Early Migratory Movements of the Indigenous Peoples into the Caribbean

History tells us that before the European invasion into the Americas there were pre-historic Amerindian groups who lived in the region. These groups settled in areas as far back as 5000-3000 BC to 7,000 years ago. These peoples were the Ostionoids, Barrancoids and the Saladoids who infiltrated the region from which you have the descendants of the Kalinagos, Tainos, Mayas, Aztecs and Incas.

- Archaeological evidence shows that these people ate shellfish and made bone and stone they were referred to as the pre-ceramic group.
- Archaeologists show that the first people to have come to the region travelled from Siberia and Alaska across the Bering Strait.
- Some also believed that these people made their way into the Americas via the winds and currents of the Pacific Ocean; by following animals across the ice bridge which joined Alaska and Siberia. Before the ice-bridge disappeared many groups of hunters pushed those who came south about some 18,000 years ago.
- Most of the earlier groups who came during the pre-Ceramic period lived in the Greater and Lesser Antilles for 5000 years before the arrival of the other groups.
- These people were acculturated with the Saladoid, Barrancoid and Ostionoid cultures from which came the Tainos, Kalinagos and Mayas.
- These people had established trading systems connected to the mainland territories.
- The Tainos and Kalinagos co-existed with these ceramic groups and in fact mixed with them. These Ceramic group still live in western Cuba and remote areas of Hispaniola (they are referred to as Ciboneys).
- The Tainos were not a separate group that came to the region, they simply were hybrids of the earlier peoples of the Greater Antilles. The Tainos arrived in the Caribbean through Venezuela-Trinidad gate way about 300BC.
- 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 of Venezuela and Guianas. However, historians today are of the view that both groups evolved from the common Saladoids.

Tainos and Kalinagos

Social Organization
- Farming activities were carried almost entirely by women; fishing and hunting were done by men. The kalinago society was very militaristic while the Tainos society was hierarchical.
- They lived in rectangular and round shaped houses made of poles and thatch.

Government
- Each independent Taino community was ruled by a cacique, a hereditary ruler who also acted as high priest and judge. On the other hand, each Kalinago family was independent; justice was carried out on a personal level. A lesser civil leader supervised farming and fishing activities, but his authority was subordinate to that of the “Ouboutu.

Religion
- A mixture of zemism- the worship of zemis or idols believed to control the forces of nature- and spiritualism, formed the basis of the Taino religion. The cacique, acting as high priest, presided over all religious ceremonies and communicated with ancestors and Gods on numerous occasions. Tainos believed in the Afterlife.
- Kalinagos on the hand, was spiritualistic. Special boys were trained as priest and they had the most powerful “maboya” or good and evil spirit.

Customs
- Both Amerindian group flattened the foreheads of their babies. They enjoyed singing, dancing to music and tobacco smoking.
- They also played a ball game called “batos”.

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• The Kalinago boys were trained as warriors and a small initiation ceremony ushered them into manhood. Before they attack the Tainos the warriors worked themselves into a rage, used their war canoes to carry out the attack, always carried way their dead and any captured Taino men who were starved for five days, then ceremonially killed and eaten. Captured women became the concubines of the Kalinago warriors.

• Seafood, vegetables and peppers were the main food items along with agouti, and iguana.

Technology
• The Tainos and the Kalinagos were skilled at constructing and using dugout canoes for fishing and transportation purposes.
• Their stone tools, spears, bows and arrows and clubs were fairly well made, but pottery items were crude and soft.
• Women wove straw baskets, cotton cloth and hammocks. Simple farming methods produced a variety of crops, including cassava, corn, cotton and tobacco.
• They also did some amount of irrigation.

Migration of the Europeans

Social Changes in Europe and contributions to explorations in the 15th century
*The rebirth of learning (Renaissance) - the new ideas that were encouraged during the renaissance provided the basis for developments in science and technology.
* With the decay of feudalism, the serfs who were at the bottom of the social system were able to pursue their own goals and aspirations without the shackles of religious precepts.

* The emergent of a middle class of merchants and tradesman came into existence, and above them was the nobility, forming the ruling class. This middle class was important in that they contributed to the development of trade and commercial of Europe.

* The rise of printing which allowed for the spread of new ideologies and thinking of Europeans. The growth of ideas led to the growth of schools and universities.

* The spiritual powers of the Roman Catholic Church permeated every aspect of life and made the church the dominant institution in the Western Europe. It fostered the desire to spread Christianity in foreign lands. The Pope became the arbitrator of political disputes, particular those involving the discovery of new lands. In fact, religion was used as a tool for European exploitation and hegemony in the conquered territories.

Settlement and Impact of the Europeans in the Americas
• For over a hundred years after Columbus claimed the Americas for Spain, no other European nation was able to establish permanent settlement in the Caribbean.
• The British and French in the 16th and 17th centuries came to raid pillage and capture rich Spanish galleons carrying gold and silver back to Spain or to lay siege to and destroy Spanish settlement and steal their treasures. They were called ”buccaneers,” “privateers” and ”pirates.”
• According to the Treaty of Tordesillas 1494, 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, British and French.
• Rivalry began between the nations for the licence and they undermined each other at the point of supply on the African coast. No longer gold and silver but human cargo was now proving to be a way to profit from Spain’s empire.
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. The islands were virtually ignored by the Spaniards and the Amerindian populations were small and easily overcome.

