

CAPE CARIBBEAN STUDIES

An Interdisciplinary Approach

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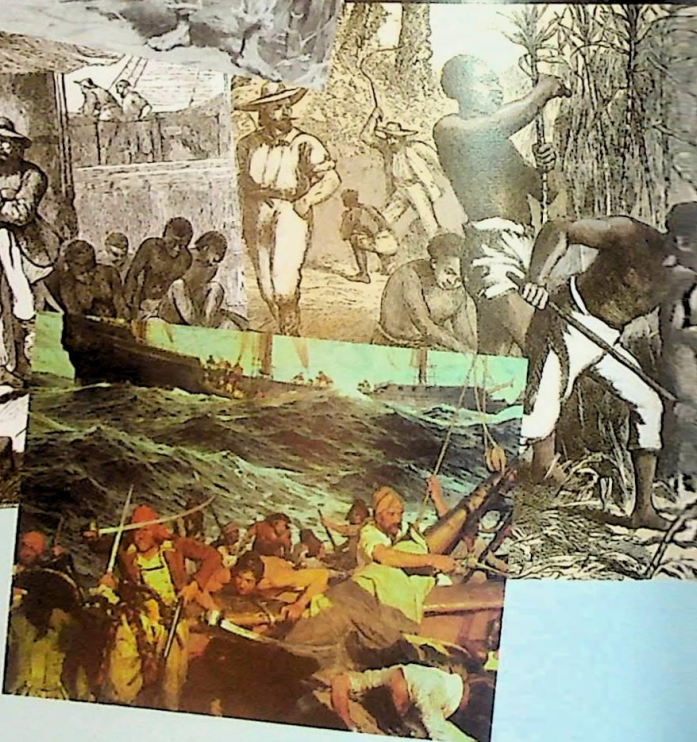
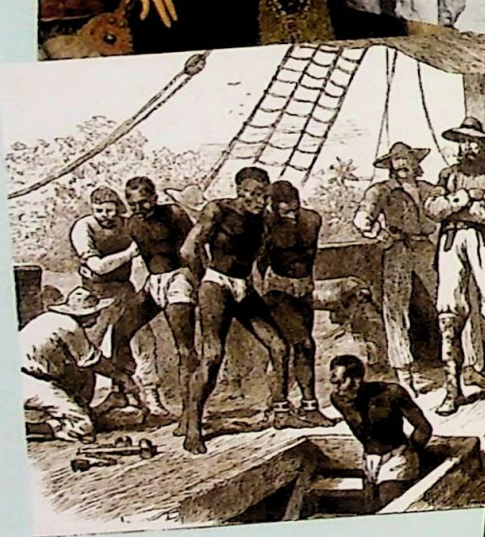
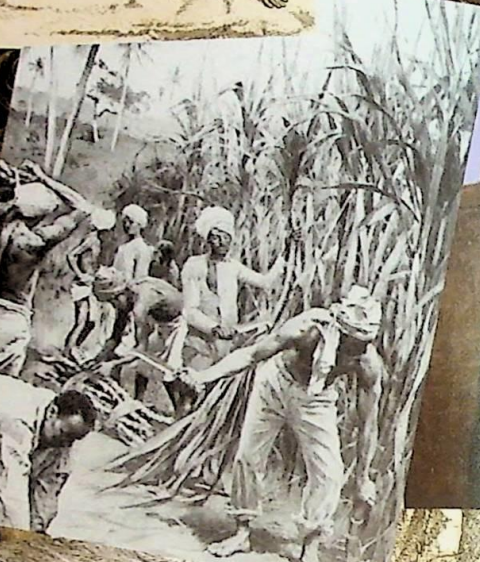
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TRACING HISTORY IN CARIBBEAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Until recently, Caribbean history was written by scholars with a distinctly ethnocentric outlook; that is, everything was judged by mainstream ideas in developed countries. Today those views of what happened in the past have been repeatedly challenged by Caribbean scholars more sensitive to the notion that history is largely an interpretive exercise, greatly influenced by who is doing the interpreting. Such insights are more likely to come from people who were colonized and are seeking ways of establishing their identity or identities. They offer alternative explanations and analyses to those presented in the past, largely by Europeans. This chapter is an attempt to dispel ideas that history is only about understanding the past and is of limited value in the here and now. The history of the Caribbean is related to present-day society and culture, and a major concern throughout the chapter relates to these ethnocentric ideas we have been taught as history and how they have influenced our understanding of the contemporary Caribbean.

The chapter begins with the earliest peoples in the Caribbean, people who have been virtually ignored in the historical account. It then moves through significant themes in the development of Caribbean society and culture – namely migration, systems of production, responses to oppression and genocide, and political and economic movements towards independence. The emphasis is not so much the re-telling of history as an analysis of its significance in Caribbean society and culture.

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completing this chapter, you will be able to

- 1 describe the main historical events and processes in Caribbean history
- 2 relate historical events and processes to contemporary Caribbean society and culture
- 3 critically analyse traditional accounts of Caribbean history
- 4 apply historical knowledge in describing diversity and complexity in Caribbean society and culture
- 5 appreciate how a knowledge of history deepens an understanding of Caribbean social life.

4.1

MIGRATIONS

The movement of people from place to place also means the movement of society and culture, as well as their meeting and mixing with other societies and cultures. The great migrations that have occurred over the Earth's surface from time immemorial have always signalled fundamental changes and adaptations in both the migrants and in the groups amongst whom they eventually settled. The Caribbean is a region that

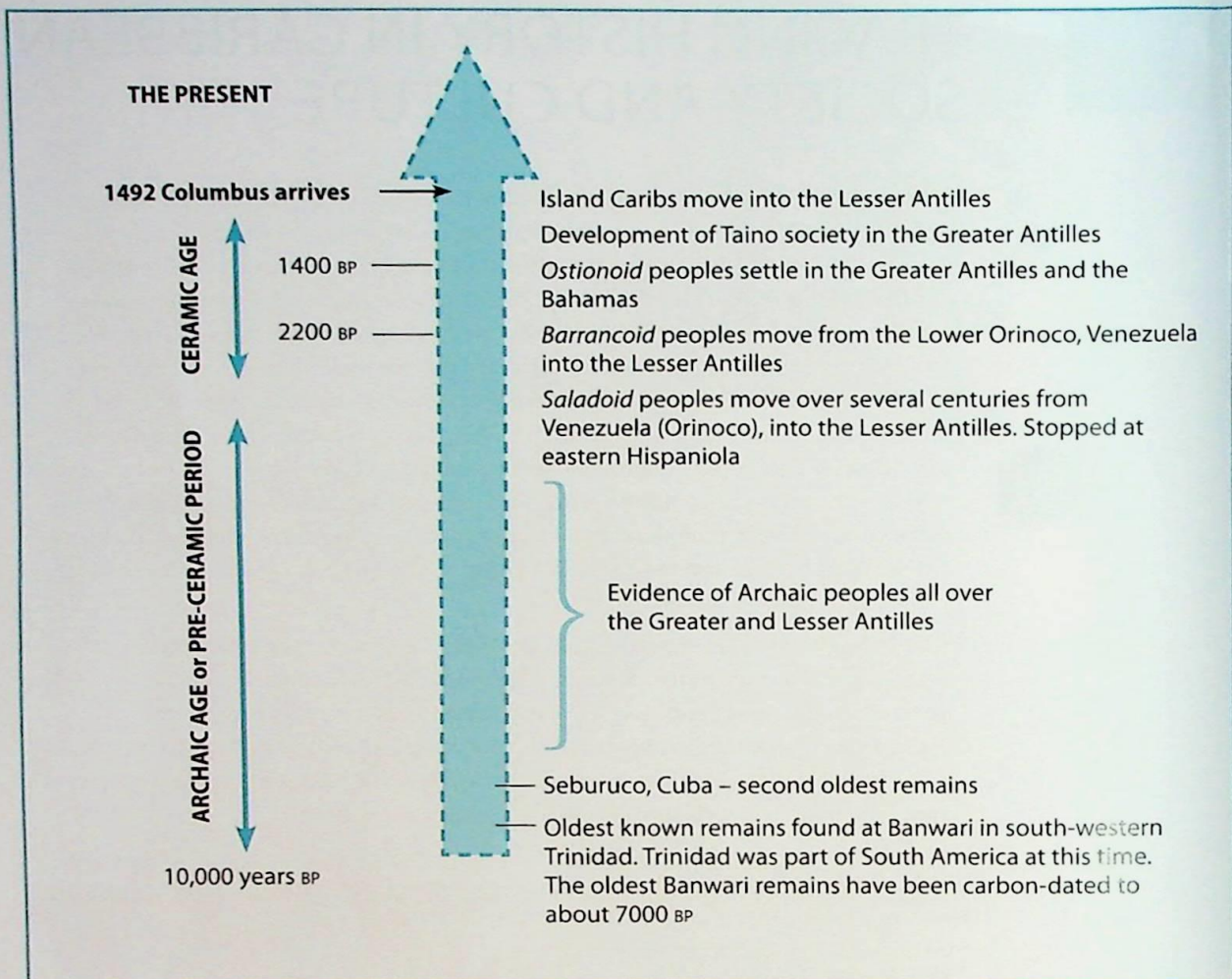


Fig. 4.1 The earliest migrations into the Caribbean (Note: BP = before the present)

has experienced significant migrations, each impacting on social life, even today. In this section, the focus is on the major movements of people *into* the Caribbean (*immigration*).

Earliest Caribbean migrations

A popular misconception about Caribbean history is that it is 'short' and that the society is 'relatively new'. These are **ethnocentric** ideas in that emphasis is given to Columbus and the influx of Europeans into the region, dating all that is significant in the Caribbean region from 1492, with the first voyage of Columbus. Some attention has been given to Caribs and Arawaks but much of that account too is flawed, being informed largely by European interpretations of the life of native peoples.

