance, as early as the 17th century, the militant Kalinago peoples of St. Vincent had become hybridized due to inter-breeding with runaway Afro-Caribbean slaves to form a population of Garifunas (Black Caribs). In Dominica in 1903, the British colonial administration designated a 3,700-acre reservation for the remaining Kalinagos of that island. Though heavily mixed at the present, the reservation has served to create an environment where the Dominican first people descendants could be culturally and socially independent. This article would be limitless in attempting to explore the regional first nations reparations issue, but of particular interest would be the case of Trinidad.

The extirpation of the indigenous populations of the island began in earnest with the first permanent Spanish settlement at San Jose de Oruna (St. Joseph) in 1592. This town was founded on the lands of the cacique Goagonare who gave his permission for the purpose. Yet, when English seafarer Sir Walter Raleigh sacked the township three years later, he freed from a

miserable incarceration in the jail, three or four chiefs, among them the hapless Goagonare, which hints that from this early epoch, the annihilation had begun.

Doubtless, low resistance to diseases such as smallpox would have eliminated a major section of the native population in Trinidad, but it was a more extensive and prolonged means that was employed to eventually rob them of their lands, identities and lives. First came the encomienda system by which certain Spanish grantees were given lands to work as plantations. These were sited at Aricagua (San Juan), Tacarigua and Arauca (Arouca). Amerindians were forcibly herded onto these and settled with the professed intent of conversion to Christianity. The natives became little more than slaves, not only being compelled to labour for the encomiendero but also to pay a certain tribute or tax in crops and other goods which were laid in the treasury for the support of the indolent vecinos or Spaniard burghesses of San Jose.

Of far more subtle but equally sinister import, was the impact of the Missions. Upon invitation from the Spanish crown, Capuchin monks, firstly from Catalonia and then latterly from Aragon, founded settlements where the doctrine of religion became the apparatus of tyranny since much like the encomiendas, the Indians were forced to work for the upkeep of the clergy as well as pay a tribute. These were founded in two separate periods, the first being 1687-90 at Naparima (San Fernando), Mayaro (short lived due to threats from mainland tribes), Savanna Grande (Princes Town), Montserrat (Mayo) Savaneta (Savonetta) and San Francisco de los Arenales (near present day San Rafael).

The latter ended in abrupt violence in 1699 when the Tamaqueo tribe rose up and slaughtered the three resident priests and a Spanish carpenter then lay in ambush, killing the governor, Don Jose de Leon y Echales and his official party who were expected at the mission. Part of the impetus for the uprising was the word coming to the mission of the Governor having severely punished and tortured a shaman at the Savaneta mission for speaking out against the religious, social and cultural subjugation of the natives by the Spanish. It was however, to be the only incident of resistance on the part of the First Peoples since the brutal suppression of the insurgent Tamaqueos in the aftermath, put paid to any thoughts of revolt in the other missions. The second period of missionary activity

saw villages being founded at Siparia, Cumana (Toco), and Erin in 1758. Archaeological evidence suggests that the cultural expression of the Amerindians, to say nothing of their religion, was gradually expunged at these missions. A late ceramic tradition identified as Mayoid pottery (because of its first classification at the old Montserrat mission in Mayo village) was being manufactured by Amerindians in the missions as late as 1700 but vanished shortly thereafter, along with other vestiges of indigenous culture. Food such as cassava bread and pepperpot survived into the collective sphere of acceptance because they were simple and easy to prepare. In 1786, the remaining Amerindians of the old encomiendas at Aricagua and Tacarigua were corralled into a new parcel of land with a mission chapel and this became the Mission of Arima. A small number of natives living in the shadow of San Fernando Hill were similarly sent to Savana Grande (later Princes Town) to make way for a new town. Thus, Arima and Savana Grande became the two largest concentrations of indig-

enous peoples in the islands existed at Cumana and of Capuchin monks.

The coming of the Brits from the conquerors in the honour the Spanish institutions but these were solely King Governor Sir Ralph Woodford's solicitude and contempt for them. While he attended them at Arima, his sentiments were summed up in the following Rev. Carillo (the debauched on January 18th 1819):

"In reply to your letter of say that the Laws of the Indians should be educated by the Fathers of the Mission



The Holy Cross RC Church in Princes Town sits on the site of the 1604 quarantine. Archaeological evidence of the mission has recently been unambiguously and museum curator Eric Lewis.

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en by official sanction in 1849.

With the approval of the Magistrate corporal punishment may be inflicted upon those who deserve it. There appears to have been some misunderstanding with regard to that which was inflicted by the Chief of Police, and I have decided that the Cacique (head man) should be removed and another named in his place. It appears to me that although it is a troublesome business to manage the Indians, their natural indolence and their submissive nature requires that the rule should be severe in appearance but mild in reality. I hope that they are now employed under your direction in repairing the Church before the rains will prevent them."

When he visited Trinidad in 1825, a young Englishman named Henry Coleridge went to both Arima and Savana Grande. At the latter, he saw the natives as the figureheads of despair and defeat, being in a state of hopeless acceptance of their grim fate. Part of his account runs thus:

"Nothing seems to affect them like other men; neither joy nor sorrow, anger nor curiosity, take any hold of them. Both mind and body are drenched in the deepest apathy; the children lie quietly on their mothers' bosoms; silence is in their dwellings and idleness in all their ways. The Indians were all summoned forth, and the alcalde and the registers stood in front with their wands of office.

These were nearly the only signs of life which they displayed; they neither smiled nor spoke nor moved, but stood like mortals in a deep trance having their eyes open. The governor gave a piece of money to each of the children, which was received with scarcely any grateful indication of pleasure or gratitude by them or their parents."

At the time, there were scarcely 900 Indians at Arima and Savana Grande all told. The Savana Grande mission along with all others, was disbanded by 1840 and the remnants of the indigenous population scattered throughout the countryside or else took refuge on the mainland.

