

Taino and kalinago



Excerpt from the book *Crossroads of Empire: The European-Caribbean Connection, 1492-1992*, by Alan Gregor Cobely; pgs 23-30 TAINO AND KALINAGO RESISTANCE TO EUROPEANS According to recent archaeological evidence, the Kalinago were the last migrant group to settle in the Caribbean prior to the arrival of the Europeans in 1492. The Columbus mission found three native groups, of different derivation and cultural attainments, but all of whom entered the Caribbean from the region of South America known as the Guianas. These were the Ciboney, the Taino (Arawaks) and the Kalinago.

The Ciboney had arrived about 300 B. C. , followed by the Taino, their ethnic relatives, about 500 years later and who by 650 A. D. had migrated northwards through the islands establishing large communities in the Greater Antilles. Starting their migration into the islands from about 1000 A. D. , Kalinagos were still arriving at the time of the Columbus landfall. They were also in the process of establishing control over territory and communities occupied by Tainos in the Lesser antilles, and parts of the Greater Antilles.

When the Spanish arrived in the northern Caribbean, therefore, they found the Tainos to some extent already on the defensive, but later encountered Kalinagos whom they described as more prepared for aggression. Kalinagos, like their Taino cousins and predecessors, had been inhabiting the islands long enough to perceive them as part of their natural, ancestral, survival environment. As a result, they prepared themselves to defend their homeland in a spirit of defiant " patriotism," having wished that the 'Europeans had never set foot in their country. From the outset, however, European colonial forces were technologically more prepared for a violent

struggle for space since in real terms, the Columbus mission represented in addition to the maritime courage and determination of Europe, the mobilisation of large scale finance capital, and of science and technology for imperialist military ends. This process was also helped by the frenzied search for identity and global ranking by Europeans through the conquest and cultural negation of other races.

In the Greater Antilles, Tainos offered a spirited but largely ineffective military resistance to the Spanish even though on occasion they were supported by the Kalinago. This was particularly clear in the early sixteenth century in the case of the struggle for Puerto Rico in which Kalinagos from neighbouring St. Croix came to Taino assistance. In 1494, Columbus led an armed party of 400 men into the interior of Hipiola in search of food, gold and slaves to which Taino caciques mobilised their armies for resistance.

Guacanagari, a leading cacique, who had tried previously to negotiate an accommodating settlement with military commander Alonso de Ojeda, marched unsuccessfully in 1494 with a few thousand men on the Spanish. In 1503, another forty caciques were captured at Hipiola and burnt alive by Governor Ovando's troops; Anacaona, the principal cacique was hung publicly in Santo Domingo. In Puerto Rico, the Spanish settlement party, led by Ponce de Leon, was attacked frequently by Taino warriors; many Spanish settlers were killed but Tainos and Kalinagos were defeated and crushed in the counter assault.

In 1511, resistance in Cuba, led by cacique Hatuey, was put down; he was captured and burnt alive; another rising in 1529 was also crushed. In these struggles, Taino fatalities were high. Thousands were killed in battle and

publicly executed for the purpose of breaking the spirit of collective resistance; some rebels fled to the mountains and forests where they established maroon settlements that continued intermittently the war against the Spanish.

By the middle of the the sixteenth century, however, Taino and Kalinago resistance had been effectively crushed in the Greater Antilles; their community structures smashed, and members reduced to various forms of enslavement in Spanish agricultural and mining enterprises. In the Lesser Antilles, however, the Kalinago were more successful in defying first the Spanish, and then later the English and French, thereby preserving their political freedom and maintaining control of their territory. As the labor supply on Epola declines, attention turned to the southern islands" which from St. Croix, neighbouring Puerto Rico, to the Guianas were inhabited by the Kalinagos. Spanish royal edicts dated November 7, 1508 and July 3, 1512, authorised settlers to capture and enslave Kalinagos on 'the island of Los Barbudos (Barbados), Dominica, Martinino (Martinique), Santa Lucia, San Vincente, La Asuncion (Grenada), and Tavaco (Tobago),' because of their 'resistance to Christians. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, the Spanish had decided, having accepted as fact the absense of gold in the Lesser Antilles, and the inevitability of considerable fatalities at the hands of Kalinago warriors, that it was wiser to adopt a 'hands off policy' while concentrating their efforts in the Greater Antilles. As a result, the Greater and Lesser Antilles became politically separated at this time by what Troy Floyd described as a 'poison arrow curtain. '

