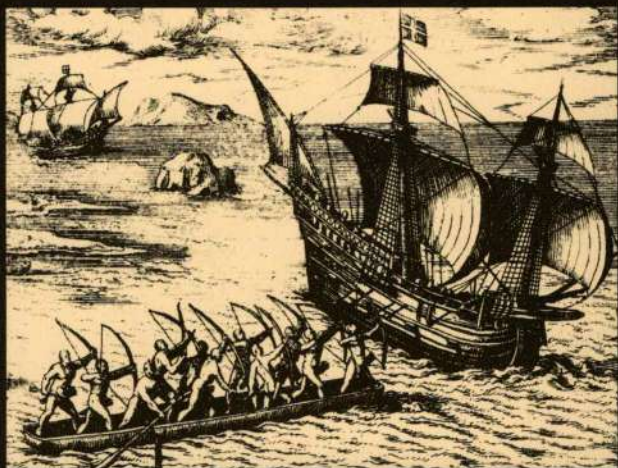

COLUMBUS

In The Bay Of Pigs



John Curl

COLUMBUS
In The Bay of Pigs



Family Life.

(From Amerigo Vespucci, *Letter*, 1509)

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Poetry

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Tidal News

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Ride the Wind

History

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- Cover illustration from Theodore de Bry, *America*, 1596
- Illustration on page 7: Taínos in a canoe, from G. Benzoni, *Historia del Mundo Nuevo*, 1572

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HOMeward PRESS

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

On my friend's mantelpiece I noticed a small plastic bag filled with sand. It was 1983. I read the label: "Arena de Playa Girón, Bahía de Cochinos, Cuba." Sandy explained that a friend of his had brought it back from an international youth conference. I told him that I had recently read that Columbus walked on that same beach. He cut a corner of the plastic and let the fine white grains trickle into a pyramid on my palm.

Several years before, I had by chance found out about Columbus' role in the genocide of the Taíno Indians. It was revelatory. From that moment, I had a thirst for learning about that era. For me, understanding those earliest events seemed key to understanding all that they had set in motion.

The defeat of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion was also a watershed experience in my life. I was twenty years old at the time. My childhood had been dominated by McCarthyism, the Korean war, atomic scares. I was already aware of the CIA's overthrow of progressive governments in Guatemala and the Congo. The Cuban revolution gave me - and many of my generation - a tremendous sense of hope. The Cuban people seemed bent on an independent course of social transformation. But would our North American giant permit a small country to defy it? This was more than a question of Cuba alone: if Cuba could break away from the system, other small countries could too. Perhaps we North Americans who felt oppressed by the same system, perhaps we could break from its oppression too. News

of the defeat of the invasion force threw us into a great elation. The euphoria however was short-lived, as the "Cuban missile crisis" began to unfold.

I had not thought about the Bay of Pigs for many years, until I read about Columbus sailing into it. And now this sand. In the intervening period, my understanding of the predatory aspects of the U.S. system had deepened, as had my commitment to work for change.

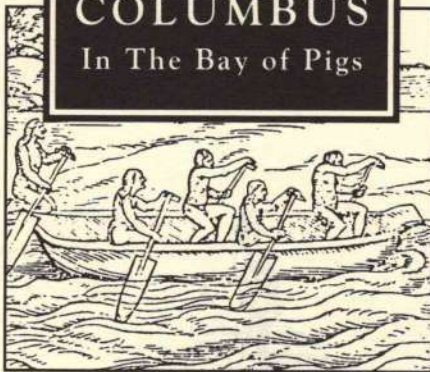
I brought some sand home. At my desk I sifted the granules back and forth between my palms. And that is how I came to write this history-poem.

The struggle of the Taíno people was not in vain. Today after 500 years the Indian nations are still resisting, although they still suffer daily. The injuries they suffer injure us all. Their struggle to survive is for us all. The indigenous people have never struggled only for physical survival, but for a way of living harmoniously with the planet. The Indian elders are correct when they say that the indigenous people are the caretakers of the world. The grandchildren of colonialism owe the native people an enormous debt. We are still just guests here, and should be humble. Only by joining with the indigenous people in common struggle can non-native people ever hope to become at peace anywhere on this continent and build a constructive future.

John Curl
July 25, 1991

COLUMBUS

In The Bay of Pigs





At home in a caney.
(From Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un Voyage*, 1527)
(illustration on facing page)



O N E

Yaní tainó, yaní tainó.

Let the Taíno language be heard.

Yaní tainó, yaní tainó. Dayaní.

Goeíz nitaynó guajirós guacá!

Imagine the sand of the beach called Girón, fine and white, the big bend that turns the corner of the Bay of Pigs, Cuba.

*Imagina la arena de Playa Girón,
fina y blanca, gira
en el rincón
de la Bahía de Cochinos
Cuba.*



Taínos making bread.

(From Girolamo Benzoni, *Historia
del Mundo Nuevo*, 1572.)

*Tócala. Tómala con la punta de tus dedos.
Déjala caer.
Estás tocando la sangre del imperio.*

Touch it. Take some in your fingertips.
Let it fall. You are touching
the blood of empire.

A dark night, April seventeenth, nineteen-
sixty-one: while the U.S. Navy watches,
not far away, fourteen hundred exiles,
recruited in Miami by the CIA,
weapons bulging in every hand,
sail quietly toward the Bahía de Cochinos,
toward the palm-shaded sand of Playa Girón...

A cloudless midday, May twenty-sixth,
fourteen-ninety-four, two years after his first
"voyage of discovery," the Italian Cristoforo
Columbo - Christopher Columbus - called
by the Spaniards Cristóbal Colón - approaches
the mouth of the Bay of Pigs. He is
on his second voyage to "the Indies."
He thinks he is off the coast of China,
and carries letters of state
from the king and queen of Spain
to the Great Emperor Khan.
He stands on the quarterdeck, squinting
at the shore, wondering
if Cuba is finally the mainland he seeks.