Arima however, presents a more interesting case for the reparations question since its native inhabitants were granted certain inalienable rights to property as was ironically cemented by Governor Woodford himself, who defended the residents against a petition by certain influential persons in the colony, to deprive them of their properties. In a reply to the petitioners dated October 26th 1819, he wrote:

"I have received and considered your representation of the 12th ult., and in reply have to observe that the ground rent which the Indian Cabildo of the Mission of Arima have imposed on the lots occupied in the village by others than Indians received my consent and approbation. As regards the right of the Indians to impose this charge, the existing documents prove that the land of Arima was given to them (the Indians) as their property in community, with an exclusive and untransferable right to the employment thereof to the best advantage for their general benefit, and as I am not aware of their having by any act forfeited their right to claim rent for any land belonging to them in common, I am advised that it was competent to them to impose a ground rent on lots belonging to them in Arima, and the amount

bears the same proportion to the annual rent as those from which the Cabildo (Town Council) receives a ground rent in this town (Part of Spain)."

The established right to property of the Arimians was borne witness by Don Manuel Sorzana, the Commandant under whose management the town was formed in 1786. The importance of this title to property was of no avail however, for after the official disbanding of the Missions, things began to deteriorate very rapidly. Under the original foundation charter for Arima, the inhabitants were granted a species of municipal government under which they chose their own King and Queen, but more importantly, a Captain or Alcalde from amongst themselves who represented the authority of law in the settlement. Indeed, the following account penned in 1857 by Dr. Louis A.A. DeVerteul, reinforces how the Arimians were robbed of their lands by official sanction and just how far the ethnic and cultural genocide of the indigenous population had progressed:

"In 1849, after the passing of the territorial ordinance, the lots in the village were put up for sale at an upset price to measure the legality of which is highly questionable, as far as the Indians were concerned, since the lands and lots in the mission had been granted to them as a compensation for property of which they had been deprived. The Indians of Arima called themselves *Colifornians*, but few of them are now alive, though the past-arch (about

and cultural extinction of the Amerindians of Trinidad in the 19th century, the present day descendants of these first peoples, although bearing little resemblance to their ancestors of three or four centuries prior, have a powerful claim for reparations. The yeoman work done by the Santa Rosa Carib Community has served to revive many customs which were previously thought extinct because of the actions of the European colonial oppressors. A great deal of credit must be given to the current President of the community, Chief Ricardo Bharath Hernandez for ensuring that the issue of First Peoples affairs is not constantly relegated to the back burner of official policy. A simple way of reinforcing the reparations claim of the Arimians and indeed all descendants of First Peoples in the nation (and many of us are blissfully unaware that in our veins flows the blood of the Amerindians) would be to conduct DNA testing to prove a tangible link between the Arimians of the 18th century and those of today. Groundbreaking discoveries made during excavations on the site of the old Mission of Savana Grande in Princes Town by young antiquarian and historian Eric Lewis, have proven that archaeological evidence can be unearthed of the Mission era, particularly human remains. I have no doubt that under the floor of the Santa Rosa R.C. Church, lies the footprint of the original mission chapel of 1786 wherein the chance and asks would have provided graves for some of the original inhabitants. This material can be used to create a scientifically verified link between those today whose long ancestry in the town would

make them plausible descendants of the

First Peoples whose compensatory rights to property were so rudely stolen by official sanction in 1849.

In addition to genetic rights to inheritance, there is the issue of the cultural heritage of every person of indigenous descent which has so wonderfully been revived by the Carib Community. Although there has been much dialogue between the spokespersons for indigenous affairs and agents of the state, it is

my conviction that serious progress made when

of the First Peoples of public

of the addressing of concerns and matters exclusively related to this cause. With due respect for the multi-ethnic and diverse national pantheon, it would be reprehensible for the government to continually treat native affairs with the scant courtesy that has characterized official involvement over the past years.

Dominica has continually pointed the way forward with a Ministry of Carib Affairs being part of its parliamentary and executive structure. With a state functionary dedicated to representing in legislative and policy matters, a systematic approach to the reparations claim of the descendants of the First Peoples can then be implemented. What is the price that is set on the centuries and decades of suppression and ensure that sought to eliminate altogether the unique identity of our First Peoples?



A typical ajoupa or native dwelling.



Warao of the Orinoco Delta 1912 populated the south-west of Trinidad and visited the island well into the 1940s to trade.

one hundred years old), and his wife, are good specimens of the race or tribe, ....

Santa Rosa's day was really a gay anniversary, at which the poor Indians, the simple children of ire, were, for the time, the principal actors, and during which they forgot both the loss of their heritage, and their own individual sorrows. The 30th of August is a holiday still, but bears quite a different character; people still crowd to the village from different parts of the island, but there are no more Indians, neither are their obligations to be seen adorning the church; their sports and their dances have passed away with the actors there; and, in their stead, quadrilles, waltzes, races, and blind-hook-eyes are the present amusements of the village."

By 1887, J.H. Collins in attending the Feast of Santa Rosa, noted the complete absence of indigenous persons, the fête being celebrated by a multitude of persons of other race.

Regardless of the circumstances of the ethnic dilution

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and Spanish under the control

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Articles of Capitulation to  
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ford, there was a mixture of  
or the indigenous popula-  
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ing letter he addressed to the  
and curate of Savana Grande)

the 8th inst., I have only to  
lies which require that the  
equally forbid the applica-  
ons of severe punishment.



17 Mission of Savana  
earthed here by



## 'The Amerindians' continues to do the work without me'

### From Page 10

family; there were many sensibilities to consider. My great aunt, Valentina Medina, who was the Carib Queen at the time of making the film, had been diagnosed with cancer.

Before my very public storytelling, Amerindian descendants had depended on the stories of their grandparents and great-grandparents for their history; we were written out.

The indigenous, sometimes lumped in with the "coco panyols", had a key role to play in the success of cocoa, coffee and tobacco crops. There are records of "Carib" calypso legends in Port of Spain. They continued to exist in small communities along the backbone of the Northern Range.

Well, this is as limited as my knowledge was at the time. I have to include South Trinidad now. At a screening of "The Amerindians" during its run at the film festival, Rabina Shar who leads a group of Warao descendants in the South, introduced himself to me.

He explained that he was so happy that I had made the film which says the story of the indigenous in Trinidad is not limited to the Santa Rosa Festival. Because "I exist" he said.

This has happened wherever I have screened the film and was present for a discussion or question and answer session afterward, in Trinidad and in Canada. When the lights go up, someone steps forward to proudly declare their connection, their desire to be counted as part of the community. Because their grandmother was, their grandfather was, because they are family.