A more accurate picture of the history of the Caribbean region must reverse these misconceptions. Fig. 4.1 shows the long habitation of people in the region,

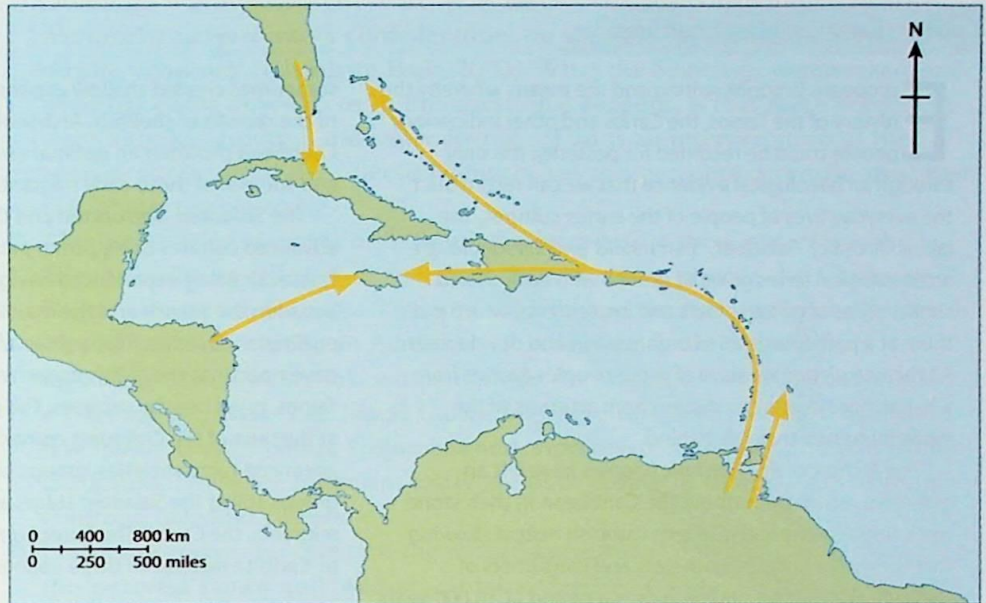


Fig. 4.2 Early migratory routes into the Caribbean

dating from over 10,000 years before the present (BP). Today archaeology is revealing more of their lives and challenging many of the assumptions we have come to accept as Caribbean history. For example:

- The fact that the earliest remains of habitation are found in both Trinidad and Cuba suggests that migrations into the Caribbean were not just from south to north but also that people entered the region from Central America, and even Florida (Fig. 4.2).
- These earliest peoples, of the *Archaic* or *pre-Ceramic period* (they had not yet discovered the use of pottery), spread out and lived in the Greater and Lesser Antilles for over 5000 years *before* other groups migrated into the region. Thus, the region already had a long history before *Ceramic* groups moved in and long before Columbus arrived.
- From about 2400 years BP different cultural groups, distinguished by distinctive styles of pottery, ornamentation and lifestyles (occupations, diet, ceremonies, **beliefs** and practices) began to migrate from South America into the Lesser Antilles. They did not settle the islands chronologically from south to north, but bypassed some altogether. The Archaic peoples who were already there experienced **acculturation** into the *Saladoid*, *Barrancoid* and *Ostionoid* cultures (Box 4.1), showing that the meeting, mixing and **hybridization** of peoples and cultures have been going on in the Caribbean for millennia.
- One aspect that has been played down in the historical record of life amongst these early peoples is the amount of contact and mobility they enjoyed. While we have learned about the prowess of the Caribs with the dug-out canoe, we did not learn that trade, for example, was something that was long established between the early island dwellers and mainland communities. Thus, it was not

BOX 4.1 Early Caribbean cultures

Europeans brought writing and the means whereby the history of the Tainos, the Caribs and other indigenous people could be recorded for posterity. It is only through archaeological evidence that we can reconstruct the everyday lives of people of the earlier cultures. The labels 'Archaic', 'Saladoid', 'Barrancoid' and 'Ostionoid' are archaeological terms given to groups who each shared similar styles of pottery, tools and implements, which put them at a particular level of organization and development. All the knowledge we have of these peoples derives from what archaeologists can discern from artefacts of the *material culture* they left behind.

The *Archaic* or *Pre-Ceramic* peoples have left an extensive record throughout the Caribbean in their stone tools, implements and middens (rubbish heaps) showing that they were hunters, gatherers and consumers of shellfish. Fluctuating sea levels over a period of 10,000 years

sometimes created shallow expanses of sea conducive to the growth of shellfish. Archaeologists feel that the Caribbean provided an optimal environment for the growth and survival of these early migrants.

The *Saladoid*, *Barrancoid* and *Ostionoid* were more advanced cultures using pottery and cultivating manioc (cassava). Being experienced navigators, they traded between the islands and the mainland and had simple, egalitarian societies. Through acculturation they eventually developed into the highly organized chiefdoms of the Tainos, ruled over by *caciques*. The people of the Caribbean at the time of the Conquest comprised the relatively advanced Taino societies, groups of Archaic peoples, other groups still at the Saladoid stage, and the most recent migrants, the Caribs. The Europeans used the terms 'Taino' or 'Carib' to include all these various groups.

just a matter of migrant groups moving northwards into the Caribbean; they frequently backtracked and kept in constant communication with suppliers of raw materials for pottery, ornaments, and various tools of stone, shell, coral and bone. The historical picture, then, is one of intense interaction between the peoples of the northern coast of South America and the Antilles.

- We have been taught about 'Amerindians' as if they were (and are) a uniform group. The reality is that hybridization developed differently in different parts of the Caribbean, and these hybrid groups co-existed with Archaic peoples still living in large communities in western Cuba and remote parts of Hispaniola (they were called *Ciboney*s) in 1492.
- European historians used labels for native peoples that were later revealed to be wrong. The people of the Greater Antilles at the time of Contact (coming of the Europeans) were labelled 'Arawak'. They spoke a language similar to that of the 'true' Arawaks of the Orinoco valley and Trinidad, people who are still found today in coastal Guyana and Suriname. However, they did not regard themselves as allied with any **ethnic group** in South America. In fact, they did not even regard themselves as one uniform cultural group throughout the Greater Antilles. The people of the Greater Antilles did use the term 'Taino', but historians are unsure about how they used it. Today we use it as a label to describe them instead of 'Arawak'.
- The *Tainos* evolved out of cultural mixing amongst the earlier peoples of the Greater Antilles; they did not come as a separate wave of migration. At the time of Contact they had developed a highly organized civilization of chiefdoms governed by *caciques*, in the process of becoming city-states similar to those of the Maya and other mainland societies. In fact, Jaragua in Santo

Domingo was almost a city-state as its *cacique*, Behechio, had united many of the nearby *caciques* into a confederation, on the basis of which there was a surplus economy (Chanlatte Baik, 2003). What the Spaniards emphasized, and what has come down to us in the traditional account, is that these peoples were 'simple, primitive and peace loving'. This is an interpretation of the Spanish dating from the fifteenth century, yet this perception remains amongst Caribbean people today.

- The last wave of migrants from South America before the Contact was the **Island Caribs**, so called to differentiate them from the present-day Caribs in Venezuela and the Guianas. The label 'Carib', too, was created by the Spaniards. The Island Caribs spoke an Arawakan language (no doubt derived from capturing so many 'Arawak' women) while the Caribs of the mainland speak a Caribbean language. The Island Caribs may have only entered the Caribbean a few hundred years before Columbus and were regarded as very different from the Tainos. However, historians today see both groups as having evolved from a common Saladoid culture.
- Historians today also question the judgement handed down by the Spaniards of the 'peaceful Tainos' and 'warlike, cannibal Caribs'. The Tainos may have been peaceful initially, but they vigorously resisted their extermination and even allied with the Caribs, as in 1511 in Puerto Rico to stage an uprising against Spanish rule. If we employed less ethnocentric thinking we might describe the Caribs as 'daring, fearless and mighty warriors'. One can even say that the Spaniards were 'warlike' as they were wresting territory from their rightful owners. The charge of cannibalism is also debated. While certain beliefs may have called for rituals involving cannibalism, the Spaniards distorted these religious practices to cast the Carib as bestial and deserving of enslavement or annihilation. It is argued that the Europeans needed slave labour to replace the dwindling Taino population and used the 'myth of cannibalism' as a justification for waging war on the Caribs, with the intention of subjugating them as slaves. In 1511, Bartolomé de Las Casas protested Trinidad's indigenous peoples being classified by the Spanish Crown as 'Carib' for this very reason; yet many were enslaved and sent to Margarita for pearl fishing.
- Finally, we have all learned that the Tainos were completely wiped out in the Greater Antilles and that the earlier inhabitants are long gone. Today, however, DNA evidence is throwing new light on our connections to our prehistory (Box 4.2).

Patterns of early migrations in the Caribbean show that the region has had a long history of settlement, much of which is unknown to students. In schools, emphasis is given to the study of the Caribs and Tainos, as these were the people living in the region when the Europeans arrived and about whom there is a written record. Archaeology helps us to discover more about the earlier inhabitants, but even with some of this knowledge already unearthed many Caribbean people still date our history to the advent of Europeans into the region. Diverse groups of Amerindians in the Caribbean today are aggressively trying to reverse this misconception by researching their own history, forming associations to publicize their lifestyles and that of their ancestors, and reminding us that they are the

BOX 4.2 DNA versus the historical record

Our DNA is found in the nucleus of our cells and we inherit it in equal parts from our mothers and fathers. However, *mitochondrial DNA* (mtDNA) is not found in the nucleus of the cell with our DNA; it is found separately as an *organelle*. Recently it has been discovered that our mtDNA is inherited only from our mothers, and they inherit it intact from their own mothers, and so on, going back throughout history. Thus, the mtDNA within your body carries clues about your early maternal ancestors.

In 1990 a study of ancestral inheritance was conducted in Puerto Rico by genetic testing of a random sample of people. The results were startling in that 61 per cent of Puerto Ricans were shown to have mtDNA characteristic of Amerindians, while 27 per cent had mtDNA characteristic of Africans and 12 per cent had mtDNA characteristic of Caucasians. Puerto Ricans usually regarded themselves

as descended from the Spaniards, with some admixture of African and Amerindian heritage. While that may be true in terms of their DNA, governing how they look (their *phenotype*), their mtDNA showed their genetic history over many hundreds of years (their *genotype*), and that many of them were descended from Amerindians (Kearns, 2003).

This is interesting in that it shows the amount of *miscegenation* occurring in the early days of the Conquest. Amerindian mtDNA, too, will undoubtedly show the miscegenation which occurred between Archaic and Ceramic peoples and the Taino. What all this really shows is that much of our genetic ancestry may be hidden from us. We may have physical characteristics that tend to characterize us as belonging to an ethnic group – African – but our genetic record may show that we have had Amerindian ancestors.

ACTIVITY 4.1

1. Suggest how an Amerindian version of the 'Coming of the Europeans' would differ from the traditional account.
2. Reflecting on what you learned about early Caribbean history as a younger student, how has that historical account influenced your understanding of Caribbean society and culture today?

original inhabitants of these lands, still alive and well. For example, the Carib community of Dominica has staged canoe trips to Trinidad and Guyana to meet other Carib communities.

European migrations

Columbus may not have been the first European to visit the Americas but he was the first to carry back tangible evidence of gold to show their Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella. If Columbus had not found gold and precious stones it is hardly likely that the Caribbean would have stirred up so much interest and expectations amongst Europeans. As soon as he returned to Spain after his first voyage of 1492, wave after wave of Spaniards came out to 'seek their fortunes'. Conquistadors and soldiers came to plunder, priests came to convert the 'heathen', and administrators came to organize society and arrange that the gold and silver of the Spanish Main be directed solely at Spain.

The Caribbean was the springboard for all this activity, which was launched mainly at Central and South America, with the island of Hispaniola being a particular focus. The fact that gold had been found on Hispaniola and that it had a large resident population of Tainos suitable for conversion into slave labour made it the first official, administrative Spanish settlement in the Americas. Spanish migrants came to satisfy a lust for riches and therefore they made war on the Tainos, enslaved them, took their wealth, killed off their leaders, and exploited the mines until the metals were exhausted. The Spanish, more than any other European power, were responsible for the **genocide** of the native peoples of the Caribbean.