Taíno hammocks.
(From Benzoni, 1572)

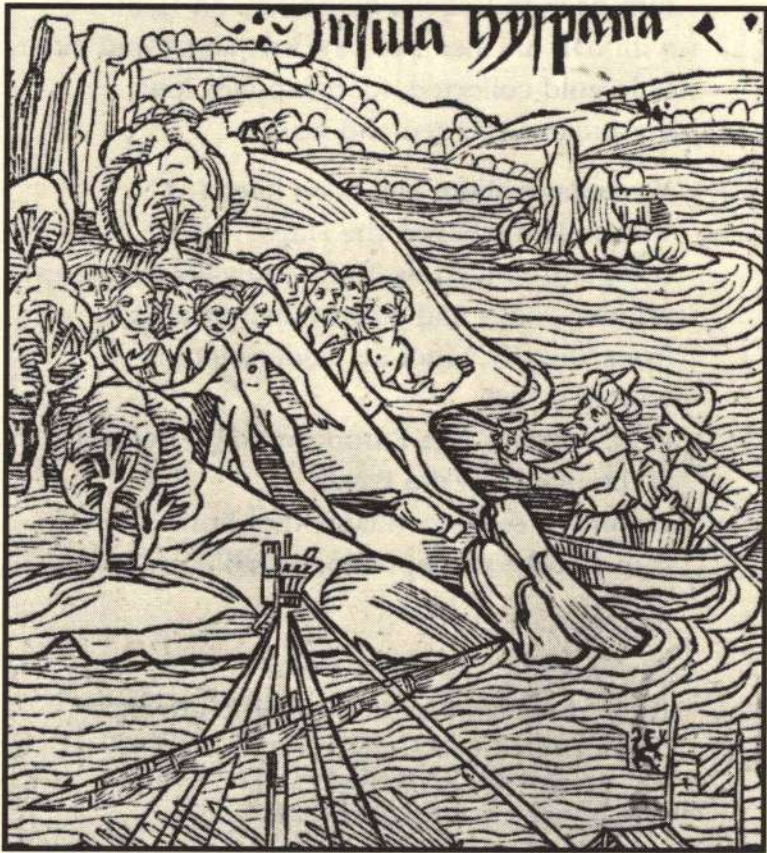
The sun is a searing disc
directly above his head. His troubled thoughts
turn back to Isabela, his colony on Haiti,
with half his men sick, the rest angry and bitter,
little gold collected, food supplies low,
the Indians strained and wary.

Yesterday's shore had been lined
with Indian villages, the ships
often surrounded by Taíno-Arawaks in canoes
offering songs and gifts to their visitors
from "the sky," (not yet understanding
what it meant
to be subjects of a European king), but today
at the mouth of the Bay of Pigs
Columbus sees no village, the shore
is mangrove swamp, impenetrable.

Suddenly
glistening before them: a white
crescent of sand laced with palm groves.

Churning water: a great herd of beasts!
The Indians call them manatee,
but the seamen call them pigs.

The boats are lowered;
the rowers pull their oars; the hulls
glide through the waves, up onto the beach.
Columbus steps out; his foot sinks
softly into the sand of Playa Girón.



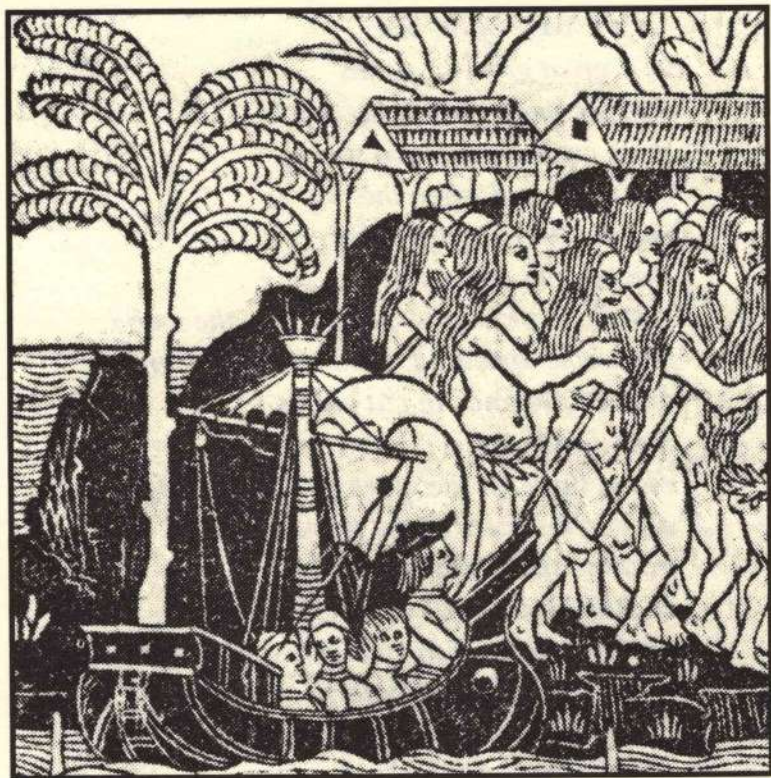
Columbus at Haiti.
(From Columbus' *First Letter*, 1493)

From his log book, these
are his very words:

*“At the edge of the sea,
in a great grove of palms
that seemed to reach the sky,
there gushed forth two springs
of water, and when the tide
was on the ebb, the water
was so cold and so sweet
that no better could be found in the world.
No people appeared, but there were signs
of their presence in cut palms.
And we all
rested there on the grass by those springs
among the scent of the flowers
and the sweet singing
of little birds, and all was so gentle,
and the shade of the palms so grand and fair,
to see it all was a wonder!”*

So Columbus gushed
over all he found in the Bay of Pigs,
as he did over so much in this New World.
But beneath the enthusiasm
was a dark side of Columbus,
an underside.

Nearby the Bay of Pigs is Laguna de Tesoro,
“Lake of the Treasure,” where the local Taínos



Columbus arrives.
(From Columbus' *First Letter*)

threw their sacred objects of gold
to hide them from the Spaniards;
somewhere on the lake bottom
today they are still there.

May twenty-sixth, fourteen-ninety-four;
April seventeenth, nineteen-sixty-one.

*Sangre llena las huellas de Cristóbal Colón
en la arena pálida de Playa Girón;*
blood fills the footprints of Cristóbal Colón
in the pale sand of Playa Girón.

He hadn't undertaken his "enterprise"
in the spirit of science,
but lusted for gold and power,
and sailed into the setting sun not just
to "discover" the Indies but
to conquer them.

That's the deal he wrangled
from the king and queen of Spain
three years before, that he,
though a commoner, a foreigner, would become
Governor and Viceroy of all
"islands and continents"
that he might "discover and acquire,"
as well as "Admiral of the Ocean Sea," and
be granted "the noble title of *don*."
And he would get to keep one tenth
of all "gold, silver, pearls, gems, spices,



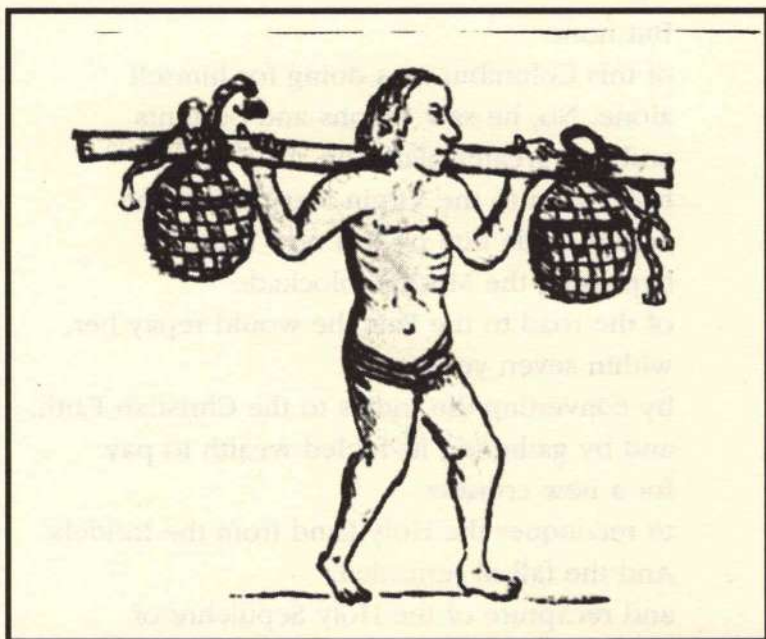
In the mountains
(From Vespucci, 1509)

and other merchandise" in these lands,
free of all taxes.