On the heels of the film festival screenings came other successful screenings at the University of the West Indies in St Augustine, the University of Trinidad and Tobago and Trinidad's National Academy of Performing Arts, as well as Peter Doig's Studio Film club.

As part of the Trinidad and Tobago Film Company's TV Film Festival in August 2011, "The Amerindians" reached homes across the country. In just one weekend, every television station in the country screened the film, along with other locally-produced short films.

My great aunt passed shortly afterward. The Amerindians had its North American premiere at the University of Toronto



on October 14, Day of Recognition. The responsive audience included respected diaspora academics and artists, students of Caribbean History, Caribbean Studies and Indigenous Studies. The film was introduced by Canadian First Nations poet and author, Lee Maracle, one of the first Aboriginal people to be published in the early 1970s. An award-winning poet, novelist, performance storyteller, scriptwriter, actor and keeper/mythmaker among the Sto:lo people.

Two days later, I presented excerpts from the film and gave a presentation on my work and process to a conference for

Aboriginal curators, artists, critics, historians and scholars at OCAD University. The conference was titled 'Revising the Indians of Canada Pavillion: Ahzhekewada' (Let us look back).

Other successful screenings at York University and Trent University lead to revealing discussions about indigenous politics and the importance of anthropological and archaeological studies in the Caribbean.

The Amerindians was also picked up for distribution by Third World Newsreel, a US-based distributor that specializes in educational documentaries.

In the last two years "The Amerindians" has been seen in Madurai International Documentary and Short Film Festival and Chennai International Documentary & Short Film Festival in South India and throughout South America and the Caribbean, through the Travelling Caribbean Film Showcase.

Dr Basil Reid, lecturer in Archaeology, Archaeology Centre, the Department of History at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine asked that I contribute a chapter to the Encyclopedia of Caribbean Archaeology.

My desire to right/write the story brought me to this place. This walk brought me to the place where I lectured to university students, having never attended university myself. Now I was writing in the books they would study.

The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Archaeology was published by University of Florida Press this year and I contributed the chapter on the Santa Rosa Carib Community (Santa Rosa First People's Community).

On September 14, I received an email from Christopher Pinheiro informing me that The Amerindians had captured the award for Best Short: Documentary at the Caribbean Tales International Film Festival held in Toronto.

I was very surprised. The Amerindians is continuing to do the work without me.

The film was not a successful money-making enterprise but I must say that money-making was not my intent. In many ways I sought only to emulate the example set by my great grandmother.







## New Book focuses on First Peoples' Culture

THE food, festivals and medicine of the First Nation community are documented in a new book scheduled for release today, Friday, October 10.

*Kunuwaton* is the title of an illustrated book by Sat Balkaransingh, produced with input from Chef Jassie Singh and Chief Ricardo Bharath, Chief of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community. The book itself focuses on

*Kunuwaton*, a Karina word that translates into 'culture', is an attempt to document the lifestyle of the Karina people whose culture has blended with those of later arrivals to the island to give Trinidad and Tobago culture the unique character that it has today.

In introducing the book, Balkaransingh says he originally intended to address the cuisine of the First Peoples of Santa Rosa of Arima, but that as it developed, he realised that how little is known about the practices and lifestyles of the First People of Kairi or of the Santa Rosa community of Arima.

"Less still is known of the historical antecedents and contributions made by our First Peoples in terms of their culinary, creative and performing arts and traditional medicines to the building of our contemporary socio-cultural landscape," says the author.

*Kunuwaton* opens with an historical account of the Santa Rosa Festival which, at 255 years, is the oldest existing festival in Trinidad and Tobago. Also provided is a detailed description of the smoke ceremony and the water ceremony, conducted in current times by Peyai Cristo Adonis, the community's medicine man or Shamaan. In introducing these, Balkaransingh makes the point about the First Peoples' philosophy of an integrated, interdependent world:

"They adhere to a philosophical belief system that the world is composed of five elements: earth, air, water, fire and ether. There is a consciousness or supreme force that energises these things to create and perpetuate life forms. Everything is intricately interconnected, and to disturb one element is to disturb the pattern of life and the energy that flows from it."

The book makes a foray into the First Nation Peoples' love affair with parang music before going on to an extensive discussion about the food of the First Nation people, with a focus on cassava and other root crops, corn, cocoa, plantains and bananas, fish and meats and vegetables and fruits including avocados, and tomatoes and natural flavourings and spices such as vanilla and tonka bean. Alongside all of these are recipes including recipes for non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks distilled by the indigenous community.

One chapter is devoted to the natural medicine of the First People with its various herbal applications for wounds, injuries and ailments. Many of the herbs mentioned are still widely used both by First Peoples and the wider national community. On the advice of the Peyai, the writer has desisted from giving details about the preparation of some of the medicine in order to avoid the risk of amateur dispensing treatment.

The book is lavishly presented with photographs and written in a style for easy reading.

### STUFFED AREPAS (Empanadas)

#### INGREDIENTS FOR DOUGH

1 1/2 lb. cornmeal  
2 3/4 cups water  
1 tbsp. sugar  
1/2 tsp. salt  
1 oz. margarine or butter

#### INGREDIENTS FOR FILLING

1lb minced beef/ pork/ chicken or fish  
(Vegetarian option of soya or mixed

vegetables)  
2 tbsp. green seasoning  
1/2 tsp. salt  
Oil for deep frying

#### METHOD

Add seasoning and salt to desired filling. Heat heavy saucepan without any fat and add seasoned filling. Cook on low heat for half hour.

Meanwhile, mix salt and sugar into cornmeal.

Heat water and pour it in a large bowl. add margarine or butter, and pour dry

ingredients in, mixing well. Divide dough into 12 pieces and form into balls. Cover with damp cloth. Press dough between 2 sheets of polythene, or 2 pieces of damp poly-ester. Open to 3" round. Place filling in middle of circle of dough. Fold over and trim edges. Deep fry for two - three minutes. As soon as empanadas float, turn to other side. Do not allow to get brown. Drain on paper towels.

# Festival and Rituals of Food







## Decade of Focus

ON 22 December 2004, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/59/174 for a Second International Decade, which commenced on 1 January 2005.

