“Our Amerindian Ancestors”:
The State, the Nation, and the Revaluing of Indigeneity in Trinidad and Tobago.

By

Maximilian C. Forte
Department of Anthropology
Adelaide University
Adelaide, South Australia 5005
Australia
e-mail: cariblink@email.com

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Summary:

The attempt to discover a sense of national indigeneity via the symbolic device of the Carib is the focus of this paper. I outline modern Trinidadian attempts to reconstruct the Carib, in a nationalist and anti-colonialist light, while utilizing the symbolism of Amerindian indigeneity as a device for creating a sense of local primordiality. In focusing on the active dissemination/insemination of symbols and ideas of the Amerindian/Carib, I examine nationalist thought, local historiographies of places such as Arima and Siparia, school texts, media reports, advertising, the performing arts, and state support of the fledgling Santa Rosa Carib Community.

Abstract:

In Drinkers, Drummers and Decent Folk, the Trinidadian anthropologist, John Stewart issues a challenge in noting that, while the anthropological literature emphasises that Trinidad is a “migrant and therefore nonindigenous society,” few treat “the struggle to establish indigeneity as a significant problem.” This paper deals with the problem of developing a ‘national indigeneity’ against a backdrop of cultural development within an assumed vacuum of indigenousness, as Michael Lieber phrased it. The specific aim of this paper is to outline
modern Trinidadian attempts to reconstruct the indigene, the Carib, in a nationalist and anti-colonialist light, while utilizing the symbolism of Amerindian indigeneity as a device for creating a sense of local primordiality and of territorial continuity with antiquity. In grappling with the baggage of colonial invention, certain sectors have actively engaged in disseminating/inseminating symbols and ideas of the Amerindian/Carib, a process that is in fact not altogether new in Trinidad. This is done by focusing on the thought of nationalists, local historiographies of places such as Arima and Siparia, school texts, media reports, advertising, the performing arts, and in state recognition and support of the fledgling Santa Rosa Carib Community—culminating in a process where the society seems to have "rediscovered" its "Carib heritage".

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Introduction: The Question of Indigeneity in Modern Trinidad

In much if not most of the social science literature on the cultural development of the post-Conquest Caribbean, there seems to be a consensus that the indigenous has been absent or severely diminished and that a conceptualisation of Caribbean indigeneity thus proves elusive. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, anthropologists such as Kevin Yelvington have written that Trinidad "remained largely a deserted island until the last years of Spanish colonial rule, when in 1783 French planters and their slaves came and set up plantations based on slave labour" [emphasis added] (Yelvington 1995: 37). As Yelvington (1995b: 42) further notes: "Social historians have investigated how the aboriginal population was virtually wiped out after contact with Spanish explorers who came after Columbus’s voyage in 1498". Other anthropologists such as Michael Lieber incorporate this deserted island thesis in explaining the factors accounting for the ‘distinctiveness’ of the Caribbean compared to other parts of the colonized world. Lieber (1981: 1) thus states that,

as a sociocultural region the Caribbean developed in what may be called a vacuum of indigeneity. The earliest European settlers, through outright extermination and the introduction of Old World diseases, were remarkably successful in depopulating the area of its aboriginal inhabitants, leaving, here and there, marginal groups of Indians whose impact on the cultural future would be nonexistent...imperialistic intrusion and expansion throughout the region could proceed as though the area were simply a cluster of lands, without a human or cultural presence. From the conquest on, the history of the Caribbean has been the history of imported peoples (emphasis added).

Aside from some of the historical inaccuracies underlying these analyses, the problem that is posed in assuming the absence of the indigenous is that it cannot account for the existence and elaboration of two current phenomena: a) the construction of a national sense of indigeneity, developed in part via the trope of the Amerindian; and, b) the current region-wide revival of Caribbean Amerindian identities and organizations, as evidenced by Trinidad’s Santa Rosa Carib Community, and, at the regional level, as exemplified by the formation of the Caribbean Organization of Indigenous Peoples and the holding of three regional Indigenous gatherings in Arima, Trinidad, itself.

