

# [Historyof trinidad and tobago history history essay](https://assignbuster.com/historyof-trinidad-and-tobago-history-history-essay/)

Decimation can be defined as destroying or killing a large part of the population literally every tenth person as chosen by lot. Christopher Columbus rediscovered the island of Trinidad on 31st July 1498 on his third voyage to the West Indies. Columbus saw the three peaks of the southern range of mountains which bear the name Trinity Hills. Christopher Columbus was one of the main reasons why Spain could have claimed Trinidad as theirs because he and his crew were the ones that rediscovered it. Why it is said that Christopher Columbus rediscovered Trinidad and not discovered it is because when the Spaniards landed, they encountered the indigenous people of Trinidad, namely the Amerindians. The Amerindians consisted of two groups of people. The Tainos who were the peaceful group and the Kalinagos who were the warlike group. The two groups responded differently with regards to welcoming the Spaniards. The Tainos offered them gifts and tried to befriend them while the Kalinagos wanted to attack but eventually retreated.

The development of new technology such as maps, compasses and navigational systems led Spain to test this new equipment where they discovered many territories. Trinidad is just one of the territories that Spain colonized. Spain took interest in Trinidad because of its many resources and due to the fact that authority was given according to the number of colonies owned, Spain claimed Trinidad as theirs. Some of the resources that the Spaniards came for were gold and spices. The Spaniards brought many things and many ways of doing things that the Amerindians did not know. They came in ships with sails, and although the ships were by standards small they were far bigger than the largest Amerindians canoe. The Spanish brought animal the Amerindians had never seen before, these include horses, donkeys, goats and cattle’s. We can see how advanced technologically the Spaniards were than the Amerindians.

There are many factors that led to decimation of the Amerindian population. It is believed that the Spaniards and their colonization of Trinidad are one of the main reasons for the drastic decrease and eventual extinction of the native people of Trinidad.

The Amerindians died from new diseases that the Spaniards brought with them such as measles and chicken pox, overwork and in fighting the Spaniards. Also due to the fact that the Spaniards had imposed their new culture on the Amerindians, which included learning the Spanish language, adopting the Roman Catholic religion, giving up their accustomed way of life and behaving, as the Spaniards wanted them to, many of the Amerindians committed suicide. Though people may believe that there are other reasons besides the Spanish colonization of Trinidad that led to the decimation of the Amerindians, the Spaniards are the main reason.

The Amerindians were the first people to inhabit the island of Trinidad. These people lived there for many centuries and had established settlements. The Tainos were a very peaceful culture. Their leader was called a “ Cacique” and his function was to keep the welfare of the village. Each village was governed by a headman who had considerable authority and was responsible for the good order. They were also farmers and their villages were close to the land so that it could be farmed. They raised their crops in a conuco. A conuco ” is a from of agriculture which the Tainos use which consisted of mounded fields which were arranged in regular rows.” They grew cassava, corn and sweet potatoes. For meat they ate fish, turtle, shellfish, birds and snakes. Their houses were built of rounded wood and there was no flooring. The house was covered in woven straw and leaves.

The Kalinagos usually fought the Tainos. When the Kalinagos attacked, they usually carried off with the Taino women. The Kalinagos’ agriculture was much like that of the Tainos because they grew the same sort of crops although they were better at hunting and fishing. The women did most of the agriculture while the men fought and hunted. The Kalinagos had chiefs and they were elected by their people for life. To be elected you had to show that you were a fearless warrior, a good swimmer and stand strong and able to stand bodily injury without showing pain. His main responsibility was to protect them and lead them to successful raids on the Tainos.

They both made a meal called a “ pepperpot.” The Pepperpot was the staple meal of these indigenous tribes. The essential ingredient is cassareep, a savoury sauce made from the initially poisonous juice left over from processing cassava, which is mixed with peppers and boiled for several hours. In its original form, pepperpot was a native stew that included a wide variety of meats, squash, beans and even peanuts, which were added to the cassareep along with water, then cooked and kept simmering over an open fire in a large clay pot.

When the Spaniards arrived to Trinidad they encountered the Amerindians for the first time. The Amerindians were completely surprised and curious of these strange men who dressed differently and who exited these big ships, which they had never seen before. The Spanish spoke but the Amerindians could not understand so the words were of no use. The clothes worn by the Spanish were inferior in comparison to the Amerindians who were all half naked. The Amerindians were armed with weapons of wood and stone. The Tainos offered the Spaniards gifts whereas the Kalinagos wanted to fight but realized that the Spaniards were more superior.

The Spanish came looking for wealth and did not intend on producing anything. They came expecting to find wealth such as gold and hope to spread the Roman Catholic faith. The Spaniards took over the land while using the Amerindians as labourers. The Amerindians’ way of life was disturbed because they became servants of the Spaniards. The Spanish often killed the Amerindians by chopping of their heads as a game, driving swords through their bodies and trampling them with their horses. The Amerindians could not defend themselves with bones and arrows, wooden spears and clubs compared to the weapons or iron and steel that were carried by the Spaniards.