The Decade has five main objectives:

**1) Promoting non-discrimination and inclusion of indigenous peoples in the design, implementation and evaluation of international, regional and national processes regarding laws, policies, resources, programmes and projects;**

**2) Promoting full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in decisions which directly or indirectly affect their lifestyles, traditional lands and territories, their cultural integrity as indigenous peoples with collective rights or any other aspect of their lives, considering the principle of free, prior and informed consent;**

**3) Redefining development policies that depart from a vision of equity and that are culturally appropriate, including respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity of indigenous peoples;**

**4) Adopting targeted policies, programmes, projects and budgets for the development of indigenous peoples, including concrete benchmarks, and particular emphasis on indigenous women, children and youth;**

**5) Developing strong monitoring mechanisms and enhancing accountability at the international, regional and particularly the national level, regarding the implementation of legal, policy and operational frameworks for the protection of indigenous peoples and the improvement of their lives.**

## Aiming For Sustainability

THE First Peoples Village Project is now a high priority item as the Indigenous Community moves to put itself and its culture on a sustainable path. Five years ago, the Government agreed to lease the Community a five-acre parcel of State land for the development of a Model Amerindian Village. This step was taken in response to the 2009 Report of the Amerindian Project Committee. Other project-based initiatives were also agreed to, such as financial support for two documentary films, the provision of technical and financial support

for enhancing exhibits and curatorial services at the First Peoples Centre in Arima.

Since then, the Government has agreed to increase the size of the land from five to 25 acres in the Northern Range. By itself, however, the land lease is far from sufficient to kick-start a venture that could achieve the Community's objectives of economic and cultural sustainability. The sketch shown above was an artist's impression of the First Peoples Village as proposed in the 2009 Report.

With an estimated 40,000 native people, Trinidad was among the most populated of the Eastern Caribbean islands at the time of Columbus' arrival in 1498.

Several towns and villages of modern Trinidad bear the names given to them by the people of the island's First Nation. Among them are Arima, Tunapuna, Arouca, Chaguanas, Couva, Mucurapo, Carapichaima, Mayaro, Tacarigua, Paria, Caura, Guaico, Mayaro, Guayaguayare.

Trinidad and Tobago's two oldest festivals, the Santa Rosa Festival and La Divina Pastora, were introduced by First Nation living in the Amerindian Mission towns of Arima and Siparia respectively.

Among the foods introduced by the native people into the Trinidadian diet are pastelles, cocoa, barbecued wild meat, cassava bread and the alcoholic drink, Warap.





## I, THE STREAM

By CRISTO "AEKOSANG" ADONIS

I, the stream do have a story to tell  
 I once ran and sang happily over lovely stones and mosses  
 Between beautiful banks covered with luscious trees, ferns and bushes  
 That was a time, the people who lived close by treated me with reverence  
 And with love  
 The fishes used me as their home: the animals came to drink of my water  
 And even the birds from above  
 We all lived in perfect peace and harmony  
 I meandered my way to meet my big sister, the river  
 And we entwined, to meet our mother the sea.  
 One day we awoke in surprise  
 To our peaceful place came strangers, who had already planned our demise  
 We being of a simple and peaceful nature  
 Thought they were beings from above  
 So my friends and I treated them with respect and love:  
 I quenched their thirst, soothed their sore bodies  
 Whilst my friends gave them shelter and food  
 All these things we did because they appeared to be harmless and good  
 But then everything changed: we saw their true ways and habits  
 They cut the trees and plants on my banks, their waste in me they dumped  
 I ran no more, but crawled. I sang no more, but whispered: I began to dry  
 Their waste began to poison my friends:  
 Man, animals, birds, fishes and plants  
 We all began to die  
 My sister, the river also became ill and now even our mother the sea is  
 Suffering that evil  
 We weep!  
 We stream!  
 We plead!  
 For a healing,  
 Oh Great Spirit,  
 Send a healing!  
 So we can be once more as we were  
 Then and only then, will there be once more pleasant story to tell

—Photo courtesy NALIS



## Chief Hyarima T&T's First Freedom Fighter

IMMORTALISED in steatite, concrete and bronze paint, Chief Hyarima, leader of the Nepuyo people of North East Trinidad, presides over the Town of Arima where his descendants keep alive the memory of Trinidad and Tobago's first national hero.

Revered as a great warrior and strategist, Hyarima is said to have commanded the respect of warriors from throughout the villages surrounding Arima.

So great was his reputation that both the Spanish who were

trying to settle Trinidad, and the Dutch who were focused on Tobago, feared and respected him. From 1665, when he established a strategic alliance with the Dutch to attack the Spanish, to 1699 when he launched a deadly attack against the Capuchin Missionaries of San Francisco de los Arenales and Governor Don Jose de Leon y Echaes in Arena, Chief Hyarima was the centre of Indigenous resistance.

On 25 May 1993, in commemoration of the UN Year of

the Indigenous People, this statue of Chief Hyarima was unveiled at Hollis Avenue in the heart of Arima. It was designed and created by artist Selwyn Borneo of Maloney Gardens, D'Abadie. The statue stands at 13ft high.

Borneo represents Chief Hyarima as the great warrior he was, dressed only in loincloth with spear in hand, surrounded by an impression of a forested Arima as the area would have been in the time of Hyarima.



# Arandara Ponahara!

## Jouvay Ayiti Coming with Reparations Mas Trilogy

By Rawle Gibbons

WARAO! Nepuyol Lokono/ Arawak  
Chaimal Chaguanes! Kalipunal Kalinagol  
Ciboney! Taino!

The proud roll call of some of the more than 2 million people who populated this region before Columbus' momentous mistake. They had migrated from the Amazon northward and south/east from the north and central continental shores to create what would be essentially island cultures. The history of the Caribbean is first of all, their story: how they migrated across land, built canoes and mastered the sea, planted cassava and produced technologies appropriate to their new environment and needs; the societies they established, the gods they knew and the caciques who ruled in their name.

From 1492 onward, they confront a kanaima of destruction, displacement, disease, forced labour, butchery and genocide, as white men invade and claim their lands in the name of alien countries and kings. This story of conflict, conquest and concession may be the story of all civilizations and would have been taking place on some scale even among the original peoples of the region. However the magnitude of this debacle, driven by Europe's genocidal greed, was without precedent in world history. The story becomes one of resistance, endurance and survival, out of which men and women are named as heroes, traitors and heroines of their people.