The focus of this paper is mostly on the first side of this problem, the development of a national sense of indigeneity via the symbolic device of the Amerindian, as a contextual complement of my research on the Carib Community in Arima, Trinidad. Part of the background of this paper’s focus is necessarily that of Trinidadian élites’ increased recognition and institutionalization of the Carib in narratives of national history, as well as the state’s nation-building efforts in seizing upon the proclaimed Carib “contribution to the national
foundation". Moreover, the intent of this paper is to take up a challenge issued by the Trinidadian anthropologist, John Stewart in *Drinkers, Drummers and Decent Folk* (1989: 20), where he wrote that while the anthropological literature emphasises that Trinidad is a "migrant and therefore nonindigenous society," few treat "the struggle to establish indigeneity as a significant problem." As early as the start of the 1970s, David Lowenthal observed that the Amerindians play "an important symbolic role in the West Indian search for identity....Cultural nationalism throughout the Caribbean today promotes the search for Arawak and Carib remains" (Lowenthal 1972: 186). The Trinidadian historian, nationalist, founder of the Peoples National Movement, and first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, thus in fact entitled one chapter "Our Amerindian Ancestors" in his *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (1962).

The specific aim of this paper is to outline some modern Trinidadian attempts to reconstruct the indigene, the Carib, in a nationalist and anti-colonialist light, while utilizing the symbolism of Amerindian indigeneity as a device for creating a sense of local primordiality and of territorial continuity with antiquity. In grappling with the baggage of colonial invention, certain sectors have actively engaged in disseminating and inseminating symbols and ideas of the Amerindian/Carib, a process that is in fact not altogether new in Trinidad. This is evidenced in the thought of nationalists, local historiographies of places such as Arima and Siparia, school texts, media reports, advertising, the performing arts, and in state recognition and support of the fledgling Santa Rosa Carib Community—culminating in a process where the society seems to have 'rediscovered' its very own 'Carib heritage'.

In response to Lieber's analysis, I would also note that the indigene is a constituent part of that same "repertory set down by the colonial experience", to use Lieber's words, a fact that can be observed in a variety of phenomena. Examples of the latter range from the naming of the Caribbean after the Caribs, to the colonial creation of special reserves in Dominica and Guyana, to the use of Amerindians as allies in the military and trade arenas, to the role of Amerindians in countering slave rebellions and hunting runaway slaves, to modern cultural nationalist reconfigurations of Amerindians as national heroes and as the first to suffer and resist European slavery. Even in their presumed absence, Amerindians still exercise a presence. Indeed, the once commonly assumed absence of an actual group does not preclude the presence of its historical construction and the activation of its symbolic value. The 'scarcity' of indigenous influences and peoples can enhance the value, the specialness, of Caribbean Amerindians, especially when bolstered by internationalised discourses stressing the special value and knowledges of special peoples threatened with extinction.

What is thus missed by authors working within the 'vacuum of indigeneity' perspective are the contemporary practices of states and intellectual élites in the Caribbean in forging a sense of national indigeneity, in part and sometimes indirectly, via the figure of the heroic Amerindian, the first root of the nation, the predecessor even if not the ancestor of the true nationals. When coupled with efforts by groups to assert and articulate their Amerindian ancestry and the value of their traditions, we see a dual process at work: national élites and culture brokers 'discovering' a general Trinidadian indigeneity via the symbolic archetype of the Amerindian, while the newly recognized and self-identified Amerindian 'discovers' his/her indigeneity in the wider society. As I mentioned, the first half of the process is the subject of this paper.