But none
of this Columbus was doing for himself
alone. No, he saw visions and portents
and had greater plans: he
had sworn to the Virgin Mary that if she
would guide him by this new route,
bypassing the Moslem blockade
of the road to the East, he would repay her,
within seven years,
by converting the Indies to the Christian Faith,
and by gathering its fabled wealth to pay
for a new crusade
to reconquer the Holy Land from the Infidels.
And the fall of Jerusalem
and recapture of the Holy Sepulchre of
Jesus by his troops, scheduled to occur about
the dawn of the year fifteen-hundred, Columbus
was certain, would be the signal for
the Second Coming.

*Sangre llena las huellas de Cristóbal Colón
en la arena pálida de Playa Girón.*

And when the Virgin Mary did - or so he
thought - guide Columbus across
the water, at the very first land he touched,
he began to repay her,



Carrying baskets.

(From G.F. de Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia general*, 1547)

by kidnapping six Tainos:

"They interrogated us as if we had come from heaven," he wrote, "and cried out in loud voices to the others, 'Come see the men from the sky. Bring them food and drink.' There came many of both sexes, every one bringing something, giving thanks to God, prostrating themselves on the earth, lifting up their hands to heaven... I took by force six of the Indians from the first island, and intend to carry them to Spain in order to learn our language and return, unless your Highnesses should choose instead to have them all transported to Spain, or held captive on the island. These people are very simple in matters of war... I could conquer the whole of them with fifty men, and govern them as I pleased... They are all of good size and stature, straight-limbed without exception, and handsomely formed, with fine shapes and faces; their hair short, coarse like a horse's tail, combed toward the forehead except for a small portion which they let hang down behind, and never cut... Their eyes are very large and beautiful... They quickly learn such words as are spoken to them... They

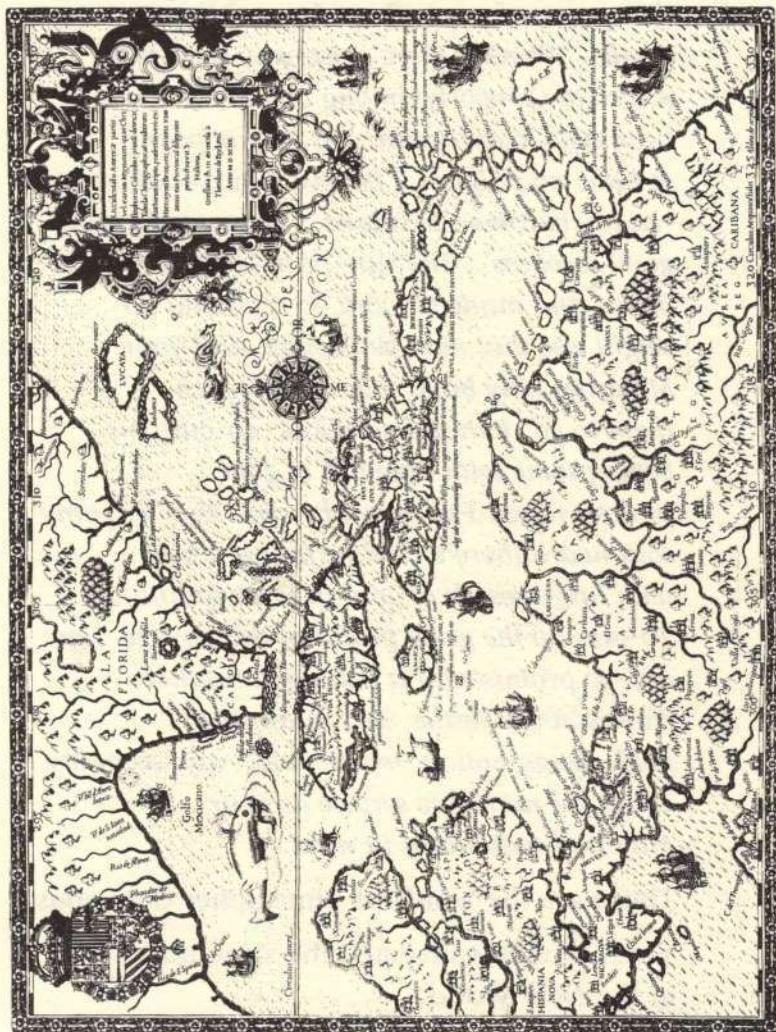


Domestic scene
(From T. de Bry, *America*, 1594)

are very clever and honest, display great liberality, and will give whatever they possess for a trifle or for nothing at all... Whether there exists any such thing as private property among them I have not been able to ascertain... As they appear to have no religion, I believe they would very readily become Christians... They would make good servants... They are fit to be ordered about and made to work, to sow, and do aught else that may be needed, and your Majesties may build towns and teach them to go clothed and adopt our customs... Seeing some with little bits of gold at their noses, I gathered by signs that by going southward there would be found a king with large vessels of gold in large quantities... To sum up the great profits of this voyage, I am able to promise, for a trifling assistance from your Majesties, any quantity of gold, drugs, cotton, mastic, aloe, and as many slaves for maritime service as your Majesties may stand in need of."