"Arandara Ponahara", the 2015 mas of Jouvay Ayiti, recalls our stories of resistance. It is the story of warriors like Bacuanar who forced the Spanish to abandon their first attempts to settle Kairi, which the invaders called Trinidad and Hyarima who later burned their first capital San Jose de Oruna to the ground. It is the story of the Taino caciques Hatuey in Cuba and Queen Anacaona in Haiti who led their people in a fight to the death; of the courageous Kalinago warriors whose swift and well-organized inter-island attacks were the bane of the British and French settlers in Alubera (Tobago) Guanarao (St. Lucia), Camajuya (Grenada) Guaticabon/Waitukubuli, (Dominica) and Carucairi/Guacana (Guadeloupe). It is the story of a fierce new race, the Garifuna, derived from Kalinago peoples and African runaways, who under their fearless paramount chief, Joseph Chatoyer, made Yurumein/Yarumai (St.

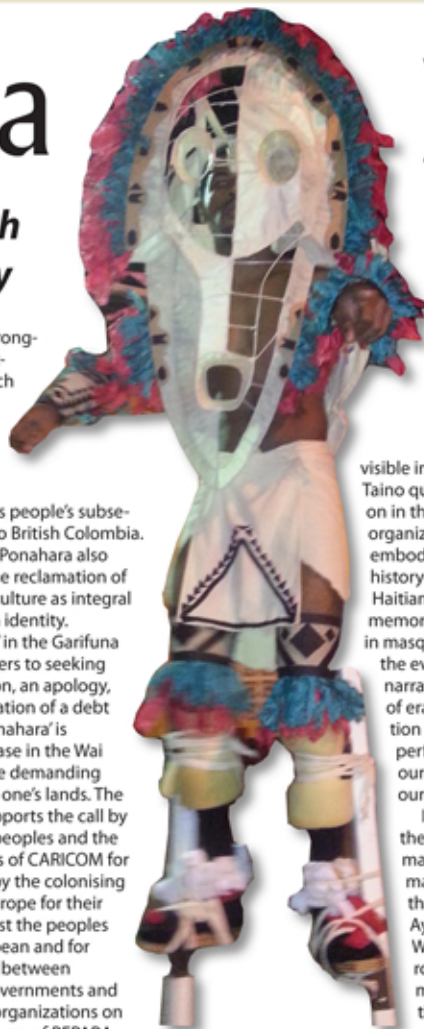
Vincent) a stronghold of resistance to French and British occupation until Chatoyer's death in battle and his people's subsequent exile to British Colombia.

Arandara Ponahara also celebrates the reclamation of indigenous culture as integral to Caribbean identity.

'Arandara' in the Garifuna language refers to seeking compensation, an apology, the reconciliation of a debt or injury; 'Ponahara' is part of a phrase in the Wai Wai language demanding the return of one's lands. The mas thus supports the call by indigenous peoples and the governments of CARICOM for an apology by the colonising powers of Europe for their crimes against the peoples of the Caribbean and for consultation between CARICOM governments and indigenous organizations on the mechanisms of REPARATION.

In meeting these objectives, the band, Jouvay Ayiti, approaches Caribbean indigeneity as a common heritage, a history from which all have benefited, a culture from which there is still much to learn, a call for reparations that is nothing less than just and, therefore, one for which people of all races must stand. The basis for the band's action is recognition of the indigenous peoples as our common ancestors. This reality has long been celebrated in the traditional theatres of Masquerade and Carnival. Throughout the African diaspora in the Caribbean and Americas, the figure of the 'Indian' appears. From the fancy-feathered, intricately beaded oratory of the New Orleans Black Indian, to the peacock-feathered, tomahawked warriors of the islands' masquerades, to the variety of Trinidad's Wild, Black and Fancy Indian traditions, there is the ritualized, festive invocation of this absence of a yet living presence.

In Haiti, where African culture is most



**'Arandara' - Garifuna for seeking compensation, an apology...  
'Ponahara' —part of a phrase in the Wai Wai language demanding the return of one's lands.**

visible in the Caribbean, the Taino queen Anacaona lives on in the names of people, organizations and the embodied possession of history that daily sustains Haitian life. These acts of memorializing, in naming, in masquerade moments, in the everyday transaction of narratives, defy a history of erasure, fragmentation and disunity. In their performance they enact our vision and making of ourselves.

It is from mas as the source of memory, magic and manifestation that Jouvay Ayiti derives. We go to the roots of the mas tradition here:

people wanting/needing to find a space for themselves, to be seen for whom they are or may choose to be, to display their celebration of choice. So the mas is essentially an individual creation and performance, woman or man, Ma and Pa 'making dey manima' - even when presented with a costume in a mini pizza-box. When one's manima is well-made, good and proper, the universe itself does open up; this too, we well know.

The Jouvay Ayiti process, involving continually challenging, engaging, creating, problem-solving is one of continuous learning. Through the connections our work makes with groups and other arts-workers in the region and wider diaspora, we place ourselves within a process of constructing through

the medium of mas, community. Jouvay Ayiti issues its call to all groups, communities, individuals, to become, in their own way, one with the mas. This does not mean all 'joining the band' or bandwagon, for that matter, but re-visiting and re-evaluating the foundation of our common indigenous ancestors and acknowledging their presence in whatever you consider your own celebration.

For us, the peoples of ARANADA PONAHERA, we call on ancestors to testify. Their presence will run through all 3 instalments of a Reparations trilogy (2015-17). So too, will we celebrate achievement, our own 'repairing' of the damage of a history that dictates who was first shall be last and that in the beginning was the sword.





# Retrieving Identity

By Thomas E. Isaac (*Gens' Arime*)  
T&T Philosophical Society

The following paper was presented at the International First peoples' Conference which took place at the UTT O'Meara Campus Auditorium on October 12 - 13, 2013.