**The Nationalist Reconstruction and Reproduction of the Carib**

Starting from as early as the 1930s, there is already some evidence of the prominence of reflections on the indigenous history of Trinidad, and on the figure of the Carib, in some of the élites’ writings of local history. In his *Historical Sketches of Trinidad and Tobago*, K. S. Wise noted in 1934: "No one can live long in Trinidad without being told that Iere was the aboriginal Indian name for the Island....so much so that this name has become part of the traditional history of Trinidad and has been adopted as a place name" (1934: 7). In 1940, for a public lecture and book published under the Royal Victoria Museum and the Historical Society of Trinidad and Tobago, entitled *The Ierian Race*, John Bullbrook, a part-time archaeologist, wrote: "Probably, if I were to ask any of my audience this evening what was the predominant or even the only race in Trinidad at the time of the discovery by Cristobal Colon, the reply
would be unhesitatingly: ‘Why, Carib, of course’” (1940: 1). Indeed, Bullbrook, as a partisan in the local debate over whether the true natives of Trinidad were Carib or Arawak, lamented in 1960 that the “tradition” of believing that Caribs were the indigenous people of Trinidad was “deep rooted and hard to destroy” (1960: 54-55).

The Carib attained the status of a primordial hero in the struggle against colonialism. Again, from as early as the 1930s, writers and public lecturers such as Wise played in role in disseminating the proud and heroic attributes of Caribs as supposed warriors of resistance:

Caribs were an intractable and warlike people; they were proud and dominating and preferred death to subjection. Throughout history the Caribs have always been indomitable and implacable opponents of all invaders. The early Conquistadors...found in the Caribs valiant and worthy opponents, and only too often the Spaniards suffered disastrous defeats (1938: 76).

Arima, which since the end of the 1800s had been cast as the last remaining seat of Trinidad’s Caribs, also figured prominently in new constructions of the anti-colonial valour of the Amerindian. Arima Mayor and Oxford graduate, F. E. M. Hosein, wrote a passion play centred on Arima’s Amerindians, entitled Hyarima and the Saints, which features the fictional millenarian prophecy of Chief Hyarima, who in his last moments before death declares:

I see the remnants of my people scattered
Far, in numbers few, in strength diminished...
I see the now oppressors of my race
In turn themselves subdued and driven forth
From blessed Cairi and all other lands...
I see their places taken by a race
‘Mongst whom the light proceeding from the Flaming Cross shines forth in greater brilliance.
And two such men I clearly see. The one
Shall gather what remains of all my people
Under his protecting arms here in
This place where I was the Chief, and through
His love and pity and by favours shown
Shall gently lead them on to reconciliation
And assuage the pain of being conquered.
The other coming next shall rescue all
My people from a dark oblivion.
And He by gracious acts of courtesy
And Love and Sympathy for a fallen
And a broken race shall then create
An interest in my unhappy people
Not felt before, a people who
Were always here, and met Columbus when
He landed on their hospitable and friendly shores.
Hail potent, glorious Chiefs from foreign climes!”
(Hosein 1976 [c. 1927]: 26-27).

The view that holds Arima as a special locus of Trinidad’s Amerindian heritage has been validated and disseminated by local scholars at least since the 1950s. This view of a surviving Amerindian heritage that privileges the place of the Arima Caribs as the anchor between the present and the long-term past, has its roots at least as far back as Carlton Ottley’s (1955) An Account of Life in Spanish Trinidad, which, as I learned, was once a commonly taught text in Trinidadian secondary schools. In his text, Ottley wrote:

But for a handful of them at Arima, these first inhabitants of Trinidad have gone. We have, however, inherited from then certain skills which today still serve us in as good stead as they did those from whom they
originated. The technique of making Carib baskets, of manufacturing fishpots of bamboo, the preparation of cassava bread on hot stones, are all of them cultural remains (1955: 4).

Eric Williams informed his readers that the Caribs tended to settle for the most part in the North and West, around what is today Port of Spain; two of their principal settlements were located in Arima and Mucurapo [west Port of Spain]. The Arawaks seem to have concentrated above all in the southeast, and it is recorded that on one occasion the Arawaks took Tobago from the Caribs (Williams 1962: 3).

