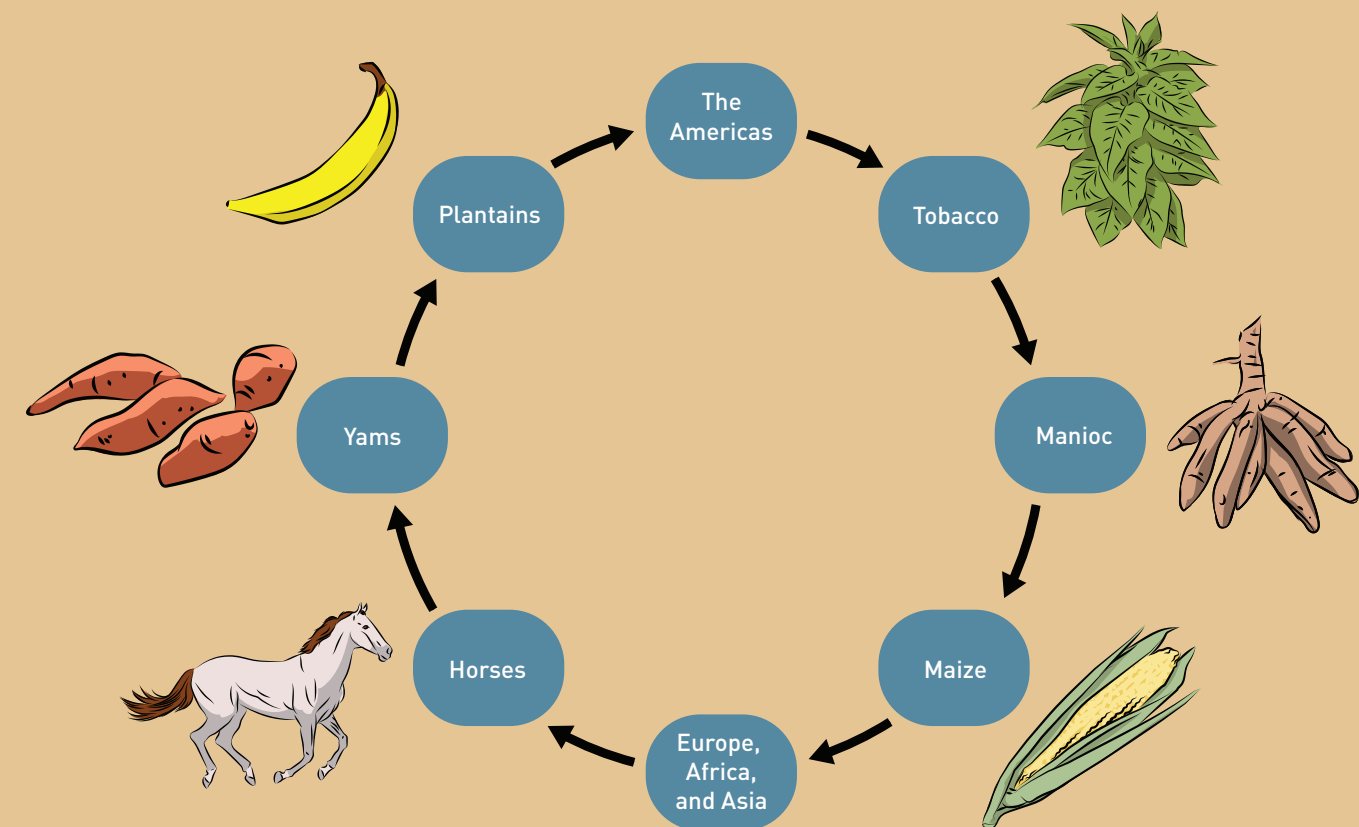


Caribbean Encounters with the World

European conquest of the Caribbean changed the world. Contact between Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia increased after colonization. The Columbian Exchange (named after Christopher Columbus) was the transfer of plants, animals, culture, human population, technology, and ideas between the Americas and across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Fast Fact: Spain's Caribbean colonies were a launching pad for the conquest and settlement of Panama, Florida, Mexico, and other parts of the Americas.

Look and Learn:



Making Connections: Foods were not the only items exchanged between the Americas and the rest of the world. Taíno peoples played a ball game called *batú* in which players hit a rubber ball with their hips, elbows, shoulders, or head. The Spanish had never seen rubber and took some back to Europe with them.

Batú is still played today in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. What other sports played today use a rubber ball? Can you think of anything else we use that is made from rubber?