Many of the Colonies established by the French and British in the early 17th century were proprietorships. The Europe 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 island of Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, St. Maarten, Saba and St. Eustatius. They were less interested in agriculture, preferring to be traders, supplying the colonies with slaves and other goods. They used the island as massive warehouses and places were slaves were kept en route to their final destination.

Unlike the Spanish, British, French and Dutch, did not enslaved 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.

**Africans**

As early as 1515, Spain gave the Asiento ot licence to Portugal to supply enslaved Africans to the Caribbean to work alongside the indigenous peoples on the ranches and in the mines. By the time of the Sugar Revolution in the 1640s the demand for enslaved labour grew astronomically. Historians argue that between 15-20 million enslaved Africans came to the Caribbean during the plantation era. The new group of enslaved people settled on the plantations in areas designated for them this was usually the back lands of the estates and / or the crop that they were responsible for producing. After emancipation they tended to occupy the rural areas of their respective territory.

**The Impact of the Africans on Caribbean Society and Culture**

The Europeans did everything in their power to alienate the African culture- new names, laws forbidding their religious worship and separating their families. Despite this many different African cultural forms survived examples of these are evident in their religion, language, foods, folk medicine, music, art and festival celebrations.

- **Religious practices**- many elements can be recognized in the cults of obeah, voodoo and Shango. These were passed down from one generation to the next. In Jamaica for example, Myalism and obeah developed into pocomania. These practices involved sorcery, witchcraft and the use of charms. It is through dancing and music that these cults are kept alive in contemporary Caribbean.

- **Language**- the West Africans who came to the Caribbean created their own tongue known as Patios (mixture of African, French, English and Spanish dialects). This dominated not only the vocabulary of the Africans but also in pronunciation and grammar ( nyam, su-su, Kas- Kas, bufbuf, bafan, booboo).

- **Foods**- some of the foods of Africa became part of the Caribbean for example, yam, cocoa, asham, fu-fu, susumba, peanut duckoonoo).

- **Folk Medicine**- the use and administration of herbs and bushes have survived in the Caribbean regardless of the fact that modern medicine has been instituted. The use of herbal medicine came through the vision and experimentations of the slaves who brought knowledge of nature and its uses. The obeah men were the
slave doctors who administered various teas, baths, potions and oils for the purpose of healing. For example, love bush was used for fevers; leaf of life for common colds; Quassie for malaria; soursop leaf to expel worms from the body.

- **Music:** African music can be identified in some Caribbean churches, festivals and theatres. The call and answer style of singing is indigenous of Africa. The use of drums escaped the dominating hands of the planters who tried to wipe it out. In Jamaica some of the melodies and rhythms brought here by the slaves are present in our music even some of their musical instruments such as Congo-talking drum, Abeng, xylophone, bamboo, fife and banjo.

- **Art:** The majority of West Africans imported in the Caribbean were talented and skilled human beings. The rich cultural heritage was retained and reflects in Caribbean art. Much of the ceramics, carvings and sculptures reflects that of the African culture.

**Festival Celebrations:** Some of the festivals have a strong link to West African practices. Some examples are Jonkonnu, Nine-night, Bruckins, Dinki Mini, sessions and Yam festivals.

**The Indentured Servants**

Indentured servants were used during the early 1600-1640 and between 1838-1917.

1. The indentured servants who came in the 17th century were used due to the near extinction of the Amerindian population.

2. Servants were imported from Ireland, England, Holland, France and Portugal.

3. Like the Amerindians they were underfed, overworked and exploited;

4. They were fed on Irish potatoes and water alone.

5. Those who came in 19th century came as contract labourers to work on the sugar plantations. Most of these servants came from Maderia, China, India and Africa.

**Migration of the Indentured Servants (1840-1917)**

- Slavery was abolished in the British Caribbean over a period of time 1834-1838. Despite that fact, some plantations needed labourers for the successful continuation of sugar production particular those countries of Trinidad and Tobago, British Guiana and Suriname.

- In the smaller islands such as Antigua, St. Kitts and Barbados Africans had fewer options and so return to the plantations and accepted the wages offered.

- In British Guiana and Trinidad which had recently become large scale sugar producers needed a large labour force for the expansion of the industry.

- The planters did not utilize ex—slave labour as much because it was “expensive.” However, some historians argue that the planters refused to pay ex-slaves fair wages.
• They first experimented with the Portuguese, Chinese, Germans and Indians to somewhat “whiten” the ethnic balance of the West Indies. The former worked but the later also went into this area but were preferred because they were willing to work for low wages.

• The indentured servants worked on a contractual system for 5-7 years and were given a passage back to their homeland while others received a grant of land.

• India was proven to be the most satisfactory source of labour and so in 1845 Trinidad and Jamaica monopolize on this and later British Guiana.

• By the time the Indian experiment of Indian Indentureship ended there were about 239,000 who went to British Guiana; 144,000 to Trinidad and 36,000 who came to Jamaica.

• Most came from Northern India- Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and various parts of British India and were willing to work for low wages.

**Impact of Indentured migrants on Caribbean Culture**

• **Ethnic Diversity**: the influx of immigrants particularly in Guyana, Trinidad, and Suriname created sizable sub-groups.

• The French brought labourers from Pondicherry a French Indian colony who brought their Kali, Tamil culture from Southern India which still exists in Guadeloupe today.

• Large Indian ethnic groups are found in Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad.

• Compared to the Indians, Chinese immigrants readily assimilated into Caribbean culture and many marry African women and became Christians.

• The development of the extended families became pronounced in Caribbean society and culture.