The import of Williams’ simple statement lies in two key facets: 1) it legitimates and underscores the view that the Amerindians of Arima were Caribs, thus helping to validate and perpetuate this powerful label; and, 2) his statement helps to recast the Arawaks in a more heroic light—not as victims of the fierce Caribs, but as also capable of vanquishing the Caribs.

In the sunset years of British rule in Trinidad, one may perceive another side to the valuation of the indigene as the ancestor of the nation. This is not a case of the Amerindian holding a positive value, strictly speaking, in the articulation of a sense of modern nationhood, but rather a double negative value: that is, using the Amerindian past as a foil for measuring the progress of modern Trinidad against a primitive and backward historical background. There is thus a double-edged value of indigeneity: a positive sense of local primordiality and locality, and, a contrast between the traditional primitive versus the modern progressive. In metaphorical terms, the nation salutes its first root and erects an edifice on top of it. The modern Trinidadian perspective on the pre-British “era of Spaniards and Amerindians” accuses the Spaniards and their Amerindian kin for their failure to “develop” the colony, a fact owing to the Spaniards’ laziness and lethargy and the Amerindians’ indolence and primitivism. The languid backwardness of Spain’s inertial imperialism and the unprogressive sloth of the colony’s Spaniards, is seen as having led them to adopt Amerindian ways. Indeed, the conceptual fusion of the Spanish and the Amerindian persists and is recreated in Trinidad to this day, epitomized by my informants’ explanations that “Spanish and Carib is the same thing”, a concept that also has certain racial translations. Carlton Ottley reinforced and disseminated the modern Trinidadian prejudice towards the pre-British era: “Time marched on but Trinidad slumbered serenely”, living an “indolent life of poverty and social inactivity”; in the 1740s, “Spaniards in St. Joseph and Indians in the forests had once more fallen completely asleep”; “The Spanish word manana [sic] (tomorrow) became household”; “The people of Trinidad during that era, sat quietly on their rickety doorsteps, waiting philosophically for their fairy to turn up and wave her golden wand to change the face of things” (Ottley 1955: 48-49). In the copy of the book I signed out from the library of the University of the West Indies, a previous reader scribbled in the margin of the page: “Still doing that! No progress”.