Taíno Language and the Taíno Today

Across the Caribbean, many places and things still have Arawak names.

Fast Fact: Some contemporary Taíno groups study Arawak with the hope of reviving it.

Look and Learn: The vocabulary chart below shows some words we use today came from the Arawak language. The Spanish who first encountered the Arawak absorbed the words into their language. The words were then absorbed into English through encounters with Spanish speakers.

Arawak	Spanish	English
Animals, Plants, and Nature:		
Manatí	Manatí	Manatee
Huracán	Huracán	Hurricane
Things:		
Canoa	Canoa	Canoe
Hamaca	Hamaca	Hammock
Barbacoa	Barbacoa	Barbeque

Tell a story or share a memory about the role or influence of ancestry in your own life. Post this on social media with #Taíno to join the conversation. To learn more, visit AmericanIndian.si.edu.

Taíno: Native Heritage and Identity in the Caribbean is a collaboration of the National Museum of the American Indian and the Smithsonian Latino Center. This exhibition and related programming are made possible through the support of the Ralph Lauren Corporation and INICIA of the Dominican Republic. Federal support is provided by the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center.

Cover image: Leonarda "Doña Esmeralda" Morales-Acevedo strips the fiber from a maguey plant to make thread for weaving hammocks. San Sebastián, Puerto Rico. Courtesy of Christina González, and supported by the National Science Foundation.

Making Connections: Caribbean peoples are still inspired by their Native ancestors today. They are reconnecting with their Native heritage by recovering local traditions and preserving natural resources. Do you have any traditions that are important to you or your family? How do you make sure that these traditions are not lost?



Puerto Rican superhero La Borinqueña encounters the powerful deity Yucahu, who appears as a mountain-sized version of a cemí. Comic book illustration from *La Borinqueña #1*, written and created by Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez.

Smithsonian

TAÍNO

Native Heritage and Identity in the Caribbean



Learn about the living legacy of the Taíno! There is a growing movement of Taíno peoples celebrating their Native heritage. This movement challenges the belief that Native peoples in the Caribbean became extinct.

Who Are the Taíno?

Arawak-speaking peoples from South America began settling the Caribbean islands more than 2,000 years ago. Their descendants, the Taíno, reside on the Greater Antilles and surrounding islands.

The Spanish first recorded the term *Taino* in 1493. Today many Caribbean people with Native ancestry embrace calling themselves Taíno.

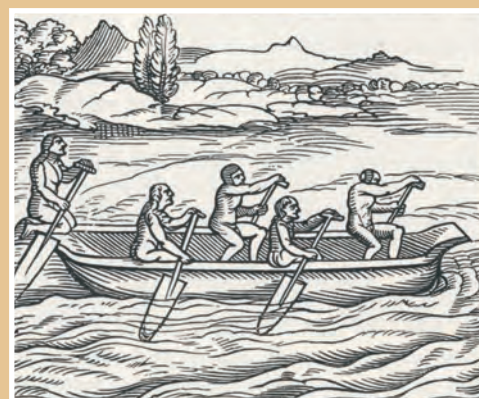
Look and Learn: Where are the Greater Antilles? Can you identify all the present-day islands that make up the Greater Antilles?



Fast Fact: The Greater Antilles include Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico.

- The largest islands in the Caribbean Sea are the Greater Antilles; the smaller chain of islands near South America are the Lesser Antilles.
- Cuba is the largest of the Caribbean islands.
- Mountains, savannas, mangroves, and dry forests blanket the islands of the Caribbean.

Making Connections: Did you know that the Taíno people of the Bahamas were the first Native peoples to encounter Christopher Columbus in 1492? The Taíno shared the Greater Antilles with other Native groups who spoke different languages. After 1492, Europeans began lumping all Native peoples together as “Indians.”



This 1562 illustration shows Caribbean Natives rowing a canoe at sea. Arawak-speaking peoples from South America began settling the Caribbean islands more than 2,000 years ago, encountering and sometimes blending with other Native peoples. Different Taíno communities developed from this ethnic mix by about AD 1000.

Mode of Navigating in the Northern Sea. Illustration from *La Historia del Mondo Nuovo (History of the New World)* by Girolamo Benzoni. Ed. W. H. Smith. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

The Taíno Homeland

During the early 1500s, the Spanish reported large Taíno communities on all the islands between Cuba and Puerto Rico.