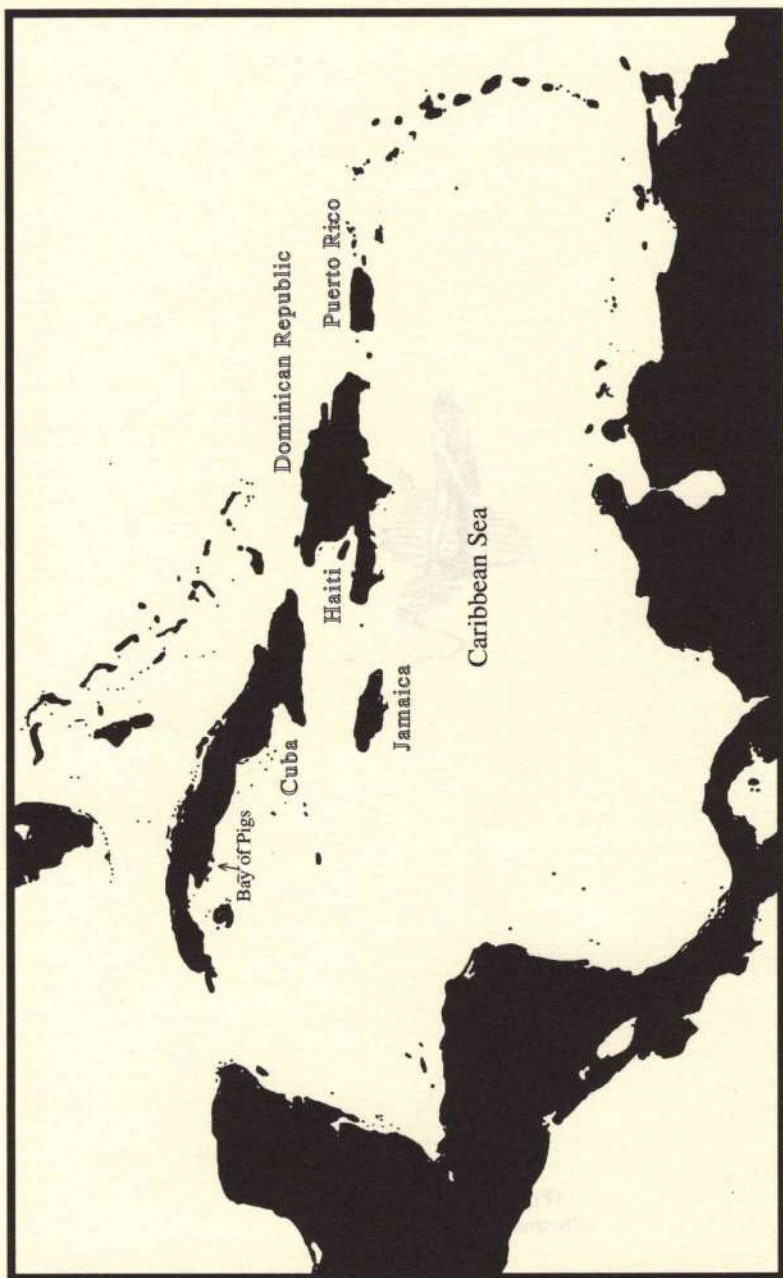
Those are the words of Christopher Columbus. Yes, Columbus invented the slave trade in the New World.

*Sangre llena las huellas de Cristóbal Colón
en la arena pálida de Playa Girón.*



(From Theodore de Bry, *America*, 1594)

The Early Caribbean.



The Caribbean.



Curing the sick.
(From Benzoni, 1574)
(illustration on facing page)



T W O

Who were these Taínos?

Probably the friendliest people in all the Americas: Taíno means “peaceful” or “good.”

They lived in villages of round palm-thatched *caney*s, some with several thousand inhabitants.

The men and boys wore no clothes, nor did the girls until their first menstruation, then a small *nagua*, and after marriage a woven cotton apron. They slept in net hammocks. The women wore lightning-bugs in their hair.



Making corn beer.
(From Benzoni, 1574)

Their main weapons
were cane spears with fish-bone tips.
They hunted the groundhog-like hutía
with trained little barkless dogs.
They used pet parrots to decoy wild ones,
then noosed their feet. They braved the sea
in cedar dugout canoes with square ends,
some large enough to carry eighty or more.
They tied a rope to the tail of the remora fish,
and, when the remora attached itself
to another fish by its sucker mouth,
the fisherman would pull them both out.
The Taínos were great swimmers.

Their bread was cassava, baked
on a stone griddle. They kept a pepper-pot soup
simmering at all times. They shaped clay
coils into pots, wove baskets from
biheo leaves. They mixed earth and ashes
into *conuco* mounds where they grew cassava;
near rivers they used ditch irrigation.
On hillsides they planted corn, five kernels
in each hole a pace apart. They grew yams,
beans, pepper, arrowroot, peanuts; kept
orchards of coconuts, papayas, mameys,
pears, annonas, guavas, pineapples.

They had broad flat foreheads, from being
pressed between boards as infants. In their
pierced ears and noses, they wore



Making fire.

(From André Thevet, *Les Singularités*, Paris, 1557.)

shell, bone, stone, and gold.

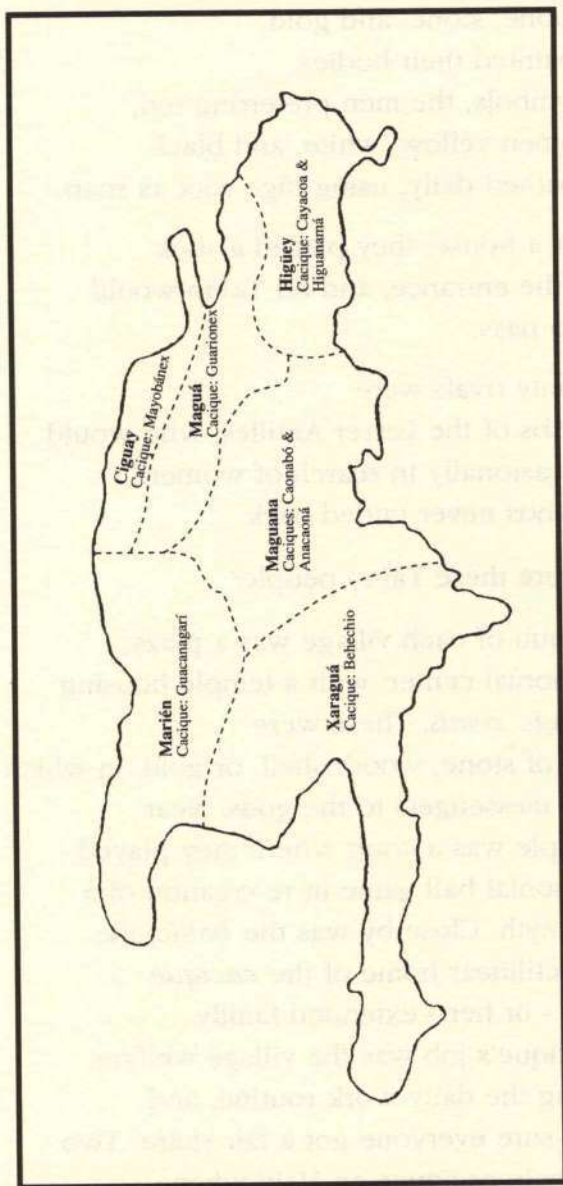
They painted their bodies
with symbols, the men preferring red,
the women yellow, white, and black.
They bathed daily, using digo root as soap.

To lock a house, they placed a stick
across the entrance, and no Taíno would
think to pass.

Their only rivals were
the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles, who would
raid occasionally in search of women.
The Taínos never raided back.

Who were these Taíno people?

At the hub of each village was a plaza,
a ceremonial center, with a temple housing
the village *zemís*. These were
effigies of stone, wood, shell, or gold, in which
resided messengers to the gods. Near
the temple was a court where they played
a ceremonial ball game in re-creation of a
heroic myth. Close by was the *bohío*, the
large rectilinear home of the *cacique*
and his - or her - extended family.
The cacique's job was the village welfare,
assigning the daily work routine, and
making sure everyone got a fair share. Two
of the main caciques on Haiti when



Map of Haiti in Taíno times, with caciques of each province. Today the island that Columbus renamed Española (Hispaniola) houses both the Dominican Republic and modern Haiti.