In today’s context, there are various rehabilitations and appropriations of the Amerindian in Trinidadian nationalist discourse. Burton Sankeralli, a columnist for the The Daily Express, wrote in 1997: “These Amerindians, whom we call ‘Caribs’, are the primordial tribe, the red ancestors of all ‘Trinbagonians’. They are the first children of our earth” (1997: 29). Besides serving as a figure for grounding modern Trinidadians within a local history, the Amerindian can also be used either as symbol for unity, as expressed in the words of Sankeralli, or as tool in ethnic contestation, as when local Africanist activists embrace and absorb the Caribs within a paradigm of those who suffered slavery as opposed to the allegedly ‘more privileged’ descendants of indentured workers, the East Indians in Trinidad. Most prominent, however, is the symbolic role of the Amerindians, now referred to as First Nations by some prominent figures in Trinidad, in developing a longer-term view of national history. “[T]he Amerindians were key to defining the foundation of the Republic”, said John Donaldson, the Vice-Chairman of the Peoples National Movement, on Republic Day in 1998. His comments were uttered by way of opening an “exhibition to commemorate our First Peoples”, held at the headquarters of the PNM. Indeed, Donaldson also devoted some time to explaining that “First Nations” was the most appropriate way of talking about the Amerindians, and he mentioned how the term is in frequent and regular use in Canada. I might also insert here that the President of the Santa Rosa Carib Community, Ricardo Bharath, is himself a member of the PNM’s General Council and won three consecutive elections to the Arima Borough Council as a PNM candidate.
From a nationalist perspective, positing Amerindian history as being of foundational importance to the creation of the modern nation-state also serves to bolster the construction of a national history that dates back not to European conquest, or the transplantation of workers from other continents, but instead several thousand years. The Amerindian thus bestows on the nation a sense of antiquity and a sense of continuity of occupation of the territory that is Trinidad. Given Caribbean nationalists’ often invidious comparisons between themselves and their former European masters, the new antiquity of a national history that appropriates the Amerindian renders Caribbean states as nation-like and ancient as any in Europe. Cultural brokers, who specialize in excavating, disseminating and promoting the past and the concept of an Amerindian heritage, cater to and possibly nurture such perspectives. The role of museums and archaeologists thus comes to the forefront. The National Museum of Trinidad and Tobago plays an important role in graphically inculcating the notion of Amerindian culture as the starting point of the nation’s history. Archaeologists themselves, despite often being non-nationals, have also worked to foster local pride in Amerindian heritage. Dutch archaeologist Arie Boomert wrote in a 1982 article in the Trinidad Naturalist, entitled “Our Amerindian Heritage” that due to Trinidad being, “one of the world’s most cosmopolitan populations,” as a result, “it is often forgotten that a few of the people now living in Trinidad are descended or partly descended from the original inhabitants of the island, the Amerindians.” He also declared: “Trinidad can boast of the fact that it is the oldest settled site of the West Indies” (Boomert 1982: 27, 28). The cover of the magazine showed a picture of a well known monument in Trinidad, the Amerindian warrior atop a pedestal at the remains of La Venezuela estate, with a bold caption: “The First Trinidadians.” Boomert’s research is also featured prominently within the Cleaver Woods museum of Amerindian heritage located at the western entrance to Arima, which features the reconstruction of an Amerindian dwelling and various archaeological remains and current arts and crafts. Archaeologists and local champions of archaeology have publicly pushed for the preservation of archaeological remains and the establishment of heritage tourism (see de Verteuil 1999).
A British archaeologist, Peter Harris, who like Boomert had been based for a period at the University of the West Indies, was also active and successful in campaigning for the official recognition of the Santa Rosa Carib Community. His approach to the Minister of Culture in 1990 resulted in not only official state recognition of the Carib Community, but in an annual financial subvention twice the amount for which he had lobbied. On 08 May, 1990, in News Release No. 360, the Information Division under the Office of the Prime Minister announced the following: "Cabinet has decided that the Santa Rosa Carib Community be recognized as representative of the indigenous Amerindians of Trinidad and Tobago, and that an annual subvention of $30,000 be granted to them from 1990. Cabinet also agreed that an Amerindian Project Committee be appointed to advise government on the development of the Community....as the oldest sector of this country’s multi-cultural society, the Amerindians
have, for some time, been recognized as having unique needs for their cultural and economic viability. Such needs come into higher relief and sharper focus as the country prepares to celebrate, Columbus’ Quincentennial in October 1992”. This announcement also indicated the government’s desire to showcase Trinidad’s Amerindian heritage for the upcoming Caribbean Festival of the Arts, hosted in Trinidad in 1992, and featuring a strong Amerindian element. The Amerindian part of the CARIFESTA activities were in fact held in Arima, with the Santa Rosa Carib Community acting as the host for Indigenous delegations from across the region.

**Figure 3: Archaeologists**

Top: A photo of Peter Harris (centre) in the University of the West Indies archaeological unit.

Bottom: Dr. Nicholas Saunders of University College London at the Caurita Rock, Trinidad’s only petroglyph site.


In addition, the state’s annual subvention has aided the development and promotion of Arima’s Santa Rosa Festival which has been reinterpreted by state authorities, the media, and the Carib Community itself, as a Carib event more than as a Catholic patronal feast day for all Arimians. *Time Out: Trinidad and Tobago*, an official tourism brochure, states: “This festival honours the few remaining descendants of the original Carib Indians, Trinidad’s first settlers. For further information call the Santa Rosa Committee at (868) 667-0210”. In fact, the state-owned tourism authority has advertised the Santa Rosa Festival as a Carib event for at least the past decade as is the case with the national airline, BWIA, which has also met some of the expenses for past events of the Carib Community (for other tourist-oriented representations of Arima and its Caribs, see “Exploring Trinidad” at: [http://www.discovertrinidad.com/trinexplore.html](http://www.discovertrinidad.com/trinexplore.html)).