Hispaniola became the established hub of this very large Spanish American empire, stretching from Mexico to Patagonia, including the Caribbean (but excluding Brazil,

BOX 4.3 Treaty of Tordesillas, 1495

The two nations of the Iberian Peninsula, Spain and Portugal, were fairly advanced in exploration and navigation by 1492, when Columbus arrived in the New World. They were also rivals. Some intervention was thought necessary to map out territory between these two European countries – even yet undiscovered territory – lest rivalry and hostility erupt into war. The Pope at the time, Alexander VI, drew an arbitrary line on the map of the Atlantic, 370 leagues (about 1300 miles or 2000 km) from the Cape Verde Islands, and decreed that any newly found territories west of this line would be considered Spanish territory and any to the east of it would go to the Portuguese.

Referring to Fig. 4.3 we see that by this papal decree Portugal received the large territory of Brazil, making it today the only Portuguese-speaking country within Latin America.

While the Iberian nations obeyed the Pope, the Protestant countries of Britain and the Netherlands had no reason to do so, and France, a Roman Catholic country, was wary of Roman authority in France in secular matters. Thus, the maritime nations of Europe – France, Britain and the Netherlands – ignored papal authority and chose to regard the Caribbean as fair game; they would encroach on Spanish territory through whatever means – raids, piracy, smuggling, trade, and later settlement.



Fig. 4.3 The Treaty of Tordesillas – dividing the New World

see Box 4.3). The migrants who continued to come from Spain after the initial spate of explorers, adventurers, priests and conquistadors came to settle, to become ranch- or estate-owners, or to get involved in the business and trading life of the new colonies. Many were royal officials sent to make sure that the business of the empire remained in Spanish hands. But Spain could not keep the 'riches of the Indies' a secret or monopolize it for very long. Indeed, the vast expanse of the empire made it impossible to patrol effectively. The greed that spurred the first migrations of Spaniards now spread to all the capitals of Europe where adventurers gathered, prepared to take what they could from the Spanish. The maritime nations of Europe – Britain, France, the Netherlands and Portugal – were best suited for this contest.

In histories of the Caribbean, the Europeans are usually treated as if they were a uniform group. A more sensitive reading of our own history will show that the differences amongst Caribbean nations today initially stemmed from the old hostilities and rivalries amongst European nations. It is important then that we are aware of some of the differences between the various groups of Europeans and how they impacted the Caribbean.

- For over a hundred years after Columbus claimed the Americas for Spain, no other European nation was able to establish a permanent settlement in the Caribbean.
- The British and French in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came to raid, pillage and capture the rich Spanish galleons carrying gold and silver back to Spain or to lay siege to and destroy Spanish settlements and steal their treasures. They were called 'buccaneers', 'privateers' and 'pirates' (Box 4.4).
- According to the Treaty of Tordesillas, Spain was not given territory in Africa and therefore had to rely on the Portuguese for a supply of slaves. This took the form of a licence, the *asiento*, granted at first to the Portuguese, then to the Dutch, French and British. Portuguese fortunes waned in Africa when their forts and slaving connections were gradually usurped by the growing maritime powers of the Dutch, British and French. There was intense rivalry for the licence and they undermined each other at the point of supply along the African coast. No longer gold and silver but human cargo was now proving to be a way to profit from Spain's empire.
- Smuggling was another means whereby all the European nations sought to encroach on the empire. The holders of the *asiento* could never satisfy the demand for slaves and other goods needed by the colonists. The Portuguese and Dutch, in particular, assisted Spanish colonists, as well as the British and French settlers who illegally occupied the Lesser Antilles, by providing them with smuggled goods and slaves.
- Once the British and French managed to establish a permanent settlement in St Kitts (1624), migrants spread quickly to Nevis, Antigua, Montserrat, Guadeloupe and Martinique. These islands were virtually ignored by the Spaniards and the Amerindian populations were small and easily overcome.

It has been calculated that in 1650, 56,900 Europeans lived in the British Caribbean and around 15,000 in the French and Dutch Antilles. This means that on average around 2,000 to 3,000 Europeans per year came into the Caribbean

BOX 4.4 Challenging Spain

As soon as word filtered back to other European nations that Spain had come upon untold wealth and riches, nobleman, merchant and commoner alike vowed to have a share as well. Settlement was not yet a dominant idea; robbery was the most pressing concern. Throughout the sixteenth century and for part of the seventeenth, Spain's empire in the New World was constantly harassed by privateers, buccaneers and pirates.

- Privateers.** French and British monarchs gave the captain of an armed ship the authority to patrol coastal areas to protect merchant vessels or to commit acts of reprisal against any ship or territory that was owned by a rival European nation. These privateers were given *letters of marque* by the monarch as their official permission to attack, loot and pillage enemy possessions in the Americas. They were rewarded by a portion of the spoils. Famous privateers included *Sir Francis Drake* and *Sir Henry Morgan*.

- Buccaneers.** Initially these were French runaways who lived a hand-to-mouth existence on Tortuga and nearby islands, killing wild pigs, and inventing the 'barbecue' in the process. The term *boucanier* means 'one who hunts wild pigs'. Spain tried to dislodge them from the small islands on which they had settled, and many joined the ranks of privateers and pirates in revenge. The term 'buccaneer' has come into general use to describe privateers and pirates and all those who sought to rob Spain of its treasure in the Americas.
- Pirates.** These were groups of men who sailed the high seas generally to rob and plunder. Their attacks were usually directed at the laden Spanish galleons en route to Spain with gold and silver, but they would attack any ship perceived to be the enemy of their country, or even a ship belonging to their own country if it was believed to be carrying valuable goods. *Blackbeard* was a famous (or infamous) pirate who frequented the waters of the Bahamas.

during the period, 1624–50. . . . These regular, massive migrations from Europe created a drastic change from the previous situation: the sparsely-populated Spanish Caribbean counted perhaps one European to 10 square miles; around 1650 the islands of the English Caribbean had become one of the heaviest populated areas in the world, with more than 50 Europeans per square mile. (Emmer, 1999, p. 16)

- Many of the colonies established by the French and British in the early seventeenth century were **proprietaryships**. The European monarch gave to noblemen, highly favoured persons, or even companies, the sole right of settling and developing such colonies. These were the Lord Proprietors who bore the expenses of the colony and in return taxed the profits of the colonists.
- The Dutch settled on the Guiana coastlands and the small islands of Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, St Maarten, Saba and Sint Eustatius. They were less interested in agriculture, preferring to be traders, supplying the colonies with slaves and other goods. They used the islands as massive warehouses and places where slaves were kept en route to their final destination.
- Unlike the Spanish, the British, French and Dutch did not enslave the native populations. Poor and unemployed persons from Europe came out as **indentured** or contracted labour for the tobacco farms before sugar cultivation became widespread.
- Denmark settled St Thomas in 1672 and later St Croix and St John, while Sweden bought St Barth's from the French in 1784 and sold it back in 1878.

ACTIVITY 4.2

1. Suggest TWO reasons to explain why the British, Dutch and French, and not the Spaniards, settled the islands of the Lesser Antilles.
2. Using your own country as an example, discuss the nature of its ties (if any) with the Dutch, French and Spanish Caribbean.
3. What percentage of the population of your country is descended from these original white settlers? Reflect on the possible **identity** issues these Caribbean people may be facing today.

Whatever their nationality, Europeans first came to the Caribbean for economic gain. Spain attempted to prevent other Europeans from sharing in the riches of the Indies but was unsuccessful. After a turbulent period of piracy in the sixteenth century, Spain was unable to stop the flow of British, French and Dutch migrants who succeeded in establishing settlements in the Caribbean; these grew into substantial colonial societies. In a manner very similar to Spain in the fifteenth century, the British, French and Dutch tried to keep their colonies as separate and distinct entities. Communication and trade between colonies of the different European countries were discouraged through laws and regulations. Not only geographical borders separated the islands but political, linguistic and cultural barriers as well. By the close of the nineteenth century, the period of large-scale European migrations had come to an end, and the Caribbean was subdivided into enclaves owned by different European empires. Even today, in the twenty-first century, there is minimal interaction between the islands and territories of the French, British, Dutch and Spanish Caribbean. In each island a society and culture has developed heavily influenced by the European **metropolitan country**. Efforts at cooperation and regional integration across all these cultural groups are still proving to be very difficult.

Forced migration of Africans

It is a matter of some considerable interest whether Africans came to the Americas long before Columbus (Box 4.5). We do know that Africans came with the first expeditions of the Spanish as free men. While slavery had existed in Spain for centuries, slaves were of different races and ethnicities – Jews, Moors and Canary Islanders. Slavery also existed in Africa long before the Europeans organized the infamous Atlantic **slave trade**. Yet how Europeans eventually organized the capture, transport, distribution and servitude of Africans in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remains unprecedented in world history. The sheer numbers involved, its economic basis as a **capitalist** enterprise, the unspeakable brutality, as well as the racial **stereotyping** that accompanied the Atlantic slave trade, involved a totally new understanding of slave trading and slavery.

In Europe and Africa people were enslaved for many different reasons – religious persecution, captives of war, as payment, as part of a dowry – or they could be kidnapped and traded. In many cases there was little difference in **ethnicity** between master and slave. Even in the organized systems of capture and distribution, as in the trans-Saharan caravan trade, the numbers involved were very small, and no country's **economy** depended wholly on enslaved labour. What made the Atlantic slave trade unique was not only the forced migration of millions of Africans into a lifetime of captivity and servitude, or that it continued for centuries, or that it supported an economy overseas that could only survive on enslaved labour, but that the foundation of this trade was based on **race**. 'Over time, whatever positive images that had also constituted a part of the perception of Africa and its peoples were filtered out and a full blown racist ideology emerged, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries' (Palmer, 1997, p. 12).

Enslaved Africans were imported into the Caribbean in small numbers from as early as 1503. By 1520 the Spanish Crown had given permission to import Africans as slaves to supplement the dwindling Taino population. The Portuguese, who held

BOX 4.5 Africans in the Caribbean before Columbus?

Some archaeological finds in central Mexico are difficult to explain without allowing for the possibility that Africans came to the Americas at different times long before Columbus. *Ivan van Sertima*, a world-renowned Guyanese historian, first put this theory forward in his 1976 book *They came before Columbus*. He proposed that Africans had made contact with the Americas as long ago as 3000 years BP and then again more recently in the twelfth century, when the Mandingo and Songhai went on long trading voyages. Other equally renowned scholars vigorously dispute these claims.

The *Olmec civilization* of Central Mexico is at the heart of the controversy. Fig. 4.4 shows an example of the huge stone sculptures that were carved by the Olmecs. To many they indicate unmistakably Negroid physical features. Olmec writing too bears close similarities to that of the Vai people of West Africa and the Mende of Sierra Leone. Their language is also somewhat similar to that of the Malinke-Bambara peoples of the Senegambia region of West Africa. Additionally, examination of some of the human skulls at Olmec sites show similarities to skulls found in West Africa. And there continue to be the yet unexplained similarities of the calendars and pyramids of Egypt and those of the Aztec and Maya civilizations of Central America. However, all this 'evidence' is dismissed as only circumstantial by critics of van Sertima.