Columbus arrived were women.

The Taínos danced to *areitos*, songs of tribal history, of the *zemís*, of love and mourning. They danced revolving in circles, with strings of rattling shells on their wrists and ankles, waving palm fronds, to the sound of hollow-log drums, shell timbrels, copper and gold castanets. The *bohuti*-priests sang *areitos* to cure the sick, to the drone of a *maiohavan*, a wooden gong with a long neck, so resonant it could be heard a half league away.

Who were these Taíno people?

They believed there is an immortal being in the sky whom none can see, who has a mother but no beginning. They called him Yocahu and his mother Atabex. The *zemís* were their messengers.

They believed that out of a cave called Yoyovava on the isle of Haiti came the sun and moon; from two other nearby caves, Cacibayagua and Amayauba, came the Taíno people.

They believed that the ocean was formed from the great flood that poured out of the stolen calabash



Indian women.

(From Amerigo Vespucci, *Mundus Novus*, Rostok, 1505)

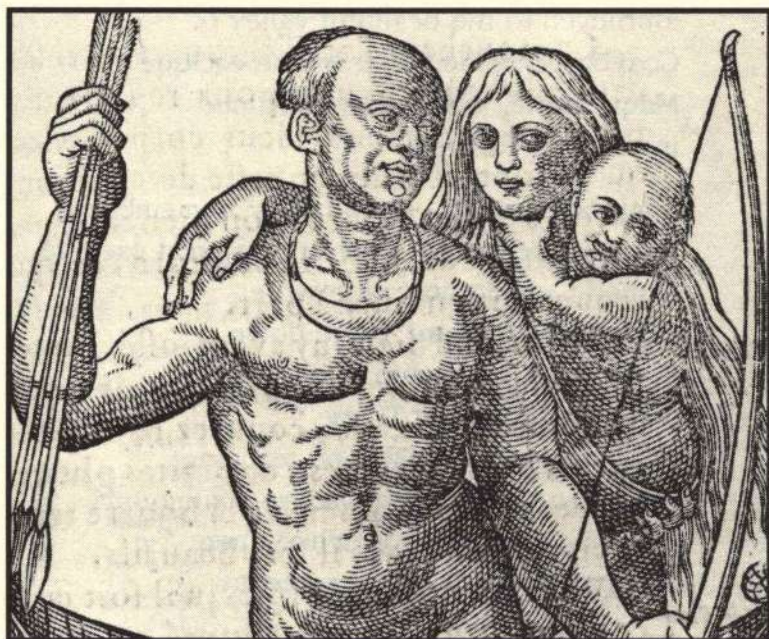
that Dimivan dropped.

They believed that at death their souls journeyed to the beautiful valley of Coaybay, presided over by the cacique Maquetaurié, where they remained in pleasure forever.

They had a myth - an old story, remembered in many areitos - of how once a great cacique named Guamiquiná, who wore clothes and a beard, came down from the sky in a ship, from a place called Turey, bringing precious gifts and teaching the Taíno people many skills. Guamiquiná could only stay a short while, then left, promising to return someday.

Was it any wonder then, when Columbus appeared at these same shores, the Taínos called him Guamiquiná, expected him to stay only a short while, and were shocked when they realized that he didn't plan to leave at all?

In the zemí-temple was a round wooden table, on which they kept powdered cohoba-root: the bohuti-priest would place some on the head of a zemí, sniff the cohoba



Family portrait.
(From de Léry, 1527)

through a branched cane, fall into a trance,
speak with the zemí, then return with a message
in an archaic tongue. The word *cohaba*
meant "to pray." It was through the *cohaba*
that the cacique Cacivaquel spoke
with the zemí Yiocavugama, who gave him,
decades prior, a prophesy of the arrival
of the Christians and a warning
of what they would do.
All the caciques knew this prophesy, but hadn't
the heart to tell their people.

*Sangre llena las huellas de Cristóbal Colón
en la arena pálida de Playa Girón.*



Columbus at Haiti.
(From de Bry, 1594)
(illustration on facing page)



THREE

On his first voyage, two years before he reached the Bay of Pigs, Columbus wrecked his flagship *Santa María* on a reef off Haiti-Bohío-Quisqueya, the cultural center of the Taíno world. He was rescued from the reef by the local chief Guacanagarí.

Columbus stayed only long enough to build a fort, then sailed back to Spain on the *Niña*, leaving thirty-nine men behind.

Returning ten months later, Columbus found the settlement burned to the ground.

Guacanagarí had tried to protect the Christians, but they'd abused the Taíno



Caonabó and Anacaoná
(From de Bry, 1594)

people until Caonabó,
"Golden House," cacique of the golden
mountains of Cibao, the most powerful
chief on Haiti, came down and
killed them all.

Caonabó was held in awe
by the Taínos. By blood half Carib,
the Taínos' only tribal rivals,
he had risen through sheer ability
to the top of the Taíno world.
He shared power with his wife,
Anacaoná, "Flower of Gold,"
renowned for wisdom, graciousness, and
beauty.

Columbus knew
he'd have to settle the score
with Caonabó someday. But first business
was start a new settlement, "Isabela,"
gather gold, and discover the mainland.

So Columbus
left most of his men on Haiti
and sailed off once more,
to the Bay of Pigs and beyond, until
he was so certain
that Cuba was the mainland
that he made his entire crew sign an oath
that they would never say it was an island



Rape of the Taíno Women.
(From de Bry, 1594)

(like the stubborn Indians insisted)
under penalty of having their tongues cut out.

On his return to Haiti,
he found the colony in disastrous straits.
Little gold had been collected, far from enough
to cover expenses, much less fulfill
his extravagant promises.

In desperation
he proposed to the king and queen
(as a temporary expedient of course,
until the gold mines begin to produce),
a plan to capture and sell
all the Carib Indians
on the fanciful grounds
that they were implacable cannibals
and fierce enemies of Spain's friends,
the Taínos.

But the king and queen balked,
as the first few Indians he'd sent quickly died.