The appropriation of the Amerindian in nationalist discourse has occurred by a variety of means, each of which has helped to add to the emergent conceptualisation of the Amerindian past as the bedrock of the modern nation, helping thus to establish a link between the first peoples/first nations/first Trinidadians and contemporary Trinidadians via an implicit notion of territorial ancestry, and where all Trinidadians, presumably, can speak collectively about “Our Amerindian Heritage”.
The Recognition and Dissemination of Indigeneity

We have already seen a few examples of the ways Carib indigeneity has been recognized, appropriated and disseminated. What I would like to do here is simply to empirically survey a range of contemporary actors and media involved in the process of promoting and revaluing Carib indigeneity at the national level.

The news media have played a key role in endorsing depictions of Amerindian cultural survival, seizing upon any ritual or performance of the Carib Community as being necessarily “ancient” and “authentic”. The news media have also played a key role in disseminating the concept of “Our Amerindian Heritage” and of the Amerindians as “the First Trinidadians” (see Chouthi 1998a, 1998b). Particular journalists, such as Kim Johnson (1997, 2000), have actively highlighted Trinidad’s Amerindian history; as Johnson puts it: “having taken our place in the modern world, we must define what we have brought to it. And to do so, what better place to start than at the beginning?” (Johnson 2000: Part 1).

Contemporary school texts have rehabilitated the previously extinct and savage Carib, transforming the Carib into a surviving entity, further recast as the First Trinidadian. Bridget Brereton’s *An Introduction to the History of Trinidad and Tobago* (1996) is used in history courses in secondary schools in Trinidad and makes specific references to the contemporary Santa Rosa Carib Community. Her chapter is entitled, significantly, “The First Trinidadians and Tobagonians”, following Williams’ (1962) designation of “Our Amerindian Ancestors”. She repeatedly uses phrases such as “the first people” and “the first Trinidadians” throughout her chapter. The resistance theme appears in her text as well, without discriminating between Arawaks and Caribs: “Amerindians resisted...strongly. The Amerindians were good fighters and it was not until 1592 that the Spaniards could actually make a permanent settlement” (Brereton 1996: 3). Instead of arguing that Amerindians became extinct, Brereton opts for the view of Amerindians declining in numbers (1996: 4). Brereton also covers some details of the history of missions in Trinidad, up to the 1800s with the remaining Amerindian missions in Arima, Toco, and Savana Grande (1996: 4). Of especial significance are Brereton’s statements pointing to both the Trinidadian search for a national indigeneity and the modern Santa Rosa Carib Community. Brereton explicitly outlines the view of “Our Amerindian Heritage” in the following passage of her school text:

> Only a few people in Trinidad and Tobago today have Amerindian blood, but we should all be proud of our first people. Their legacy is all around us. We can see it in many words and place names, reminding us that these people made the islands their own by settling down and naming places, rivers, bays, districts and things. We can see it in roads which date back to their paths. We see it in ways of cooking, especially dishes made with cassava. We also have a community in Arima, who call themselves ‘Caribs’ and are very proud of their culture. They are working hard to make us all more aware of the heritage of our first people [emphasis added] (Brereton 1996: 4).

Also at the level of educational institutions, one finds growing interest in the Carib Community on the part of tertiary students, with at least two Caribbean studies theses having been produced in the last decade (Ahee 1992, Almarales 1994).

In terms of popular literature, I have already cited Hosein’s play on the Arima Caribs. Recently, books of poems, tales and historical novels have been published that feature Trinidad’s Amerindians. Examples include Norma McCartney’s (1989) *Tales of the Immortelles* which has two fairy tales centred on the Caribs of Arima. Knolly La Fortune’s (1999) *Manzanilla*, a collection of poems, begins with a poem in memory of Chief Hyarima, part of a renewed contemporary interest in this Chief, dubbed the first national hero of Trinidad in the plaque adjoining his recently erected monument at the entrance to Arima.
THE LAST GREAT LEADER OF THIS NATION'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WAS HYARIMA. HE WAS A NEPUYPO, A SUB-TRIBE OF THE CARINEPOGOTO, (CARIB), WHOSE VILLAGES WERE ESTABLISHED THROUGHOUT NORTH-EAST TRINIDAD.