Other explanations put forward (other than direct contact in the pre-Christian era and in the twelfth century) suggest that Africans were among the first peoples to enter the New World, when the continents were placed differently

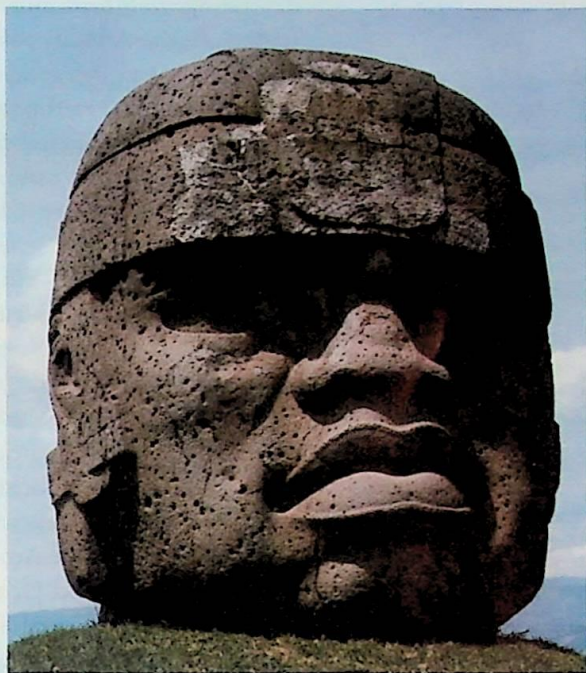


Fig. 4.4 An Olmec stone head

to how they are now (see Box 5.8). Hence, they have left some influences behind. At the moment, then, some scholars are willing to admit that the presence of Africans in the Americas before Columbus is not that far fetched, but without the necessary archaeological evidence it can only be judged as a strong possibility.

the *asiento* and controlled large tracts of territory in Africa, supplied the Spanish Empire with African slaves. Spain could not be an active player in the slave trade because of the Treaty of Tordesillas (see Box 4.3). In turn, the Dutch, French and British each dominated the Atlantic slave trade from the sixteenth through to the nineteenth century, when it was abolished.

The organization of the Atlantic slave trade illustrates how differently it developed compared with previous forms of slave trading or slavery:

- The trade was highly organized on a business footing. European merchants, banks and chartered companies put up the necessary capital to finance the undertaking. It was hardly likely that a lone sea captain could stand the costs of such a venture by himself or with a few partners.
- European governments took an active role in the commercial aspects of the slave trade. They founded by charter *joint stock companies*, of which the best known are the Royal African Company, the Company of Senegal (French) and the

Dutch West India Company. These companies were given a **monopoly** to trade in slaves and other goods for certain time periods. They were responsible for defending their forts and warehouses in Africa and could harass other European traders on the African coast by capturing their merchandise.

- West Africa was integral to the operations of these companies. Each European country involved in the trade built forts at different points on the coast. The Portuguese built the massive fort at Elmina, which was captured by the Dutch in 1650. (Ghana has restored many of these forts today as historical sites.) The Royal African Company built its fort at Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast, Ghana. The forts were used to store the merchandise brought from Europe for trading purposes – cloth, iron, weapons, cowrie shells, trinkets and beads – and to house those Africans who were to be sold as slaves in the Americas. Europeans at the forts were also responsible for conducting delicate negotiations with African chiefs and their emissaries. Indeed, members of these chartered companies acted on behalf of their governments, offering gifts and bribes to tribal chieftains who sometimes proved uncooperative. The forts had armed guards to ward off dissatisfied African traders and European rivals.
- Conservative estimates put the total numbers of Africans forcibly taken from Africa and sent to the Americas at 15 million. The Portuguese were mainly active along the Gold Coast (Fig. 4.5) and then shifted operations to present-day Angola. The Dutch established forts and small settlements on the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast and the Ivory Coast. France's main areas of activity were Angola, Benin, Senegal and the Gold Coast. Britain traded along the Gold Coast, Whydah, Guinea, Benin and later Angola. Each country carved out a sphere of influence on the African coast and nurtured delicate relations with the tribal chieftains for the good of the trade but also to safeguard their own persons.

Wherever slave trading took place on the coast, it affected a region hundreds of miles inland. Initially the Europeans conducted their own raids to capture Africans, sometimes with help from rival African groups. Later, as they found it necessary to go deeper inland, they formed alliances with African groups willing to capture and sell fellow Africans. Eventually, although they were only involved in bartering or buying slaves, they were constantly drawn into the internal, domestic intrigues of the coastal kingdoms, providing guns and ammunition to their allies.



Fig. 4.5 The kingdoms of West and Central Africa

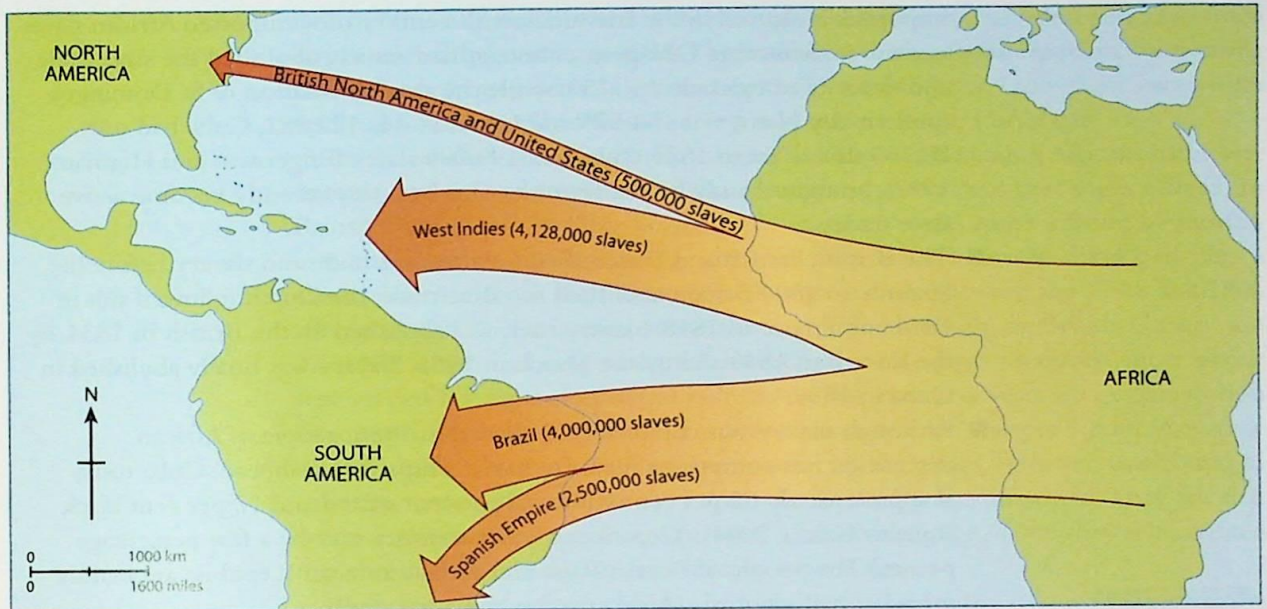


Fig. 4.6 The Atlantic Slave Trade

- Once the slave ships left the African coast they embarked on the second leg, the **Middle Passage**, across the Atlantic to the Caribbean or North America (Fig. 4.6). The conditions of life aboard a slaver were terrible. Many died from suffocation in the hold because there was only enough room to lie down with another layer of captives above and below. The more slaves a ship could carry, the higher the profits, and if a certain number of fatalities were to be expected then even more were taken on to offset that occurrence. The journey lasted roughly two to three months.
- When the enslaved Africans were sold, the ships took on a cargo of sugar, rum and molasses and headed for Western Europe, to ports such as London, Amsterdam and Bordeaux. This was the third and final leg of the **triangular trade** route, showing that the slave trade was a complex, economic enterprise that required financing and coordination on three continents.

The forced migration of millions of Africans to the Americas is the single most important historical process impacting the Caribbean today. It totally changed the demographic structure of the Caribbean. Caribbean societies became **slave societies** because of the sheer numbers of the enslaved in the society. They were not just societies where slaves existed but slavery became the basis for the economy and society. However, it impacted Caribbean countries in different ways:

- The slave trade was directly tied to the need for *labour*. Thus, colonies where plantations were first established tended to develop large African populations before others. In the British, French and Dutch territories, the African segment of the population became dominant.
- The Spanish, on the other hand, were slow to introduce plantations into Cuba, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, and so over the centuries fewer Africans were

imported. However, in the late nineteenth century they imported African slaves at a time when other European countries had already abolished the slave trade and slavery. For example, in 1750, while the slave population of St Domingue (present-day Haiti) was 164,859 and Jamaica's was 127,881, Cuba had only 28,760 slaves. Yet in 1880 Cuba had 199,094 slaves (Engerman and Higman, 1997), brought mainly by the Spanish, who had only recently become active slave traders.

- The British, French and Dutch *abolished* the slave trade and slavery before the Spanish. In 1804 Britain abolished the slave trade; the Dutch followed suit in 1814 and France in 1818. Slavery itself was abolished by the British in 1834, by the French in 1848 and by the Dutch in 1863. Slavery was finally abolished in Cuba in 1886.
- Although slavery was completely abolished in 1886, people of African descent do not comprise a majority in the Hispanic Caribbean. Cuba today is approximately 66 per cent white, 22 per cent mixed and 12 per cent black (Iglesias Garcia, 2004). (Census and other statistics vary by a few percentage points.) The people of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic are mainly mixed, usually mulatto (African and white admixture).
- The forced migration of African peoples created a **diaspora** – people or migrants who have a homeland elsewhere to which they share an emotional attachment. This 'in-betweenity' (of living in the Caribbean as the largest ethnic group, while at the same time having only a short history in the region and actually belonging elsewhere) continues to impact Caribbean society and culture as identity issues in many different ways.
- We should be aware that in speaking of the Caribbean as an 'African' diaspora we are smoothing over all the ethnic differences of the people who were forcibly brought here. They did not identify themselves as African but as Wolof, Ewe or Ashanti. Thus, some of the cultural differences evident in Caribbean society and culture today are due to large numbers of people from the same African ethnic group being found only in certain islands. For example:
 - The French traded a great deal in Dahomey (Benin) and supplied mainly their own colonies, so the strong influence of voodoo (*Vodun*) in Haiti is easy to understand; it is the official religion of Benin today.
 - Most Africans taken to Cuba were of the Bantu peoples. The Bakongo, a Bantu group from northern Angola, practise a religion very similar to the Palo Monte found today in Cuba. And, although there were not as many Yoruba in Cuba, the religion they practised, Santería, is now widespread throughout that island.
 - The Big Drum and Nation Dances in Carriacou, usually performed at Easter, are strongly associated with the Ibo and Koromanti of West Africa.

ACTIVITY 4.3

1. Identify the arguments someone might use to show that the Atlantic slave trade was a **racist** enterprise.

2. It is likely that you are a member of one (or more than one) of the diasporas affecting the Caribbean.

(a) What kind of ties would you like with your homeland or homelands?

(b) To what extent do you feel that acknowledging a homeland or homelands elsewhere affects the ties you may have to your Caribbean country?