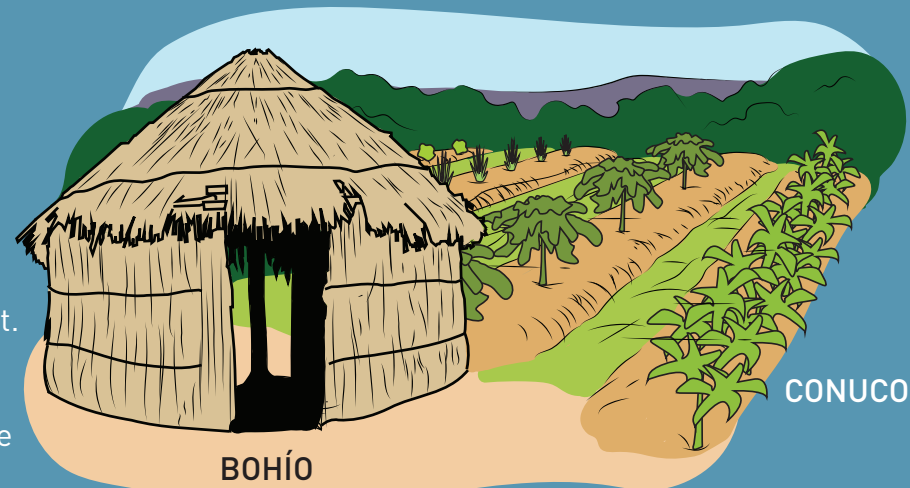
Taíno peoples used the natural materials found in their environments to survive. They developed rich craft, food, music, and healing traditions.

After European colonization, surviving Native peoples held onto many of their healing, farming, weaving, and pottery traditions.

Look and Learn:

Bohío: A traditional Native house that is built with local, weather-resistant materials such as palms and vines.

Conuco: A traditional family garden plot. Crops include Native plants and those brought from Asia, Africa, and Europe to the Americas. Below are some of the plants grown in the conuco.



Native leader Panchito Ramirez and his family stand in their conuco in La Ranchería, Cuba, in 2004. The conuco ensured the survival of many rural families during lean times. Photo by Julio Larramendi.

Making Connections: Looking at the list, can you find foods that Native communities in North America grew?

Native Plants	
Manioc	Cotton
Pumpkin	Vines
Maize	Soursop
Chili Pepper	Guaiacum tree
Guava	Calabash tree
Peanut	
Non-native Plants	
Yam (Asia and Africa)	
Plantain (Southeast Asia and Africa)	
Bitter Orange (Southeast Asia and Europe)	
Taro Root (Asia)	
Basil (Europe and Asia)	

Fast Fact: The Taíno made objects such as maracas, canteens, bowls, and spoons from dried calabash tree gourds.



Maracas made from dried calabash tree gourds are emblems of the musical legacy of the Native Caribbean. Yara Taíno dance rattle, ca. 1910. Baracoa, Cuba. Calabash gourd, wood. NMAI 9/2264



Members of the Concilio Taíno Guatu-Ma-cu A Borikén in Guayanilla, Puerto Rico, 2017. Photo by Teresita González-Crespo.

Before and After European Contact

Taíno peoples already had their own ceremonies and traditions and concepts of leadership and spirituality before contact with Europeans.

Fast Fact: The Taíno did not have a written language before contact with the Spanish. So how do we know about their beliefs and traditions? One way is through a science called archaeology. Archaeologists study materials such as pottery, stone objects, and burials that cultures leave behind in order to learn what those cultures may have been like.

Look and Learn: A cemí is a powerful spiritual object used in Taíno ceremonies. They were made from stone, wood, cotton, and other natural materials. This stone cemí was made before the Taíno met Europeans. It probably shows an important Native leader or ancestor.



Taíno (Chican Ostionoid) cemí carved to represent a human head, AD 800–1500 San Pedro de Macorís Province, Dominican Republic Stone Purchased in 1941 from A. E. Todd. NMAI 20/3511

Slavery

Christopher Columbus introduced slavery to the Caribbean. Spanish colonies used Native and African slave labor to work on sugar plantations and in mines and Spanish households. Native leaders were killed or forced under Spanish control, religious and cultural traditions were suppressed, and slaves were brutalized.

By 1540, about 90 percent of the Native population had died from European diseases. More enslaved Africans were brought to the Caribbean to replace this lost slave labor. They often mixed with the remaining Native peoples. They shared knowledge about living in their environment with the Caribbean's European and African newcomers.

Making Connections: Why did so many Native people die from diseases? Why do you think the Spanish thought it was okay to enslave African and Native peoples? Was it okay? Why or why not?