HYARIMA, IT IS SAID, COULD SUMMON HUNDREDS OF WARRIORS FROM THE VILLAGES THAT THEN SURROUNDED ARIMA OF WHICH HE WAS THE CHIEF.

HE WAS FEARED AND RESPECTED BY THE SPANISH WHO WERE ATTEMPTING TO COLONISE CAIRI WHICH THEY RENAMED TRINIDAD, AND BY THE DUTCH WHO WANTED TO SETTLE IN TOBAGO.

HYARIMA JOINED THE DUTCH IN 1636 TO RAID SPANISH OUTPOSTS IN TRINIDAD, AND ALSO THOSE OF THE ORINOCO IN 1637.

HE WAS INVOLVED IN THE LAST SUCCESSFUL REVOLT BY THIS ISLAND'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, THIS TOOK PLACE IN DECEMBER 1699, AGAINST THE CAPUCHIN MISSIONARIES OF SAN FRANCISCO DE LOS ARENALES AND THE THEN GOVERNOR DON JOSE DE
Arthur de Lima’s (1993) *Don José*, is a novel devoted the life of the popularized last Spanish Governor of Trinidad, a possible expression of increased local interest in the Spanish and aboriginal history of Trinidad. Other recent, locally published texts on select aspects of Trinidad’s colonial Amerindian history have also appeared (see de Verteuil 1995, Johnson 1997), as well as those that pay special attention to the so-called Amerindian background (see Besson and Brereton 1991; also Brereton 1981). Locally published books on the histories of Trinidad’s towns almost invariably begin their entries for Arima with discussion of the Caribs, the Amerindian Mission, and the Santa Rosa Festival (see for example Anthony 1988).

**Figure 4: "The Inherent Nobility of Man"**

The mural painted by Carlisle Chang that used to greet arrivals at Piarco International Report. At the left of the picture we see the figure of an Amerindian man, and below, an Amerindian woman, almost as if at the dawn of either the human experience as a whole, or the history of the Trinidadian nation in particular.

For more on Carlisle Chang, see: An interview with the artist in Caribbean Beat.

In the realm of commercial advertising one sees a few select cases of the perpetuation of important indigenous labels such as Carib and Arawak, as well as more veiled references to the Caribs of Arima (see the examples below).

**Figure 5: Sponsored Indigeneity**
Mpule Kwelagobe, the winner of the 1999 Miss Universe pageant hosted in Trinidad, poses for Carib under a sentence with obvious double meaning which also provides a reference to claims increasingly voiced by Trinidadian individuals as to possessing some degree of Carib ancestry.

The Unit Trust Corporation has erected this billboard at the western entrance to Arima, with an apparent illustration of an elderly Amerindian woman, presumably depicting the essence of wisdom. (Photo: © 1999, Maximilian C. Forte)
The performing arts have been another arena for the expression of interest in, and the dissemination of, symbols of indigeneity, whether this be in the form of professional dance troupes creatively enacting imagined Carib dances, or in the much broader field of Carnival with its categories of Fancy Indians, Red and Wild Indians, and Plains Indians (see the following examples; also see Bellour and Kinser 1998 for their discussion of Amerindian Masking in Trinidad's Carnival). The Centre for Performing Arts at the University of the West Indies regularly sends students to interview leading members of the Carib Community about Carib rituals, traditions, and styles of dress, in addition to hosting lectures by spokespersons such as the Carib President. The interest in Amerindian aesthetics, and the development of Amerindian derived styles in furniture design and interior decoration is also exemplified by the emergence of Manzanare Design Solutions (see http://community.wow.net/manzanare/manznewstuff.htm), which has recently held exhibitions of some of its Amerindian-inspired furniture pieces and decorative items.