Meanwhile, gangs of soldiers were roaming
Haiti, skirting only the province of Caonabó,
committing brutalities of every sort
against the Taínos, who suffered in silence until
one chief, Gua Tiguanaá,
ambushed three Spaniards and killed them.
Columbus didn't hesitate:



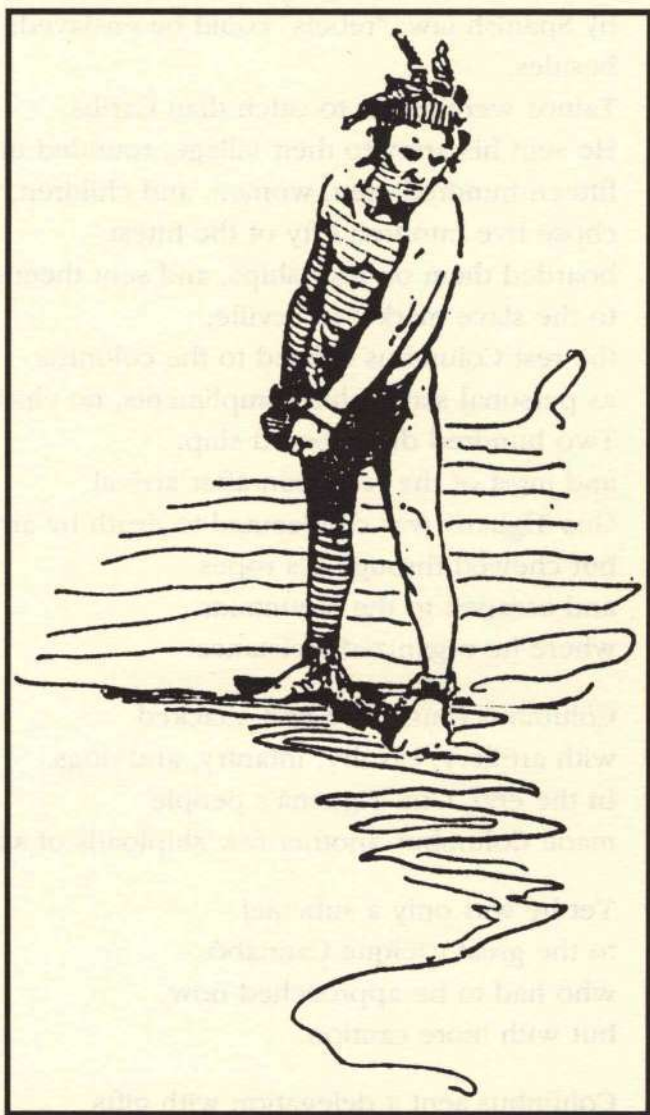
The Cacique Guarionex leading the Battle of the Vega Real
(From A. de Herrera, *Historia general*, 1601)

by Spanish law, "rebels" could be enslaved;
besides,
Taínos were easier to catch than Caribs.
He sent his army to their village, rounded up
fifteen hundred men, women, and children,
chose five hundred fifty of the fittest,
boarded them on four ships, and sent them off
to the slave market in Seville;
the rest Columbus offered to the colonists
as personal slaves, his compliments, no charge.
Two hundred died aboard ship,
and most of the rest soon after arrival.
Gua Tiguana was condemned to death by arrows,
but chewed through his ropes
and escaped to the mountains,
where he organized resistance.

Columbus found him and attacked
with artillery, cavalry, infantry, and dogs.
In the end, Gua Tiguana's people
made Columbus another few shiploads of slaves.

Yet he was only a subchief
to the great cacique Caonabó,
who had to be approached now,
but with more caution.

Columbus sent a delegation with gifts
to Caonabó, led
by the intrepid Lt. Ojeda, already famed



Caonabó in chains.
(By Dominican sculptor Abelard Rodriguez Urdaneta)

as the first to enforce Columbus' decree
to cut off the ears or nose of any Indian
stealing Spanish property.

In his village,
high in the mountains of Cibao, Ojeda
met Caonabó, who wore a crown "with wings
on its sides like a shield and golden eyes
as large as silver cups." Ojeda told him
that Columbus offered peace,
if only he would come down
to the settlement to talk. Caonabó, despite
everything, responded, "Yes,
if Guamiquiná wants peace,
I will make peace. I ask only one thing:
to be given
the Christians' church bell as a sign."
So they started down.

Stopping at a river bank, Ojeda held up a
set of manacles to Caonabó, and said,
"These are ceremonial bracelets,
worn only by kings on horseback:
Lord Columbus
has sent them for you to wear
on this great occasion."

So Caonabó became the first Indian
to ever ride
one of these magic creatures called horse.



Punishment for failure to meet tribute payments.
(By de Bry, from B. de las Casas, *Brevissima relación*, Frankfort, 1598.)

Caonabó was tied to the saddle behind Ojeda,
the chains locked on his wrists and ankles;
Ojeda suddenly spurred the horse
across the river, away from the startled
Indian delegation, and hardly stopped until
they reached the settlement, where the greatest
chief of Haiti, instead of being given
the church bell, was thrown at Columbus'
feet, then chained on the porch
of Columbus' house
on the main plaza, for all to see.

The entire island,
except for the village of Guacanagarí,
rose in revolt,
but the Taínos' fish-bone tipped spears
were no match for cold steel,
so all the island was quickly conquered,
and Columbus, imitating Caesar in Gaul,
imposed tribute on the native people.

*Sangre llena las huellas de Cristóbal Colón
en la arena pálida de Playa Girón.*

Each Taíno over fourteen years of age
in the region of Cibao
had to pay enough gold
to fill a hawk's bell measure
every three months, and in return
received a brass token



Táinos pouring molten gold down Spaniards' throats.
(From Benzoni, 1574)

to wear about his neck as proof
of up-to-date payments. Caciques had to pay
a half calabash full of gold
every two months. The penalty
for nonpayment was amputation of the hands.

The gold the Taínos possessed
had been collected over many generations;
within a season Columbus had it all
and the only way the Taínos
could fill their quotas was
to dig it from the river banks. Soon
the streams were filled with whole families,
desperately trying to find enough in time.
They began to flee to the highest mountains
and remotest spots, leaving their crops
unplanted, and famine stalked the land.

But the Christians came after them.
When the Taínos caught a Spaniard now,
they melted gold and poured it down his throat.

Columbus kept the great cacique Caonabó
chained on his front porch for two years, then
put him on a ship for Spain;
he died at sea.

One by one all the chiefs of Haiti,
men and women,
Guarionéx, Behechió, Mayobanéx, Gua Tiguanaá,
Cotubanamá, Cayacoá, Higuanamá,



Death of Anacaoná.
(From Las Casas, 1598)

Caonabó's wife Anacaoná,
were tortured, hanged, impaled, burned
at the stake, except for Guacanagarí,
Columbus' one unwavering friend, and he
was banished by his own village, for
Columbus had not exempted even them
from the horrors of the tribute collectors, so
Guacanagarí, an outcast, died
a squalid death on some remote peak.

The Taínos could not understand
why the Christians wanted this gold.

One cacique of Haiti, Hatuey, fled
with his people to Cuba. When told that the
Christians had followed them, he took out
a basket of gold, and said, "Here
is the God of the Christians. They want
us to worship this God: that is why
they struggle with us and kill us. Let us dance
for this God. Who knows? It may please
the Christian God and then they will do us
no harm."