## THE ENCOMIENDA SYSTEM

The Spanish introduced the Encomienda system to the Amerindians. “ The Encomienda system was created by the Spanish to control and regulate American Indian labour and behaviour during the colonization of the Americas. Under the Encomienda system, conquistadors and other leaders received grants of a number of Indians, from whom they could exact “ tribute” in the form of gold or labour. The Encomenderos were retired soldiers that were brought by the Spaniards were supposed to protect and Christianize the Indians granted to them, but they most often used the system to effectively enslave the Indians and take their lands.” This system could not work because before the Spanish had arrived, the Amerindians had not dug gold in great quantities. After the Spanish had conquered the island there were fewer Indians to produce goods and gold for the Spaniards. The Indians lost their traditional way of life, they had harsh treatment by their new masters and they even committed suicide.

## THE ARENA MASSACRE

“ The Arena Massacre is an incident in 1699 which took place at the Amerindian mission of San Francisco de los Arenales, a site which lies a short distance away from today’s village of San Rafael.” The Amerindians were rebuilding the Catholic Church and because the Priests were not pleased with the speed they were working at, they threatened the Amerindians. The threat to the Amerindians was that if they didn’t work more efficient a negative report would have been given to the Governor at the time Jose de Leon y Echales. The result could have gone anywhere from extreme torture to even death. Before the Governor’s arrival, the Amerindians planned an attack and ambushed the Governor along with the Priests and their bodies were thrown in the church’s foundation. The Governor and the Priests were clubbed and stabbed. The Amerindians, in the process of fleeing were caught by the Spaniards and hundreds were brutally murdered while twenty-two were tried, hung and their bodies dismembered.

This is another reason why Spanish colonization led to the decimation of the Amerindians. The Spaniards were “ deeply rooted” in their Roman Catholic; they would have viewed what the Amerindians had done as totally heinous disregarding the view from the Amerindians standpoint. Not only did they disrespect the Catholic Church, but also they also brutally murdered the Priests, of who are very significant members of Catholic Church.

Though this may be so, the Amerindians were also disrespected. They were forced to convert to Roman Catholicism and they were also overworked in poor conditions. Due to the imposition of the Spaniards’ customs, beliefs and other aspects on the Amerindians, local customs and religion were totally disregarded.

## DISEASES

According to Lisa Allen-Agostini in a 1999 newspaper article, “ Fr. Michel De Verteuil, editor of the Catholic News, says that the Church, through Pope John Paul II, has repented for the atrocities it perpetrated in the name of faith. De Verteuil himself has no problem with the revision of the Arena affair. “ It certainly is a challenge for us to look again at the whole strategy of evangelisation…there was a certain lack of respect for local religion and customs. “ This archdiocese has not explicitly apologised for Arena and the other acts of violence against Amerindian people which resulted in the population dropping from 40, 000 at the arrival of Columbus in 1498, to 4, 000 in 1634.” This would imply that the Spanish colonization was mainly responsible for the drastic decrease in the Amerindian population.

However, apart from the harsh treatment of the Amerindians at the hands of the Spaniards such as that as being forced to convert to the Roman Catholic faith, being subjected to malnutrition and death for a variety of reasons, diseases were also responsible for many deaths. The Amerindians were a traditional people. This meant that their sources for everyday living were natural. They believed in healing and other common elements to assist them in times of need. When the Spaniards arrived however, they brought with them several diseases such as small pox, cholera, yellow fever, and influenza among others. The Amerindians believed in their “ healers” and believed that their Gods had abandoned them because they had gotten sick. The Amerindians were not abandoned were not abandoned by their Gods, but died of these illnesses because vaccines for these diseases were not yet invented. Many Amerindians also committed suicide because they could not deal with the oppression they faced.

## THE CEDULA OF POPULATION

“ The Cedula of Population was a law passed by the King of Spain in 1783 that stated that any Roman Catholic who decided to come to Trinidad to settle would be given free land and would be excused from most taxes. As a result of this law many settlers came to Trinidad with their slaves after 1783.” Every white was given thirty acres of land for each family member and fifteen acres for each slave he brought. Blacks and free coloureds were given fifteen acres of land. The settlers who were there for five years were given privileges and all the rights of Spanish citizenship.

Since the arrival of the Spaniards the Amerindian were slowly killed, which led to the eventual extinction of these indigenous people. The diseases, overwork, suicide and fighting the Spaniards are some of the reasons why the Amerindians were decimated. This indigenous group of people had their customary way of life imposed on by the Spaniards and in the journey to regain that lifestyle; they were killed in a variety of brutal ways. Though the Spaniards colonized Trinidad and Tobago, the Amerindians will always be known as the first the inhabitants of the island.