Migrations of indentured servants

Slavery was abolished in the British Caribbean over a period of time (1834–1838). Some smaller territories became free overnight (for example, Antigua and the

British Virgin Islands); others went through a compulsory transition period (termed **apprenticeship**), ending in 1838. The crucial issues after **emancipation**, confronting both European and African, centred on the price of labour. How those issues were resolved fundamentally affected society and culture in the Caribbean.

In the smaller islands such as Antigua, St Kitts and Barbados, Africans had fewer options and so had to return to the plantations and accept the wages offered. In British Guiana (present-day Guyana) the ex-slaves could make a living by moving into the interior and becoming small farmers. Trinidad never developed into a classic slave society as slave imports took place mainly between the 1790s and 1806 (Brereton, 2002). Europeans made the case that especially in British Guiana and Trinidad, which had only recently become large-scale sugar producers, more labour was needed for expansion of the industry. In the transition years after emancipation Europeans were on the search for a reliable source of cheaper labour. Any new labour supply coming into Caribbean society and culture, however, was bound to encounter hostility from the Africans, who wanted wages increased. They felt that while Europeans were making claims of a labour shortage, it was they who created that shortage by refusing to pay Africans a fair wage.

'Indentureship' was an old idea brought back to solve the labour problems in the British West Indies. Indentured servants agreed to enter into a contract to work in the Caribbean for a period of five to seven or ten years, for a minimum wage. Their outward passage would be provided and they had the option of either accepting a return

BOX 4.6 Experiments in indentured immigration

Europeans were first tried as indentured labourers to help 'whiten' the ethnic balance in the British West Indies. Between 1834 and 1846 Portuguese from the Azores and Madeira came in several thousands to Trinidad and British Guiana, and British and German immigrants went to Jamaica. The Lesser Antilles received much smaller numbers. However, the Europeans could not perform satisfactorily as manual labourers in tropical conditions and gradually drifted off the plantations into the towns. The Portuguese were more successful as shopkeepers.

Planters in British Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica then looked to the other islands of the British Caribbean, offering higher wages. By 1850 thousands of Africans had left Barbados and Grenada for Trinidad and British Guiana; Jamaica received several hundred. This internal migration heightened the labour shortage in the Eastern Caribbean but it gradually declined when migrants realized that the wages were not much better.

A short-lived scheme then involved attracting indentured labour from West Africa, particularly Sierra Leone and Liberia. However, Africans did not seem interested

in voluntarily migrating and the majority of Africans who entered the Caribbean as a labour force by the 1860s were those who had been liberated from ships still plying the slave trade. Since the British had abolished the trade in 1804 they had been policing the high seas to prevent other nations from bringing slaves into the New World. Very few of these liberated Africans were repatriated; instead they were dropped off in the British Caribbean to swell the labour supply. However, they too drifted off the plantations in search of other work.

In 1838 the experiment involving indentured labour from India began in a small way when 396 Indians arrived in Guyana (Box 4.7). Europeans had no way of knowing that this was to be the only group to show signs of realizing planter expectations and would continue until 1917. They were trying several alternatives simultaneously, including recruiting Chinese labour from Canton and Hong Kong, mainly for British Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica. When they too drifted off the plantations as they found business and commerce more suited to their talents, the planters focused exclusively on India.

BOX 4.7 'Indians' in the Caribbean

In the Caribbean, particularly Guyana and Trinidad, which received the largest numbers of immigrant labour from India, Indians have often been referred to as 'East Indians'. It is a local use of the term that sometimes confuses persons from outside the area. We can only suppose that it grew out of a desire to differentiate them from the native 'Indians' or Amerindians, who were not Indians at all, but a case of mistaken identity on the part of Columbus, who had gone in search of a new route to India and the spice islands of the east. When it was realized that Columbus had stumbled on islands that were not the sought-for spice islands, a

distinction was drawn by simply putting 'east' or 'west' before the term 'the Indies'. 'The Indies' was a term probably long used by Europeans to describe the islands to the east of India (mainly what is present-day Indonesia). Thus, the *East Indies* and *West Indies* came into being and have been a source of confusion ever since. For example, today there is no country or group of countries one can identify as the *East Indies*; the term has fallen into disuse. However, the *West Indies* remains very much in use. That gives rise to the interesting fact that more than half the population of Guyana and Trinidad are East Indian West Indians!

passage to their country of origin once the period of indentureship was completed or receiving a grant of land. Various experiments were tried. Europeans looked first to Europe, then to other Caribbean islands, Africa, India and China (Box 4.6).

India proved to be the most satisfactory source of labour, and in 1845 both Trinidad and Jamaica, following the lead of British Guiana, began importing Indian indentured labour. While immigrants came in small numbers from time to time to virtually all of the Caribbean territories (Fig. 4.7), immigration into British Guiana and Trinidad was heavy and continuous. By the time the experiment in Indian indentureship ended in 1917, approximately 239,000 had gone to British Guiana, 144,000 to Trinidad and 36,000 to Jamaica.

The price of labour was the crucial factor governing the entry of Indians into Caribbean society and culture. They came from conditions of extreme poverty mainly in northern India – Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and various other parts of British India (Fig. 4.8) – and were willing to work for the small wage offered. The Africans did not trust a people who accepted such poor conditions of work, and who thereby excluded them from making effective wage demands on the planters. The Indians

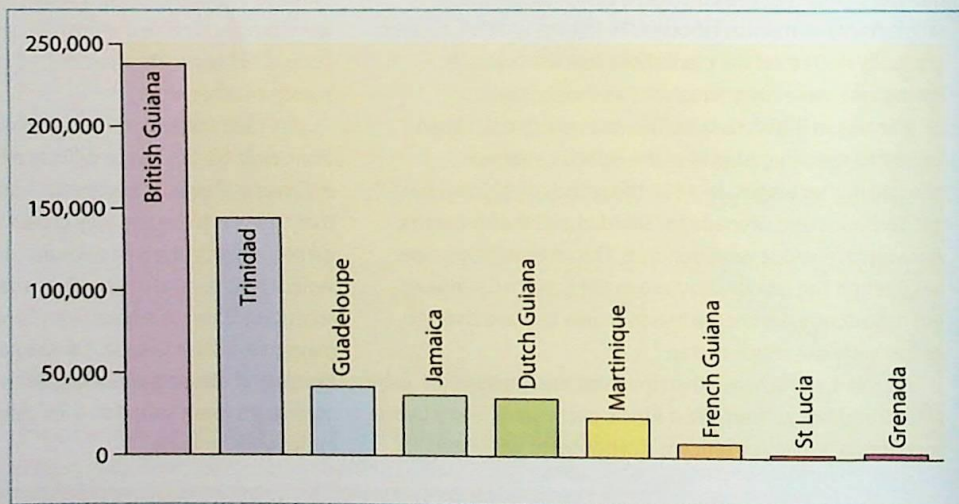


Fig. 4.7 Indentured immigrants to Caribbean countries



Fig. 4.8 Origins of Indian immigrants in the nineteenth century

for their part, in an alien environment where their customs found disfavour, remained apart on the plantations.

Indentured migrants added to the diversity and complexity of Caribbean society and culture:

- Although the societies of the Caribbean are described as **plural**, the influx of indentured immigrants, particularly in Guyana, Trinidad and Suriname, created sizable additional groups and sub-groups. As was discussed in Chapter 3, the tensions amongst them go largely unresolved to this day.
- After 1848 planters in the French Caribbean brought labourers from Pondicherry, a French colony in India (Fig. 4.7), to work in the cane fields. The Kali ceremony and other examples of Tamil or Madras culture (from South India) can still be found in Guadeloupe today.
- The Dutch had an extensive empire in the East Indies and brought labourers from the island of Java to their colony Dutch Guiana (Suriname). They also imported Indians from British India, who are referred to in Suriname today as 'Hindustanis' or East Indians. The Javanese comprise 15 per cent of Suriname's population and are mostly Muslim, while the 'Hindustanis', comprising about

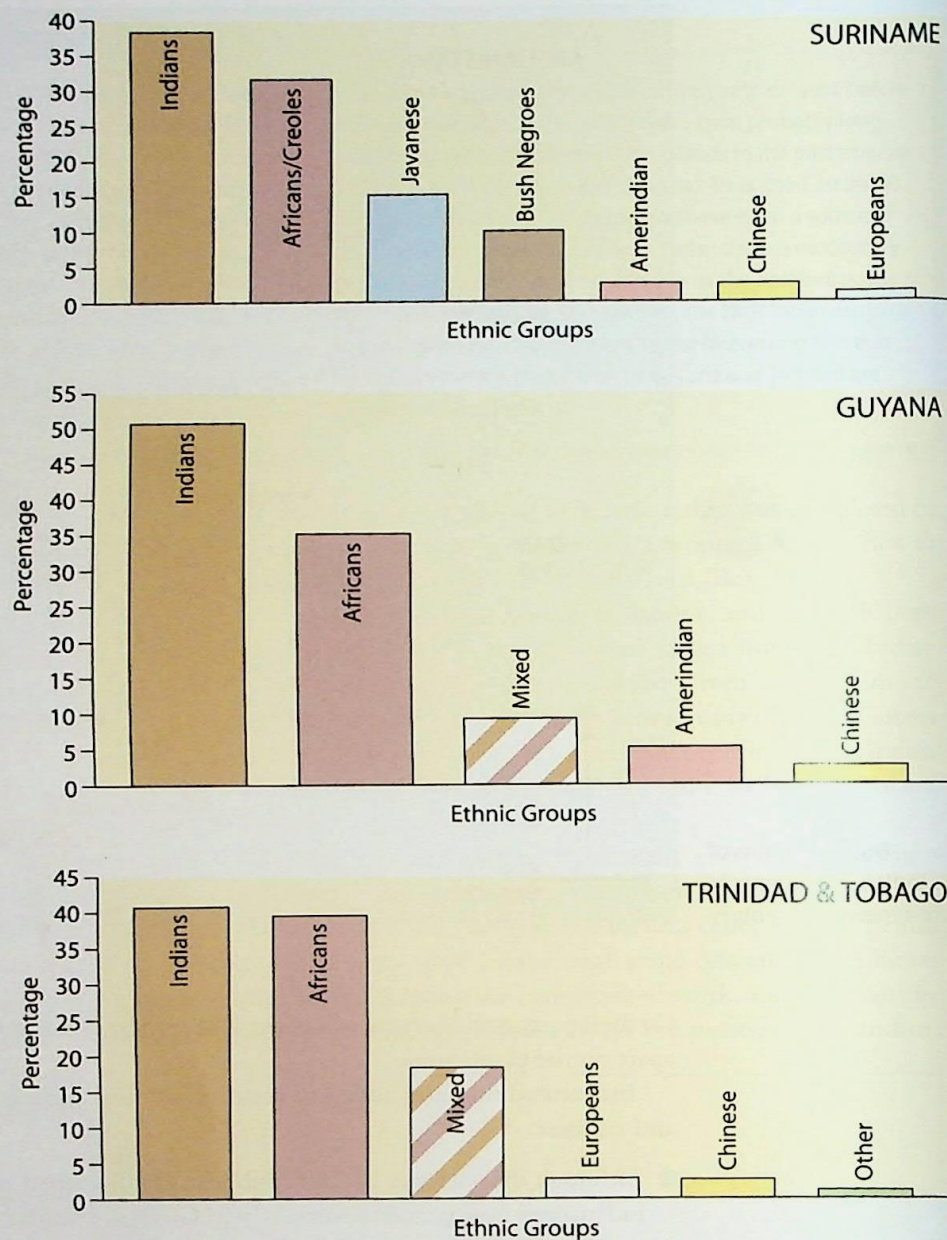


Fig. 4.9 Ethnic composition in selected Caribbean countries

ACTIVITY 4.4

There is a complaint sometimes heard in Trinidad and Tobago that whilst it is acceptable to speak of Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians, other groups are still referred to as 'Chinese', 'white' or 'Portuguese', even though they are also nationals. Discuss the issues that may be important here. Is there a similar situation in another Caribbean country that you may know about?