So he and his people danced
before the gold. Then Hatuey hurled
it into the middle of a river.
Not long after,
the Christians caught him
and tied him to a stake. A friar who knew



Death of Hatuey.
(From Las Casas, 1598)

the Taíno language, told Hatuey,
just before they touched the flames,
“If you become a Christian, even now,
you will go to Heaven instead of
to the eternal torment of Hell.”

Hatuey asked the friar, “Do
all Christians go to Heaven?” The friar
said, “They do;” and Hatuey replied, “I
would prefer then to go to Hell.”

*Sangre llena las huellas de Cristóbal Colón
en la arena pálida de Playa Girón.*

And so the island of Haiti-Bohío-Quisqueya,
which in Taíno means,
Mountain-House-Of-Which-Nothing-Is-Greater,
a land thriving with millions
of people when Columbus arrived,
within a short time was almost
depopulated.

Most of the Taíno men wound up as slaves
in the mines, most of the women slaves
in the fields, where thousands died
of exhaustion, disease, and hunger.
Those hiding in the mountains saw
that all was lost, and thousands jumped
from cliffs, hanged or stabbed themselves,
or drank cassava poison.



Táinos committing suicide.
(From Benzoni, 1574)

And the beautiful Taíno language
became silence.

Most of the gold, the treasure
of the Taíno nation,
was stowed on a fleet bound for Spain,
but Guabancéx, the zemí of hurricanes,
rose a great wind and sucked the gold
to the ocean bottom, to mix
with the bones of Caonabó.

Faced with a labor shortage, the Christians
sent soldiers to the other islands, to capture
slaves for the mines and plantations
of Haiti, and to begin setting up plantations
and mines on those other islands too.

*Sangre llena las huellas de Cristóbal Colón
en la arena pálida de Playa Girón.*

This is the Taíno language:

Datoá guariquén ayacavó datiáo.

Mother, come meet my friend.

Mayaní, guaguá areitó ocamá.

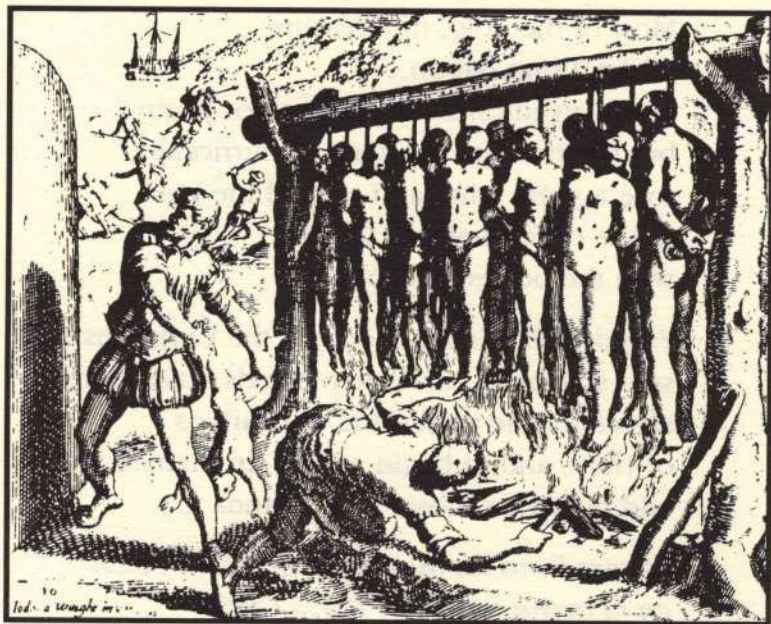
Quiet, my baby, listen to the song.

Caconá behiqué chug, darocoél.

Take this gift of medicine, grandfather.

Itá caoná.

I don't have any gold.



Execution of caciques.
(From Las Casas, 1598)

Guaibá cristianós anaquí kanaimã.

Let us get away from the Christian devils.

Baizá! Mayanimacamá!

No! Do not kill me!

Opiá dacá.

I am dead.



Columbus' earliest portrait.
(From Paulus Jovius, *Elogia*, Basel, 1575)
(illustration on facing page)



FOUR

What sort of man was this Columbus?

The son of a weaver, he pretended to descend from an ancient Roman Consul.

Who was this Columbus?

As an incentive to the sailors on his first voyage, the king and queen had offered a reward to the first man to sight land, a reward of forty thousand maravedis per year for life: a trifle for a rich man, a fortune for a poor.

It was a common seaman named Rodrigo de Triana who was the first to actually sight and cry, "Land!" but



Torturing a cacique.
(From de Bry, 1594)

when they got back to Spain,
Admiral Columbus claimed
- and got -
the reward himself, for his story of having
seen some beckoning light
in the dark the night before, even though
he never actually cried "Land!" while
the seaman Rodrigo got nothing.

Who was this man Columbus?

He had read the imaginary
Travels of Sir John Mandeville,
and taken it literally, so when he
finally did reach the continent, at
the Orinoco river in Venezuela, Columbus
made perhaps his greatest discovery:

*"I have always read that the world
of land and sea is spherical. All authorities
and recorded experiments
have confirmed this until now...
But I have found such great irregularities
here that I have come to the conclusion
that the world is not round,
but the shape of a pear,
with only one side round
and the other jutting out
like a woman's nipple...
I believe that*



Enslaved as porters.
(From de Bry, 1594)

*the earthly Paradise lies here,
as testified in Holy Scripture,
which no one can enter
except by permission of God."*

It was here in Venezuela, on the nipple of Paradise, that Columbus planned to start his first mainland colony, in order to sail upstream to the heights of Eden, with God's permission, and to harvest the nearby pearl beds he'd discovered.

Who was this man Columbus?

The Taínos were not the only ones with reason to hate the Governor: a steady stream of colonists returning to Spain accused him of abuse of authority, fiscal mismanagement, withholding of salaries, embezzlement, boundless personal ambition. Some rose in the first colonial revolt in the New World, in alliance with the Taínos, led by Columbus' former footman and squire, Francisco Roldán, whom he in his wisdom had appointed Chief Justice.

Meanwhile almost all the Indian slaves that Columbus sent to Spain soon died, until finally the king and queen decided to



Columbus arrested by Bobadilla.
(From de Bry, 1594.)

send the last few Indians alive in Spain back to the Indies, along with a royal investigator, Commander Bobadilla, who sailed into the harbor of Columbus' new capitol, Santo Domingo, on August twenty-third, the year fifteen-hundred. The first thing he saw was three swaying bodies on the gallows, "rebels" hanged hours before; the prison held more "rebels", scheduled for hanging next dawn.

Bobadilla declared Columbus deposed and ordered him arrested.

But the soldiers who confronted Columbus suddenly took fright, and none of them was willing to place the chains on the Admiral of the Ocean Sea, until a man stepped forward who knew him so well he had no fear of him: Espinoza, Columbus' personal cook, took the chains from the soldier and snapped them on his master's wrists.

And so Columbus was sent back to Spain, to face the mercy of the Crown, and never fulfilled his vow to the Virgin Mary.