The English and French initiating their colonizing missions during the early seventeenth century, therefore, had a clear choice. They could either confront the Spanish north of the 'poison arrow curtain' or Kalinago forces south of it. Either way, they expected to encounter considerable organized armed resistance. They chose the latter, partly because of the perception that Kalinagos were the weaker, but also because of the belief that Kalinagos were the 'common enemy' of all Europeans and that solidarity could be achieved for collective military operations against them.

Having secured some respite from the pressures of Spanish colonization by the end of the sixteenth century, then, Kalinagos were immediately confronted by the more economically aggressive and militarily determined English and French colonists. Once again, they began to reorganize their communities in preparation for counter strategies. This time, it would be a clear case of resistance on the retreat. By the 1630s, their rapidly diminishing numbers were being consolidated around a smaller group of specially chosen islands - mostly in the Windwards but also in the Leewards.

By this time, for instance, Barbados, identified in a Spanish document of 1511 as an island densely populated with Kalinagos, no longer had a native presence. Europeans understood the significance of this reorganization and resettlement of Kalinago communities, and established their infant colonies in peripheral parts of the Leeward Islands where their presence was less formidable, and in Barbados where it was now absent. The English and French then were aware that most of their settlement would have to come to terms with Kalinago resistance. His expectation, however, did not deter them, and they continued to seek out island niches where an effective

foothold could be gained until such time as Kalinago forces could be subdued and destroyed by their respective imperial forces. The English and French sought the passification of the Kalinago for two distinct, but related reasons, and over time adopted different strategies and methods but maintained the ideological position that they should be enslaved, driven out, or exterminated.

First, lands occupied by the Kalinago were required for large scale commodity production within the expansive, capitalist, North Atlantic agrarian complex. The effective integration of the Caribbean into this mercantile and productive system require the appropriation of land through the agency of the plantation enterprise Finance capital, then sought to revolutionize the market value of Kalinago lands by making them available to European commerical interests.

By resisting land confiscation Kalinagos were therefore confronting the full ideological and economic force of Atlantic capitalism. Second, European economic activities in the CARibbean were based upon the enslavement of Indigenes and imported Africans. The principal role and relation assigned to these and other non-Europeans within the colonial formation was that of servitude. Europeans in the Lesser Antilles, however, were not successful in reducing an economic number of Kalinago to chattle slavery, or other forms of servitude.

Unlike the Taino, their labour could not be effectively commodified, simply because their communities proved impossible to subdue. It was not that the Kalinago were more militant than the Taino. Rather it was because the nomadic nature of their small communities and their emphasis upon

territorial acquisition, in part a response to the geographical features of the Lesser Antilles, enabled them to make more effective use of the environment in a 'strike and sail' resistance strategy.

Kalinago, then, while not prepared to surrender either land or labour to Europeans, were better placed to implement effective counter-aggression. Primarily because of their irrepressible war of resistance, which intimidated all Europeans in the region, Kalinago were targeted first for an ideological campaign in which they were established within the European mind, not as 'noble savages,' as was the case with the less effective Taino, but as vicious cannibals' worthy of extermination within the context of genocidal military expeditions. Voluminous details were prepared by Spanish and later English and French colonial chroniclers on the political and ideological mentality of the Kalinago, most of whom called for 'holy wars' against 'les sauvages' as a principal way to achieve their subjugation.

This literature, dating back to Columbus in 1494, in a contradictory fashion, denied Kalinago humanity while at the same time outlined their general anti-colonial and anti-slavery consciences and attitudes. In the writings of many Europeans of the seventeenth century, the Kalinago are presented as a people who could 'prefer to die of hunger than live as a slave. ' - Excerpt from the book *Crossroads of Empire: The European-Caribbean Connection, 1492-1992*, by Alan Gregor Cobely; pgs 23-30