- 37 per cent of the population, are mainly Hindus with a Muslim minority. However, Javanese and 'Hindustani' Muslims practise different traditions in Islam.
- Today, the Indian populations in Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad are larger than the other ethnic groups (Fig. 4.9).
- Compared to the Indians, Chinese indentured immigrants readily assimilated into Caribbean society and many married African women and became Christian.

Summary

The Caribbean has been a destination for migrants over many thousands of years. Each group has contributed to the creation of Caribbean society and culture. Migrants came through normal processes of diffusion and expansion of cultures, through voyages intent on discovering new trade routes, as well as through force by being enslaved, and through worker indentureship schemes. Each group added to the increasing diversity of Caribbean society and culture, especially as each group impacted the various territories differently. Today both diversity and complexity deepen as we see the resurgence of groups thought to have long died out, namely the Amerindians, with a demand to be recognized as a vibrant part of Caribbean society and culture. And we also see Africans, Indians, Chinese and whites not only as Caribbean people, but also as part of the various diasporas, having homelands elsewhere and learning to forge an identity under such circumstances. The complexity deepens considerably when Caribbean people migrate to metropolitan countries and live in 'a double diaspora'.

4.2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMS OF PRODUCTION

A system of production refers to the ways in which an economy is organized to produce commodities to sustain society. Early societies had simple systems of production such as hunting and gathering or subsistence agriculture. Once surpluses occurred, trade became important. Amerindian societies were at different stages of economic organization when the Europeans arrived in the Americas. The Tainos, the most advanced, were producing agricultural surpluses and trade was mostly organized around feeding and providing for the wants of their increasingly urban communities. The Spaniards, however, brought ideas about systems of production in which wealth in the form of gold and silver (bullion) was the desired goal. They believed that if Spain had access to its own gold and silver mines, then it would be the most powerful country in Europe. Thus, the driving force behind Spain's **colonization** of the Americas was the lure of precious metals.

Encomienda

The Spanish monarchs decided that the native population should be divided up amongst Spaniards, who had the right to exact from them some form of tribute – produce, gold or personal service. In return, the Spaniards would guarantee religious instruction in the Roman Catholic faith. This system was known as the **encomienda**. In reality, the Amerindians were treated as slaves and put to work in the mines. They quickly died out from hunger, overwork, harsh punishments and European diseases. Many committed suicide. The system of production was a get-rich-quick scheme where precious metals were taken from a conquered people by forced labour and sent to Spain to increase Spain's power and prestige in Europe.

Slavery

African slavery was then introduced throughout the Americas. Other Europeans had begun to encroach on Spain's empire, settling territories they had captured such as

Jamaica and the western part of Hispaniola, or islands of little importance to Spain, namely the Lesser Antilles. In the British, French and Dutch Caribbean, slavery as a system of production was primarily bound up with the cultivation of sugar and the social and economic organization of the plantation.

Slavery as a total institution

Slavery was a **total institution** in that it determined all aspects of the lives of African people, as well as the social and economic arrangements of the plantation and, by extension, the society. Slavery as a total institution formed the basis of **plantation society** (Box 2.5 and Fig. 3.2) and this was the system of production in the Caribbean associated with sugar cultivation. One fundamental way in which slavery shaped the lives of Africans was by the attempt to *dehumanize* the African. Africans were regarded as 'chattel' (property like land or buildings) and were thus owned by Europeans who had paid for them. This attempt at dehumanization was done through suppressing the social and cultural ties which helped to form an identity and a sense of belonging. For example:

- Choosing Africans from different tribal groups for the plantations to minimize communication and bonds of kinship between them was based on a fear of Africans banding together.
- Giving the Africans European names and forbidding the practice of their religions, customs and traditions, so that any semblance of social and family life was discouraged, was also based on a fear of developing solidarity and identity.
- Meting out harsh physical punishments, torture, and even death, was done to force the African to submit to the will of the European.
- Playing one group of Africans against others was meant to promote European values and ways of life. (The domestic or house slaves or lighter-skinned, partly European slaves, were accorded higher status and prestige because of their constant and intimate contact with Europeans.)
- Rigidly stratifying the society according to race and colour, relegating black people to the bottom of the social strata, was dehumanizing because the very characteristics identifying Africans as a race were the same ones identifying them as slaves, and therefore the property of others.

The plantation system

The plantation was a system of production that Europeans had devised in their colonial empires. They brought different ethnic groups to live and work on plantations far from their homelands; the groups were encouraged to distrust each other; and they were encouraged to look on the European as superior. Labour was coloured and the whites were the owners, managers and supervisors. When coupled with slavery as a total institution the plantation system became a sophisticated economic mechanism that dominated the culture and society of the Caribbean, locking it into European economies. For example, the plantation system:

- relied on the Atlantic slave trade for its labour supply and provided the raw materials for the third leg of the triangular trade – sugar, rum and molasses for the port cities of England, France and Holland

ACTIVITY 4.5

1. List some of the social and economic effects that the plantation system may have had on present-day society and culture in the Caribbean.

2. Some persons believe that to use slavery as an argument for some of the problems/issues still being faced by Caribbean people is merely an excuse, since slavery ended long ago. Identify some of those problems/issues.

- provided the basis for the growing manufacturing and industrial strength of Europe (plantations were a form of investment financed from the capitals of Europe)
- was so valuable that in 1651 Britain instituted the Navigation Laws whereby only English ships could trade with English colonies. This prevented other nations from getting a share of the profitable trade arising from the slave plantations of the Caribbean. France followed in 1664 with similar laws.

Europeans brought systems of production to the Caribbean that began to take the shape of capitalist enterprises. The emphasis lay in amassing huge profits that were repatriated to the metropolitan country. The basis of such wealth depended on the enslavement of people who, for the purpose of profit and prosperity, were regarded as subhuman. Values stressing exploitation of the environment and people for economic gain and an ideology of European superiority became part of the system of production.

Indentureship

After emancipation, the planters sought a reliable source of labour, particularly in the larger territories where the ex-slaves refused to work for what they regarded as very low wages. The system of production in the British, French and Dutch Caribbean was thus thrown into jeopardy. Indentureship has been described as another form of slavery, though the Indian and Chinese immigrants were not regarded as chattel and they continued to practise their religions, speak their languages and maintain their traditions as best they could. The charge of slavery comes from how they were treated. They were paid extremely low wages and their accommodation was crowded, substandard and unsanitary. They were always in debt to the company store where they were forced to buy goods. In addition, they were not allowed to move about freely, and if caught some distance from the plantation to which they had been assigned they were charged with vagrancy, flogged, and jailed. If they tried to escape they were hunted down and jailed for breach of contract, then returned to the plantation. For minor offences they were charged exorbitant fines. Many died from poor nutrition and they suffered from malaria, yaws, typhoid and dysentery. They were in a continual state of poor health and the rate of suicide was high.

As a system of production, indentureship was very much related to African slavery and, indeed, plantation society survived because of this new supply of labour. The socio-economic influences of the plantations still pervaded the whole society even though some Africans had opted to move away. For example, the Indians were a non-white group of labourers who now occupied the lowest stratum of the society and were encouraged to see the European bosses as superior. They were also encouraged to keep themselves apart from the Africans, thus continuing disunity amongst workers. Although a new group had entered Caribbean society, the system of production – the plantation – continued to influence social and economic affairs in the same ways.

However, times had changed. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Caribbean plantations were no longer as important to European economies because they now had worldwide empires. In addition, the sugar plantations had to contend

ACTIVITY 4.6

Some Caribbean scholars have described the impact of systems of production in this way. They say that elsewhere, such as in colonial New England, a society was developed with strong and vibrant institutions. *Here in the Caribbean, though, the economy developed society.* Explain your understanding of this interpretation of Caribbean society and culture.

with cheaper sugar produced by larger sugar producers, some of them still using slave labour – notably Brazil and Cuba. When the nationalist movement in India brought pressure to bear on the British authorities who were in control of India at this time to discontinue immigration schemes because they were dissatisfied with how their nationals were treated, the British ended indentureship in 1917. (The Chinese government had ended indentureship in 1885 for similar reasons.)

As a system of production Indian indentureship did save the sugar plantations in the British, French and Dutch Caribbean in the aftermath of emancipation. The very low wages they were paid exploited the labour force and enabled the plantations to survive through some turbulent times when the price of sugar on the world market was falling. However, the long association with enslaved and indentured labour predisposed Caribbean planters into a preference for exploitative systems of production. In the twentieth century, however, the number of plantations quickly decreased as the planters found that they could not survive by paying a fair wage. In addition, the reliance on forced or indentured labour had created a mindset that refused to implement labour-saving techniques and cost-effective technologies. The cost of production in Caribbean territories was thus very high and this legacy was bequeathed to Caribbean societies struggling with independence and self-determination later on in the century.

Summary

The systems of production established by Europeans in the Caribbean have continued mainly intact, even though centuries have passed since they were first introduced. Whilst the *encomienda* system, slavery and indentureship were all eventually abolished, the plantation is still seen as the main organizer of society and culture in the Caribbean. The plantation is a synonym now for highly stratified, ex-colonial societies where labour was brought in and now forms rival groups, in an economy that is still largely based on **monocultural** (one main product) exports. Europeans did not develop the economic institutions of Caribbean societies. Their emphasis was on producing agricultural products by monoculture and exporting the raw materials to Europe to be manufactured. Today, Caribbean societies continue to struggle with systems of production that are not geared towards developing a vibrant, indigenous manufacturing sector and food production.

4.3

RESISTANCE

Since the coming of the Europeans the history of the Caribbean has been steeped in violence and genocide. This oppression is a direct outcome of the systems of production that were established for economic gain – *encomienda*, slavery and indentureship. Whilst it may seem that the European will prevailed – for example, witness the divisions of the French, British, Dutch and Spanish Caribbeans today – this was achieved only amidst continuous wars, rebellions, revolution, maroonage, and other more subtle forms of resistance. It is a common belief that because plantation society was organized to keep the Amerindians and Africans in an inferior position, where not only prevailing attitudes but the actual laws of the country kept them powerless and vulnerable, they were mostly resigned to accepting their lot.

This is borne out by the fact that whilst Amerindians and Africans far outnumbered the whites at all times, they were not successful in overthrowing them.

This is a traditional version of Caribbean history. It is an account that usually refers to the Africans as 'slaves', whereas more sensitive renderings today acknowledge that Africans did not think of themselves as slaves but as people who were *enslaved* by others. What we have had as 'history' is an edited account that gave us the European perspective of events. This distinction between *slaves* and *the enslaved* helps us to gain some alternative insights into the nature of the resistance from the captive peoples' point of view. In fact, they resisted the oppression by any means possible.