Sugar slaves.
(From de Bry, 1594)
(illustration on facing page)



FIVE

Even with Columbus gone, the mold had been cast, the conquest and slaughter on the islands raged on: Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, the Antilles, the Bahamas, millions of Taíno-Arawaks dead, the entire nation murdered from the face of the planet, and even then, the infernos in the mines and plantations blazed hardly diminished, Taínos replaced by Caribs, by Aztecs and Mayas from the mainland, and by slaves from Africa.

*Sangre llena las huellas de Cristóbal Colón
en la arena pálida de Playa Girón.*

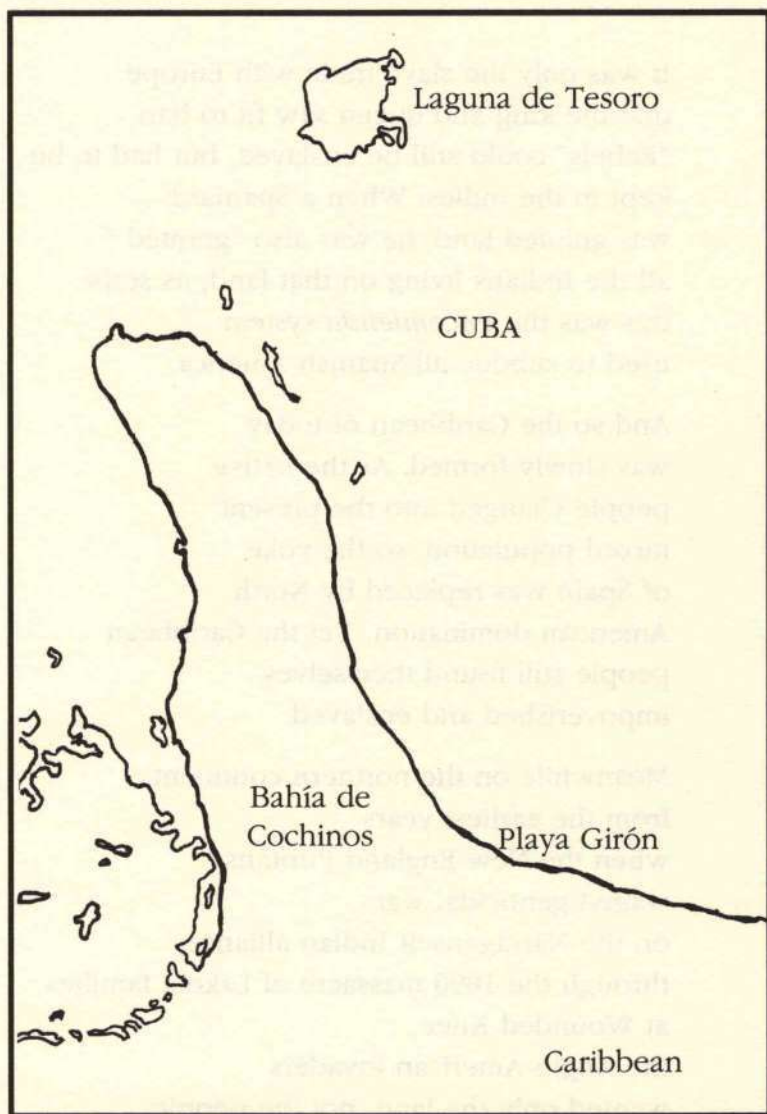


Gold mine on Haiti.
(From de Bry, 1594)

It was only the slave trade with Europe that the king and queen saw fit to ban. "Rebels" could still be enslaved, but had to be kept in the Indies. When a Spaniard was granted land, he was also "granted" all the Indians living on that land, as serfs: this was the *encomienda* system used to subdue all Spanish America.

And so the Caribbean of today was slowly formed. As the native people changed into the present mixed population, so the yoke of Spain was replaced by North American domination. Yet the Caribbean people still found themselves impoverished and enslaved.

Meanwhile on the northern continent, from the earliest years when the New England Puritans waged genocidal war on the Narragansett Indian alliance, through the 1890 massacre of Lakota families at Wounded Knee, the Anglo-American invaders wanted only the land, not the people, and removed the northern Indian nations from it by any means necessary. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, formed in



The Bay of Pigs.

the Department of War, was moved to the Department of "the Interior" to consolidate the conquest, and they no longer recognized the North American Indians as citizens of independent nations.

But the U. S. A. was still hungry for further domination, so turned south, and by 1954 staged over 55 armed interventions in Latin America.

In Cuba, 1958, foreigners owned and controlled seventy-five percent of all arable land; the police chief of Havana received \$730,000 dollars per month from the gambling casinos, while the new native people, the campesinos, did not eat regularly.

But now the Cuban people had more than fish-bone tipped spears to fight back with.

December 1958:
the revolutionary guerrillas of the 26th of July Movement descend from the Sierra Maestra mountains and fight their way toward the cities.



Attack on a village.
(From de Bry, 1594)

The U.S. client dictator flees; the streets
fill with dancers.

For the next two years, Cuba struggles
toward independence from all
foreign domination and social prosperity
for its working population.

But the U.S. of North America
declares a general embargo on Cuba,
forbids its citizens to travel to Cuba,
breaks diplomatic relations with Cuba.

A dark night, April 17, 1961:
while the U.S. Navy watches,
not far away, fourteen hundred exiles,
recruited in Miami by the CIA,
sail quietly toward the mouth
of the Bahía de Cochinos,
the Bay of Pigs, weapons bulging in every hand,
and in their crosshairs, the young
Cuban revolutionaries, for their crime
of overthrowing a brutal regime
and their sin
of trying to break the stranglehold of
the almighty dollar.
While on the beach, between the palms,
on the fine white sand of Playa Girón,
by chance, a jeep drives up,
and two Revolutionary Militiamen,



Carib resistance.
(From Plautius, *Nova Typis Transacta Navagatio*, 1621)

sensing something wrong, stop and
shine their headlights into the face
of the oncoming waves...

*Toca la arena. Tómala con la punta de tus dedos.
Déjala caer. Estás tocando
la sangre del imperio.*

Touch the sand. Take some in your fingertips.
Let it fall. You are touching
the blood of empire.

May twenty-sixth, fourteen-ninety-four;
April seventeenth, nineteen-sixty-one:

*Sangre llena las huellas de Cristóbal Colón
en la arena pálida de Playa Girón.*

Datoá, guariquén ayacavó datiaó.
Mother, come meet my friend.

Mayaní, guaguá, areitó ocamá.
Quiet, my baby, listen to the song.

Caconá behiqué chug, darocoél.
Take this gift of medicine, grandfather.

Dayaní.
I will speak.

Goeíz nitaynó guajirós guacá.
The Taíno people live!



Taíno canoe.
(From Oviedo, 1547)

Yaní tainó, yaní tainó.
Let the Taíno language be heard.
Let the Taíno language be heard.

Yaní tainó, yaní tainó. Dayaní.
Goeíz nitaynó guajirós guacá!



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