SPAIN'S colonial project in the Caribbean led not only to the erasure of cultural identity but to the rapid disappearance of its first peoples within a relatively short time-period. The ruthless passion for gold, if only to ensure that the financial investment made by Ferdinand and Isabella paid out handsome dividends, privileged material wealth over human well-being, and converted the bodies and souls of men into instruments of labour in the quest for money, power and prestige. Through repartimiento and encomienda, the Spaniards herded the natives like animals so as to fully exploit the land for its resources. The brutality of the exploitative machinery and the microbial onslaught from the old world diseases decimated the islanders, and actually wiped out the Amerindian population from almost all of the small Caribbean islands. The Spanish colonial policy, if at all there was one, issued out differing and conflictual concerns, interests and ideological motivations. Much of the actual practice of colonization was conducted, not by learned Iberian scholars fascinated by the challenge of the novel civilizational encounter with unknown cultures and peoples having new ideas and technologies, plants and traditions, capable of enriching the European project. Soldiers, traders, merchantmen, among the most uncaring and ruthless adventurers, exposed for the first time to extreme conditions of survival, embarked on a risky commercial venture in which profit was not guaranteed, thousands of miles from the centres of governance and accountability, and distant from family and friends.

By the fifteenth century the Western Christian church had reached its boundaries in its thrust of evangelizing the heathen, contained as it was geographically by the world of Islam which almost completely encircled Western Europe from Turkey to Morocco. Columbus' new discovery re-ignited the evangelical passion for souls, motivating friars and monks to abandon their curas in Spain for a new world to be claimed and Christianized for king and pope. The early voyages coincided with the expulsion of Jews and Moslems from Spain under the programme of national

unification. The church's spiritual conquest, which at times seemed in conflict with the military and economic enterprise of Spain, as in the case of Las Casas, was really complementary to the designs of conquistador and administrator in its genocidal impact on the body and soul of the native.

The magnitude and temporal celerity of this undertaking, extending from Canada to Argentina eventually when the Protestant nations of Western Europe joined the enterprise, eventuated in what was perhaps the greatest tragedy of human history, surpassing in its horrific effects four centuries of the Atlantic slave trade, the barbarities of the Mongol invasions, or the nightmare of the twentieth century holocaust and the massive destruction of lives in World War II. Those who experienced the most intense form of horror of European conquest were not the Aztecs and Mayas of Mexico nor the Incas of Peru, where tribal identities and languages still survive into modernity because geography provided a buffer to the onslaught of a remorseless invasion of human beings, microbes and

weaponry against which first peoples had little defenses. This is indeed an amazing historical instantiation of the interdependence of man and his natural environment, nature and culture, and a validation of the many eco-philosophies that characterize the consciousness of many first peoples.

The truly tragic onslaught was actually here in the Caribbean, from Cuba and its Tainos people, to Trinidad with its cosmopolis of island and continental races, Kalina, Warao, Kalipuna, Nepuyo, Arawaks, Caribs, many on the move northwards at the same time that the pale strangers were heading southwards in search of gold, pearls and other exotic materials. The intensity of the horror, though not its magnitude, is perhaps captured in the story of Sauteurs, Grenada, where in an act of collective suicide, the natives leaped to their death on the rocks below to escape a worse imagined fate of colonial servitude. It is even more amazing and heroic that here on the islands, in the face of massive destruction and extermination, the noble and courageous fighters right here in Trinidad refused to be completely wiped off the historical records and traces of their struggles and resistance have survived to this day in Arima, on Calvary Hill and along the banks of the Arima River into Mundo Nuevo, and indeed throughout the Northern Range where the tropical rainforest provided shelter and habitat to a lost generation. The remarkable achievement of the group, in-

tent on holding on and retaining or retrieving identity, from Hyarima to Hernandez-Bharath and Cristo Adonis is indeed one of the most remarkable stories in the Americas, and provides us all Trinidadians with a rich legacy that needs to be cherished and celebrated by all.

The struggle for survival and identity began from the first instance of European settlement in the island. We made it hard for Spaniards to settle here, and the very first efforts of colonization failed miserably, not because Trinidad was a Spanish backwater as the Western accounts tell us, but because our first peoples engaged in pitched battle on the central plains with the early colonizers. Later when Spain was better prepared for the challenge the colony around San Jose survived, but the full conquest of the island was still a difficult proposition. The San Rafael affair, the Arena massacre/miracle, which the historians refer to as a massacre of Roman Catholics priests, but was really a Spanish punitive massacre of natives, is merely a single monument of resistance and revolt against repartimiento and Christianization. Spain had to invite French colonists before they could pacify the island, and by the time Britain arrived at the turn of the nineteenth century it was evident that the first peoples had lost their foothold. To make way for Count Lopinot and the many settlers from Grenada the remaining tribes from Tacarigua, Arauca and Caura were herded into Arima, and placed under the supervision of the Santa Rosa Capuchin missionaries. It is here that church and tribe worked together to protect and preserve cultural identity, though only in so far as it was receptive to the doctrinal and formalizing impress of a medieval Christianity. The story of Santa Rosa and her miraculous encounter with a few natives illustrates magnificently the process of cultural preservation-distortion-reproduction that was at work among our first peoples.

It is necessary that we recognize the actual scale of the threat to identity what was often knowingly, often unwillingly orchestrated on our first peoples of Trinidad. In the early twentieth century the people of Calvary Hill were genetically very much true natives. Fair-skinned as compared to the rest of the population, with Amerindian-Asiatic features as their fellow tribesmen along the great river valleys of the Guianas, and still retaining cultural peculiarities like hunting skills and agricultural practices, they stood out uniquely with the burgeoning population of southern Arima. The authorities had failed to discharge the terms of their contractual promises to protect the tribe from migrants coming to live in Arima. Two generations later the physical appearance of the tribe



Participants at the 2013 International Conference



## 'Arima is well poised to be the mecca of a Caribbean renaissance of an indigenous civilization'

had drastically changed, constituting a real threat through miscegenation to the preservation of identity and essence. Most of the tribal descendants, though remarkably retaining native features in physiognomy and countenance, are now characterized as Afro-Trinidadians, or Cocoa-Payols Spanish (which until quite recently constituted the spoken language and the lyrical content of the parang). All these curiously exotic designations are nothing more than a deliberate erasure of cultural difference which fifty years of national independence has failed to nurture. Today the task of preserving and retrieving identity and essence is perhaps under its greatest threat; all the more reason for supporting and sustaining the work of Ricardo, Cristo and the Carib Queen of Arima.