The native peoples

The Tainos

The coming of the Europeans with their weapons of iron and steel, and their tracker dogs and horses, was an unprecedented experience for the native peoples. Yet almost from the inception of the Spanish invasion they resisted the newcomers. The people, described by the Spaniards themselves as 'peaceful' and 'gentle', realizing that they were facing genocide, were roused into open warfare. The earliest account dates from 1493, when they killed the men that Columbus had left at La Navidad in Hispaniola because of their ill treatment of native women. A series of conflicts continued throughout the Spanish occupation of the Greater Antilles and their imposition of the *encomienda*. Important native leaders in the struggle were the *caciques*, such as *Guarionex* in Hispaniola, *Hatuey* in Cuba and *Agueybana* in Puerto Rico.

Although the Spaniards had superior military might, their conquest of the Greater Antilles was not easy. By 1503 they had brought much of the active rebellions in Hispaniola to a close, but that was a long time considering their advantage of advanced weapons technology. It was not until 1513 that the Spaniards actually won the war for possession of Puerto Rico, and as late as 1520 they were still fighting a guerrilla war in Cuba. Other than open warfare, the Tainos also resisted the Spaniards by running away and withdrawing from settled areas so that the *encomienda* could not be enforced. They also resorted to sabotage and suicide.

The fierce resistance put up by the Tainos, a people at a relatively early form of technological development compared with the Spaniards, is hardly mentioned in the historical record. The Caribs are more likely to be mentioned in this regard, emphasizing the European myth that the inhabitants of the Greater Antilles were 'peaceful' and the Caribs were 'warlike'. Our history texts do not dwell on the heroes and heroines, tragic though they might be, the *caciques* and *cacicas*, who first engaged the Spaniards, yet we are well acquainted with Columbus, his brother Diego, Ponce de Leon, Magellan, Ovando, Las Casas and so on.

Perhaps one way we can *resist* this ethnocentric version of Caribbean history today is to tell these tales and write about them in textbooks and story-books where young Caribbean children will learn not only about the exploits of male *caciques*, but also of the powerful *Anaconda* in Hispaniola, and other *cacicas*. Millions of people who inhabited the Greater Antilles at the time of the Conquest should not be rendered silent by history. In this way, and others, resistance continues as a theme in Caribbean society and culture.

The Caribs

The Caribs of the Lesser Antilles met the Spaniards' offensive with implacable resistance. Their tactical responses were well suited to the mountainous terrain of their islands, where they could engage in protracted guerrilla warfare indefinitely. Their social organization permitted flexibility as they did not have a traditional noble line with hereditary power; instead leadership resided in the best warriors. They were highly mobile, especially with the dug-out canoe enabling them to elude capture time and time again. Very soon the Spaniards left them alone, believing it was too much trouble defending islands where no gold was to be found.

However, the Caribs had to deal with the interlopers in Spain's empire – the British, French and Dutch who sought to colonize the Lesser Antilles. When they arrived in large numbers to settle, the Caribs would usually retreat into the interior. From there they waged continuous raids on the settlements, even forming alliances with one European power against another. Carib and European often lived on the same island in an uneasy co-existence. Gradually, however, the constant influx of Europeans and their superior weapons drove the Caribs out of most of the islands to their remaining strongholds in Dominica and Grenada. In St Vincent they mixed with Africans to form the Black Caribs, who after much bloody warfare with the British were deported to the coast of Belize. Their descendants today comprise the *Garifuna* people of Belize. In Dominica, Caribs persist in the north, occupying territory won by treaty with the British.

ACTIVITY 4.7

Using the internet, find websites which support Amerindian peoples and showcase their activities and culture. What examples of *resistance* do you discern in how Amerindians portray themselves?

The Caribs never let up in their resistance to the Europeans who took their territory, captured their people and were bent on exterminating them. It is only because the Europeans could not fully subdue the Caribs that treaties were finally signed that ensured their survival as a race. By this time, though, they were severely decimated and only found in large numbers in Dominica and in Belize. Their fighting spirit and attitude of resistance continue today in efforts to draw all the aboriginal populations of the Caribbean together, to re-create aspects of their ancestry such as the re-enactment of historic voyages, and to collaborate with archaeologists in interpreting the historical record. Today they use modern technologies such as the internet to maintain websites about their culture, past and present.

The Africans

Millions of Africans were imported into Caribbean society, where the whites, their oppressors, formed a minority. To be able to keep so many people in subjugation for centuries meant that it was not only the threat of physical violence and death that was employed but also some degree of psychological 'brainwashing' occurred. Resistance has to be understood against this peculiar background – that it would take both active and passive forms, and that sometimes it would not even be understood as resistance. One has to be able to enter the world of the enslaved to assess and judge whether their efforts succeeded or not.

Passive forms of resistance included acts of sabotage such as damaging tools, equipment and other property belonging to the planter, malingering (as in protracting an illness or delaying or avoiding work), deliberately misunderstanding instructions, suicide and induced abortions. These acts were committed in situations where all power had been taken away, and although they might not greatly cripple operations

on the plantation they served to make the powerless feel that they could still control the events of their lives to some extent. Actually, such acts proved expensive to the planter. For example, the deliberate abortions and the killing of babies denied the planter a continuous source of slaves so that the enslaved labour supply always had to be replenished by the slave trade.

Running away was also an option, and in territories where there were mountainous interiors prohibiting the Europeans from effective pursuit, sizeable *maroon* communities were established (see Box 3.5). In Guyana, Suriname, Jamaica and Hispaniola the presence of Africans living freely in the interior acted as a beacon or symbol of what was possible to those on the plantations. This was the main reason why the Europeans tried every strategy, even importing troops, to destroy these settlements. The symbolic power of freed Africans living nearby acted as a tremendous psychological boost to enslaved Africans. It demonstrated that one could escape the oppressors. It also resurrected hopes that African customs and ways of life could be restored.

It was a priority with Europeans that the different aspects of African culture should be wiped out so that European culture could be substituted, making the Africans more subservient and controllable. This form of psychological brainwashing required some cunning responses from the captives. They continued to use African words where possible, they hybridized African religions onto Christianity, they told their *Anansi* stories as they recounted their oral folklore, and they made up songs and performances that ridiculed the white man. Although banned in several territories, their drumming continued as a major **cultural retention**. Africans, then, made great efforts to protect and practise their traditions as a form of resistance to cultural oppression.

More active forms of resistance did occur, on a regular basis, but the Africans had few weapons and could not communicate effectively between the various plantations. Nevertheless, revolts and rebellions made life in the colonies unsafe and risky for Europeans. Sporadic and isolated incidents were common (for example, an African killing a white man), and all whites lived with the ever-present threat of being poisoned by their house slaves. Rebellions that grew into full-scale revolutions, involving the whole territory and continuing for a protracted period, did erupt from time to time but were largely suppressed with great cruelty. The most famous and successful was the Haitian Revolution of 1791 (Box 4.8).

Superficially it may seem that the African responses to centuries of oppression were largely ineffective. Historians today are of the view, though, that the continued violence in the colonies was one of the main reasons why the slave trade and then slavery was abolished. The traditional account emphasized the activities of the Quakers and other humanitarian groups in England in bringing about the end of slavery. Many influential members of the British House of Commons were sympathizers and the case against slavery was widely debated in the British parliament. Nowadays more credit goes to the part that the enslaved Africans played in ending their own servitude. The continued violence and the high costs of maintaining the slave system made sugar plantations uneconomic to operate. Eventually European governments were prepared to abandon their commitment to actively supporting the costly sugar producers of the Caribbean and did away with the Navigation Laws, opening up markets to **free trade**.

ACTIVITY 4.8

Identify THREE other major slave rebellions that took place in the Caribbean, their dates and the major figures involved.

BOX 4.8 The Haitian Revolution

Under French rule Haiti was known as St Domingue. It was the largest sugar producer of the French Caribbean and in the late eighteenth century the most valuable plantation economy in the world. A socially stratified plantation society had developed where half a million Africans lived in bondage, with many thousands of Free Coloureds (*gens du couleur*), who were the children of Frenchmen and their slaves, who were also dissatisfied. These people were free, often educated, and had careers as doctors, pharmacists, teachers, and even slave owners. However, in the rigidly stratified society, they suffered discriminatory practices because they were not white – neither *Grands Blancs* nor *Petits Blancs*.

It is the activities of this relatively privileged group that actually began the revolt against the whites and provided the opportunity that was quickly grasped by the enslaved Africans. It mushroomed into a full-scale slave rebellion that was further expanded into a revolution, which wiped out

society as it was known. An estimated 350,000 people died in this revolution before Haiti was declared a free republic in 1804.

This revolution saw Haiti fighting France (Napoleon) and Britain at different times and even forming alliances with Spain. Caribbean historians today accredit the success of this revolution to:

- the role of maroon communities in mounting guerrilla-type offensives against the Europeans
- *vodun* in providing a unifying force
- the genius of African leaders such as *L'Ouverture*, *Christophe* and *Dessalines*.

The existence of a Black Republic in 1804, where the slaves freed themselves and were now governing themselves, reverberated throughout the slave societies of the Caribbean.

ACTIVITY 4.9

There are African peoples who are opposed to the reparations movement. Suggest TWO arguments to justify their position.

The end of slavery did not mean the end of resistance. After emancipation Africans had to struggle to establish viable systems of production and political arrangements that would make 'freedom' into more than just a hand-to-mouth existence. All attempts by African people in the Caribbean to downplay the emphasis on European ideas and ideals and supplant them with more Afro-centric ones are examples of resistance in the modern era. The **reparations** movement (Box 4.9) is a bold move that continues this theme of resistance.

BOX 4.9 The reparations movement

The reparations movement is an example of the resistance to slavery that is going on even now.

The word 'reparations' means that it is necessary to make amends, that some compensation is being asked for, for some damage or injury that has occurred. African groups and organizations today have set up committees in different countries to publicize their intention of seeking compensation for:

- the deaths of millions of Africans in the slave trade
- the forced labour expended by millions of slaves over hundreds of years
- the value of resources taken out of Africa during colonial rule (e.g. copper).

They seek compensation in monetary terms from the countries that profited from the slave trade,

slavery and colonialism. However, they feel that some acknowledgement of guilt and an apology from European countries is equally important. This spirit of resistance and defiance today they see as necessary. They feel that African people need to be aware that some redress has been put in train for the racism that they have suffered at the hands of Europeans.

We see here a bold and innovative gesture through which we learn that history does not just 'happen' but apparently we can be held accountable in the here and now. This kind of thinking is a good example of 'tracing history in Caribbean society and culture' today. It has not yet met with a serious response from the developed countries but it is provocative and shows that slavery is still very much part of the issues being debated and analysed in contemporary life.

Indentured immigrants

The Indian labourers also experienced great hardship on the plantations and the Indian government actually stopped immigration several times because of reports of the cruelty being suffered by their nationals. Although a Protector of the Immigrants was appointed in each colony where there were indentured servants, most of them were biased in favour of planter interests. Because of their bonded state the labourers could not resort to collective bargaining to seek redress about their low wages and conditions of work. Inevitably then, protests and widespread unrest resulted in Guyana and Trinidad. This culminated in the serious outbreak on Leonora Estate in Guyana in 1869. In 1870 the British responded by setting up a commission of inquiry but this did not substantially address the problems of the labourers.

While some of the indentured servants resisted their condition by running away or refusing to work, most of them were able to establish some other small business on the side, usually market gardening, and invest its proceeds in land, small-scale trade enterprises, and shopkeeping concerns. Their efforts at **entrepreneurship** represent an extraordinary resilience amidst every kind of hardship and were a very productive form of resistance. They quickly became independent of the plantation, and if they chose to work there after their period of indenture, they usually had other economic interests as well. These strategies succeeded largely because of the **joint household** structure (households comprised two or three generations and extended family members) where everyone worked in the family business and it was the business rather than individual success that was important.

Summary

In the history of the Caribbean the themes of genocide and oppression are emphasized and so are resistance and survival. Genocide, slavery and indentureship are each by themselves horrific forms of oppression. For all three to have occurred in this region is an extraordinary circumstance. Yet the oppressed have forged lives, and even family life, under these conditions. Some **cultural erasure** might have occurred but the processes of acculturation, **interculturalisation** and **transculturalisation** have come together in the Caribbean to create some unique, culturally hybrid forms. Resistance occurs in many ways, as we have seen, and this dynamic, cultural fusion is a response that says culture is resilient and it will re-surface in different guises. One of the major elements, then, of Caribbean culture is its resistant response to domination or oppression.

ACTIVITY 4.10

1. List the ways that Caribbean people have resisted oppression and continue to do so today.
2. What role do you see for young Caribbean people today in resisting oppression?

4.4

MOVEMENTS TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

From emancipation until the end of the nineteenth century Caribbean people were shaking off the mental, psychological and emotional trauma associated with enslaved and bonded labour. This process of 'realizing freedom', however, took place within a colonial society that at times seemed as oppressive as it had been in the era that had gone before. By the dawn of the twentieth century Caribbean people were increasingly coming to understand what 'freedom' meant and beginning to challenge the very basis of colonialism, particularly in the aftermath of two world wars. We

may look at the entire period after emancipation until the first half of the twentieth century as a time when Caribbean people were preparing for self-determination, for finally throwing off European domination.

Economic enfranchisement

Economic **enfranchisement** is the condition whereby a country or nation achieves the right to determine how it will develop its systems of production. While under colonialism the economy was largely organized by the European power, Caribbean people also tried to resist and develop their own ways of making a living.

Plantation economies were based on large quantities of cheap, unskilled, manual labour, and monoculture – the production of one cash crop, namely sugar cane. Almost all the harvest was exported to Europe to be processed. Food production was haphazard and it was mainly left up to the ex-slaves and indentured labourers to grow fruit, vegetables and provisions for subsistence and sale in local Sunday markets. During the nineteenth century, as it became clear that the downturn in sugar prices would mean a decline in plantation economies, Caribbean small farmers or peasants turned more and more towards developing alternative cash crops for export. Cocoa, bananas, coffee, ginger, cotton, coconuts and arrowroot were grown by peasant farmers on their smallholdings. They also grew food crops and reared farm animals. In so doing they developed a diversified local economy – different types of cash crops, food crops and livestock. This strategy of economic diversification attempted to make small farmers self-sufficient and resilient in the face of economic hardship. It kept them independent of the planter and the low wages offered on the plantations. It introduced them to an outward focus by having to organize themselves for the export market and to develop some sophistication in making trading connections with the wider world.

They were largely on their own, however. They received little support and encouragement from the colonial authorities, who would have preferred a more subservient peasantry that was easy to control. The peasants were charged high rents for land and were frequently evicted. The planters sometimes refused to sell land to the peasants and blocked their efforts to seek credit facilities. The peasant proprietors also experienced sabotage. In the face of such **discriminatory** practices they resorted to different strategies. They banded together and bought whole plantations where impoverished planters could not afford to refuse the sale. Baptist ministers assisted them in buying land, especially in Jamaica, establishing free villages. Others, with few alternatives, squatted on crown lands, as in Trinidad and Guyana, for example.

It must be remembered that the peasantry's efforts to establish an economic basis for their independence from the planters was done under colonial rule. It could have been more successful and helped to develop a prosperous peasantry if the colonial authorities had not been deliberately obstructionist. They tended to side with planter interests. Efforts at economic diversification did assist the colony in establishing a more balanced economy and provided the peasants with a sense of independence, but it was ad hoc and could not raise the peasants far from poverty.

ACTIVITY 4.11

The entrepreneurial spirit amongst the Caribbean peasantry led to the development of savings societies and building and loan societies. Find out about these forms of economic organization from older persons, as their functions have been largely taken over by commercial banks today.



Fig. 4.10 Uriah Buzz Butler

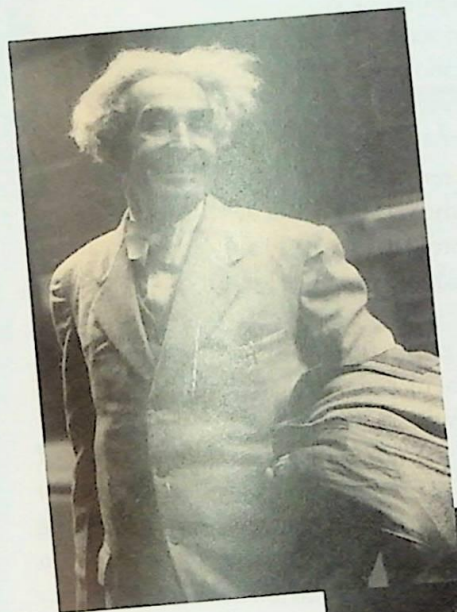


Fig. 4.11 Alexander Bustamante



Fig. 4.12 Norman Manley



Fig. 4.13 Grantley Adams

Political enfranchisement

'Political enfranchisement' refers to the right of a people or nation to determine their own affairs. Under colonialism the Caribbean colony was under the control of the European power. However, once emancipation had been achieved it was only a matter of time before Caribbean people would develop the skills and expertise necessary to challenge the status quo.

Caribbean people in their thousands, in the years after emancipation, migrated to different regional destinations for work and better wages. The Panama Canal, the modern sugar plantations of Cuba, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, the oil refineries of Curaçao and Aruba, and the oilfields of Venezuela, helped to develop a consciousness of political and economic conditions in these countries and exposed workers to new and different ideas. Returning soldiers who had served Britain in the world wars in far-flung reaches of the empire were unwilling to resume a lowly status in the social hierarchy because they had been exposed to different ideas and political philosophies. Moreover, the ideas and speeches of Marcus Garvey of Jamaica pervaded the entire Caribbean. Black consciousness and nationalist sentiments began to seem enabling strategies of resistance.

In the 1930s economic conditions had deteriorated to such a level that the region was wracked by labour riots, strikes and wide-scale protests. Violence and mayhem followed. This period saw the rise of charismatic leaders in the labour movement who, riding on their mass popularity, made the successful transition to political leaders. *Uriah Buzz Butler*, *Adrian Cola Rienzi* and *Captain A. A. Cipriani* of Trinidad and Tobago, *Alexander Bustamante* and *Norman Washington Manley* of Jamaica, *Grantley Adams* of Barbados and *Nathaniel Crichtlow* of Guyana (Figs 4.10–13) organized and developed the trade union

BOX 4.10 Political development

The form of government that was widespread throughout the British Caribbean was called the *Old Representative System*. A 'governor' was appointed from England who transmitted the dictates of the Colonial Office to the colonies. He ruled with the help of a nominated council and an elected assembly. The latter proved troublesome to the governor on many occasions. However, for a long time their quarrels were largely between whites from England and creole whites (planters) about how best to run the colony.

During the nineteenth century Britain took more direct control of many of the colonies by eliminating the elected assembly. The governor and a legislative council, with official and nominated unofficial members, now ruled. This was called **crown colony** government and proved oppressive to a population of ex-slaves and ex-indentured labourers who were economically distressed and looking for ways to improve their condition.

Widespread unrest in the 1930s forced the colonial authorities to reinstate elected representation. It occurred gradually, but from 1944 onwards, Caribbean territories were granted **universal adult suffrage**. There were no restrictions put on the population (except that of age) in being eligible to vote and elect members to the **legislature**. Once this occurred it was only a matter of time before these territories sought **internal self government**. They remained colonies with Britain's interests being overseen by a governor general, but a chief minister and members of the legislature were now elected from the ranks of Caribbean people of all ethnicities. This could be viewed as a period of transition to full **independence**, as once it became possible to supplant white or European persons in positions of control, colonialism no longer made any sense (see also Box 1.2).

ACTIVITY 4.12

Suggest why *enfranchisement* is an important concept in discussing the economic and political developments of the Caribbean in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

movement in the Caribbean. While some Creole whites were involved in the early stages it quickly became a working-class movement dedicated towards better working conditions for the poor as well as improvements in health and education. This concern with social welfare made it inevitable that the trade unions would be the birthplace for Caribbean political parties.

It also became clear to many of the trade union leaders that the interests of labour had to be represented in the government so that laws could be passed to protect trade unions and their activities as well as the rights of workers. The traditional make-up of the legislative bodies comprised persons who were of the planter class and sympathetic to the needs of that group. The strategy was to get the trade union leaders elected to office so that they could form a lobby agitating for internal self-government and then full independence. Thus, once the trade union movement began, it was the whole colonial system in the Caribbean that was being challenged. Colonialism depended on social class divisions, with European governors, planters, supervisors and property owners exploiting labour and people of a different colour and race. Once Africans and Indians were elected to office, the writing was on the wall for the colonial system (Box 4.10).

Summary

Economic and political enfranchisement of Caribbean people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was won out of their continued resistance to the planter class and control of the colony from the mother country. The resilience of Caribbean people in developing vibrant and diversified peasant economies came out of a spirit of resistance. They could not change the economic structures, however, and Caribbean

societies remained very much plantation economies dominated by whites trying to stifle any initiative that was not solely concerned with their own welfare. This lack of interest on the part of the whites led to economic distress, and in response to the rise of trade unionism and political parties. Behind all this was a growing awareness of black consciousness and nationalism, both deeply embedded in a spirit of resistance. Thus, the end of enslaved and bonded labour did not see a minimizing of resistance; it changed focus as it grappled with bringing down colonialism itself. Since independence it has occurred in myriad ways as history continues to impact society and culture today.

WRAP UP

Analysing the history of the Caribbean shows how ethnocentric ideas have pervaded the traditional account. *Resistance* is a central theme in Caribbean history and uncovering ethnocentrism is a form of resistance. Hybridization is also a process of resistance where the culture of the captors, the enslaved and the indentured come together today in unique forms. The struggle of Caribbean nations to achieve sustainable economies is a continuing act of resistance to overcome the underdeveloped state in which the European countries left their colonial possessions. Independence – political, economic and psychological – continues to be important to ideas of resistance. Tracing history in Caribbean culture and society shows the extent to which historical events and processes arise in contemporary social life in the Caribbean.