The nature of that threat is what we need to examine at this time, if the project of cultural retrieval is to be accomplished with any reasonable degree of success. Native cultures were deliberately demonized and eradicated in the early period of European colonization, when Spanish, and later English and French governments perceived their historic mission as civilizing the barbarous and assimilated them to Western cultural practices. This required a virtual transformation of consciousness, the imposition of a new pantheon of divinities, new apparel, languages, technologies of existence and production, strategies for living, as well as transformed sensibilities in matters of taste, melody, beauty, order and ethical virtue. To be human, and the Europeans were not always too certain of the native's full humanity, was to be European, and this applied to all first peoples, be they from the Americas, Africa or Asia. It was at this time that many of the racialogical theories were concocted in Western academia and the discourses over empire and the nature of non-Europeans. Non-Europeans could not fit into a Christian world-view that confined humanity within the boundaries of a Biblical decent from Noah within a post-diluvian Middle-Eastern river valley. Later, even modern scientific notions of biological evolution were used to support racial agendas that hierarchized the races in degrees of evolutionary ascent to homo sapiens. Mulattos and Mestizos did not fare well in these estimations, as their name suggests, and were often perceived as the basest forms of humanity, and even at first as sterile and sub-human creatures.

The real tragedy of all this is the European political power and military superiority imposed this cultural-intellectual regime on first peoples throughout the new and old worlds, China and Japan excepted, and the victims almost to a man came to accept this world-view and vision, believing in its rightness and veracity within a Christian epistemology, and consciously abandoning the folk mores of their ancestors. This is a process that continues to this day despite talk of cultural diversity and

the legitimacy of difference. Post-modern scepticism and its levelling of culture and tradition has not been able to check the impetuous march of a triumphalist modernity that continues to promote the western project. What reinforces modernity's self-assurance and hubris is the triumph of technology which implicitly relegates all early cultures to the dust-bins of history. The recent idolization and fetishization of the gadgets of modern civilization renders the production techniques of former times and peoples fossilized of a primitive past.

This new cult of technology threatens to condemn us to a Marcusian one-dimensionality that deprives living in modern times of its richness and diversity. So much the more must we therefore preserve the memory of the past, and protect the legacy of ancestors

Today the voice of the first peoples is heard throughout the world in so many ways, but it is the Native American that is the most significant and sonorous because of the reality of the historical tragedy and the actual threat of disappearance. Here in Trinidad that voice must be heard among a competing cacophony of other voices. First there was the black awakening beginning in the early twentieth century with Garvey and the pan-African movement, and culminating in the American Civil rights movement and Black power during the 60's and 70's. That Africanist discourse is still alive and implicates many of our Arima first peoples who share an African ancestry. In response there was a corresponding Indo-Trinidadian awakening with a renewed pride in an Asiatic heritage which like the African was bludgeoned by Western arrogance and atrocities. Some tribal members share this heritage also. National independence brought to Trinidad another discourse that also promised to erode the culture of first peoples. It was a nationalist programme that aimed initially at subsuming ethnic difference under a unified image of the Trinidadian, and the model was Afro-creole. Some accommodation was made for the Amerindian heritage in the nationalist revival of the music of the parandero, although this was viewed as a seasonal past-time fitted for Better Village competitions or Christmas festivities. The studious preservation of a unique culture that perhaps can alone lay claim to be truly Trinidadian was hardly ever taken into account. Thanks to the archaeo-

logical work of Prof Harris and others and the living experimental endeavours of Ricardo, Cristo and other tribal leaders, a legacy has been protected and retrieved for generations to come.

For the Amerindian occupying this Bhabhaian space of cultural hybridity, the retrieval and preservation of identity is a momentarily hazardous undertaking. Without a literary culture of their own which can best protect and preserve patrimony and inheritance, native peoples were without agency in the epistemic task of self-definition, only to discover themselves later in history described as cannibalistic, lazy, slovenly, demonic in

Geronimo are still numbered among the enemies of America. Here in Trinidad a Hyarima or any of the early caciques are not given the historical status of a De Berrio, Chacon, Lord Harris even in contemporary national historiography, but always portrayed as an exotic other in opposition to the relentless march of Western civilization. Historical reminiscence, the essence of the present project, painful as it may be, requires not merely retrieval, but a redefinition of a Caribbean subjectivity, and a new narrative account of history that relocates Columbus quite late in the story of the Americas.

To secure our own Trinidad legacy is one of the greatest challenges to government, academia and tribe here in Trinidad. Our Ministry of Culture needs to give some measure of serious attention to task preservation, providing the infrastructure and financial resources for such a project. Our primary centres of learning, UWI, UTT, USC need to invest in the archaeological researchers necessary to retrieve so much that is lost to history. The palpable recreation of an Amerindian culture and civilization must be undertaken in the efficiently administered preservation of this unique arts and skills of food-preparation, technologies of production, aesthetic pursuits, music, sculpture, wood-work, painting, and basketry, weaving and the many elements of native life. That authentic Carib/First Peoples village must be laboriously constructed, not primarily as a premier touristic attraction on the traveling itinerary in the Caribbean, but more so as a retrieval/recreation of an indigenous civilization and ecology within and alongside our cultural modernity for the enrichment of our human experience and the education of the young. We need writers, literary men and woman who in novel and poetry, stage and historiography, will recreate in the life



Delegates arrive for the Conference

religious practices, sterile, unprogressive and un-historical in the march of civilization. The onslaught of this epistemic injustice together with the collective amnesia that continues to haunt the consciousness of most Caribbean peoples, native as well as immigrant. Retrieving memory therefore becomes emotively a painful experience, a collective, tribal reliving of the agonies and atrocities of history, and the new self-writing into the record of the human presents an arduous task of collecting fragments of a lost civilization. It is a positive responses to Spivak's famous question "Can the sub-altern speak?" Such conferences of first peoples, with an increasing population of Gramscian organic intellectuals, are for the first time truly speaking, and their intellectual task requires the complete debunking of the Western Eurocentric perspective on history and culture. To this day the USA has not embraced the stories of its first peoples as its own, and Sitting Bull, Crazy Hawk or

of the collective imagination reminiscences of the native past. This requires a tremendous investment in our human resources, a studious commitment to the enterprise of the Indies, and a genuine belief in the value of undertaking. Tribe and national community must work together to protect and preserve this truly indigenous inheritance, locating it centrally in a national cultural project. Arima is well poised to be the mecca of a Caribbean renaissance of an indigenous civilization.

How all of this fits into a new vision of humanity, a philosophical frame that identifies the preservation of an Amerindian heritage with the ultimate human project of survival, restoration, insight, even I daresay a transcend Logos that secures man's place in the universe, his cosmological topos, is the real intellectual challenge that confronts the dangerous luxury of philosophical reflections that have only in recent times been daring to project thought thus far.





The Inherent Nobility of Man (1962), a mural by the artist Carlisle Chang at the Old Piarco Airport. It was infamously destroyed on instruction of the Government of T&T to make way for new construction. The painting depicts the stream of people for whom Trinidad has been home, beginning with the native people followed by successive waves of immigrants from Europe, Africa and Asia.

# Message to The Future

*By Rabina Shar  
Spokesperson of the Elders Council of the Warao  
Community in the Southwestern Peninsular of  
Trinidad and Tobago*

**I WRITE with the permission of my Elders Council which recognizes that all our people have been indoctrinated for over 400 years.**

The Warao way of life, our religion, our traditions and eventually our freedom to determine our destiny, have been forcefully taken away from us. The political resources of our lands have been captured and controlled by foreign invaders. Our history has been painted as cannibalism, ignorance and dead warriors who lost their birthright against a superior race and military power. Those among our people who betrayed our dignity and joined the ranks of the European invaders have been heralded as our heroes. Most of our oppressed survivors have been converted to Catholics under the Jesuits and Capuchin Priests who inducted our female saints like La Divina Pastora and Santa Rosa De Lima into the church. In the twentieth century most of our people were led to believe that they had been transformed into Spaniards by virtue of interbreeding with the Spanish.

This scenario in which our children of the Warao Community have been made to exist hides the truth of who we are, who we were and who we shall be in the future.

Our Elders Council has been the conscious witnesses of this historical phenomenon. We have decided to research the traditions of our Ancestors and to tell the truth to our children. Our Grand Chief Mr. Lawrence Gervais, a retired school principal from Rancho Quemado, says I, Rabina Shar, the youngest of the Elders should become the Voice and the Opinions of the Elders. That I should enlighten our people

with the oral history and research of our great traditions, religion and the human values of our civilization.

We thank Ms. Michelle Goldwasser, anthropologist from UCLA for the research she has done on our people and has shared with us. Our Elder Felix Voisin Jones has been the host of this great lady and friend. He is the heartbeat of our allegiance to the development of our resurgence as the First Nation in the habitat of both Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago, part of the South American continent.

According to Johannes Wilbert author of "Mystic Endowment" among other books and our oral traditions, around 5000 years ago Trinidad and Venezuela was one land mass. Nature has since separated Trinidad from the mainland by sea. The Warao people are the original inhabitants of these lands situated near the mouth of the Orinoco River. Our habitat extended to Guyana and lands now under the sea in the East.

Our cosmological world is bounded by four mountains at the cardinal points: In the South by Cerro Manoa in Venezuela, in the North by Naparima Hill in the city of San Fernando in Trinidad, in the West by mountains in Guyana, in the East by a mountain sunken within the Atlantic Ocean. These mountains or hills are the abode of our Earth Gods who are our earliest Ancestors who left the knowledge and sciences of our civilization to be passed down through our Shamans or high priest and priestesses.

The Northern Earth Gods hold the realm of the Sanctuary (Naparima Hill), where our First Father, "Haburi", used to meditate in order to access the universal or Heavenly Realm. Little has been researched by scholars in this regard that has come to light. The destruction of this

hill and transformation of the Holy Cave by Europeans into underground sealed buildings is a protected environment by the State which has it under its control.

The concept of power versus truth is the struggle our Elders Council faces today.

The crime is clear. On 13 September 2007 the United Nations declared the Rights of Indigenous People. Yet they have not created a criminal court to deal with these issues.

Instead, they have put the "Aboriginal Case" before the very nations that have been given power; by the colonizers, and are the beneficiaries of the colonial inheritance.

Our struggle, already outlined in our proposal to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, is a simple one. Know that for 7000 years and more the Warao People have known this land and this land has known their descendants. For this reason, the Spirit of our Ancestors have requested:

[1] That the Constitution of this land acknowledges the recognition of our descendants as the First People and the First Nation of these Lands;

[2] That our people's right to serve our Earth Gods in the Northern End of our Cosmological World at the Naparima Hill in San Fernando be recognised;

[3] That the burial ground of our Ancestors be granted to our People so that we can pay respect to our Ancestors in accordance with our traditions;

[4] That our Holy City of Siparia be open to our brothers and sisters to pay respect unto our Mother Goddess, known to you as La Divina Pastora;

[5] That our people be eligible for part of the national resources which belong to us by virtue of our right to our lands over 7000 years

of occupation as the First Citizens of this Land;

[6] That our descendants be they described as Caribs or Arawaks be identified as First People, registered as First People and allowed to be organized into groups with the principle of freedom of association;

[7] That funding be appropriated for the purpose of Research and Development of religion, traditional governance and economic development and that scholarships and visits to Venezuela and Guyana be given to advance the knowledge and culture of our origin;

[8] That all artefacts that were taken out of our land be returned and that any further exploitation of same be discontinued by enforcement of implementable laws;

[9] That an Alliance between the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and their government be arrived at, with a view to becoming One Nation with respect for the rights of Aboriginal People, an equation which has been excluded in the formation of our Constitution;

[10] That the existing Amerindian Project Committee be revisited and efforts be made to legalize the status of the First People, leading up to the formation of a Ministry of First People that shall represent the Assembly of First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago at the Parliamentary level;

[11] That groups of First People be formed and organized as an Assembly run by representatives of their choice guided by Traditional Governance;

[12] That historical rights of our people within the Republic of Venezuela be recognised in good faith.

We remain peaceful in our undertakings as we struggle against all odds for justice.

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2015

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: A DECADE FOR ACTION AND DIGNITY  
PUEBLOS INDÍGENAS: UN DECENIO PARA LA ACCIÓN Y DIGNIDAD  
PEUPLES AUTOCHTONES : UNE DÉCENNIE POUR L'ACTION ET DIGNITÉ  
КОРЕННЫЕ НАРОДЫ: ДЕСЯТИЛЕТИЕ ДЕЙСТВИЙ И ДОСТОИНСТВА

# First Peoples Heritage Week 2014



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A collaboration between  
**Santa Rosa First Peoples  
Community**  
and  
**The Ministry of  
National Diversity and  
Social Integration**

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