Figure 6: Carnival Indians
Other institutions have also played a part in the validation and promotion of Trinidad’s and Arima’s Carib heritage. The Arima Public Library has, for the past decade, maintained a “Carib Corner” featuring Carib craft displays, historical notes, and sketches of Amerindians as conceived and produced by local primary school students, whilst also maintaining files of documents on the Carib Community’s history, public events, and appearances in the media. Also based in Arima, the National Parang Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the body responsible for the promotion of Trinidad’s Spanish Christmas music, itself maintains a small museum and archives that routinely highlight what NPATT directors see as the Carib heritage and basis of this popular musical form.

**Figure 7: Carib Corner**

![Carib Corner](image.png)

Part of the Amerindian display at the Arima Public Library (Photo: © 1998, Maximilian C. Forte)

At the international level, a range of international organizations such as the Organization of American States, the UN’s World Intellectual Property Organization, and UNESCO, having all worked with the Santa Rosa Carib Community in some capacity at some time, have all been sources of recognition for the Arima Carib Community and, consequently, heightened the local legitimacy of the group. Indigenous organizations such as Canada’s Assembly of First Nations, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, have also recognized and in some cases sponsored and assisted the Santa Rosa Carib Community. What cannot be summarized is the depth and range of powerful affirmations of the importance of indigenous peoples as promoted in various international media over the decades, added to the growing visual association between celebrities, prominent world leaders and Amerindian images as presented in international news reports.

**Figure 8: The Power of Association**
Carib President, Ricardo Bharath, in the centre, is flanked by representatives of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs during their visit to Trinidad in late November, 1999. At left is Chief Rod Bushie. The setting is the Cleaver Woods Amerindian museum at the entrance to Arima. (Photo: © 1999, Maximilian C. Forte)

From BBC News Online, at left, former US President Bill Clinton and an American Indian leader; at right, Prince Charles during his 2000 visit to Guyana’s interior and his meeting with Guyanese Amerindians.

Last but not least, the Internet has also seen the emergence of Websites on Trinidad’s Amerindian heritage (see Johnson 2000, Bermúdez Negrón 2000-2001, Marchock 2000, and PanTribago 2000a, 2000b). Judging from the feedback received by sites featuring Trinidad’s Caribs, these seem to have acted as a magnet for expressions of national pride and local interest by Trinidadians at home and especially abroad.

Figure 9: Internet Indigeneity
Ryan Marchock’s AmerindianTrail.com, featuring Trinidad’s Santa Rosa Carib Community

Kim Johnson’s pages on the Amerindian history of Trinidad
Conclusion: Canonizing and Nationalizing the Carib

Much of what I have dealt with this in this paper can be summarized as the canonization and nationalization of the Carib. With respect to canonization, I take my cue from recent work on the Taino revival (see Haslip-Viera 1999) in showing the Carib to have become enshrined in...
increasingly conventional narratives of Trinidadian history, a history in which the Carib has become a routine and established given. Depictions of Carib survival and representations of Carib heritage are not just broadly disseminated, they are also taught. Amerindian history comprises the almost obligatory Chapter One of texts on Trinidadian history. Increasingly, the Caribs have rejoined popular recitations of the national inventories of the peoples who make up Trinidad. The media also covers virtually every Carib event, large or small, and is showing increasing attention to the organization and composition of the Carib Community.

With reference to nationalization, I draw attention to the state’s recognition, support and incorporation of the Carib Community. The state funds the Caribs in their work for the Santa Rosa Festival; the state has also offered land and a building in central Arima; and, funds for hosting regional gatherings of Indigenous Peoples have been provided by the state on at least three occasions. The Caribs’ Community Centre was also built with public funds and with labour donated under the Unemployment Relief Programme. At the Arima level, activities and events of the Carib event are an established part of the annual ArimaFest celebrations. Under the United National Congress government of Prime Minister Basdeo Panday, October the 14th has been made into an annual national day of commemoration of Trinidad’s Amerindian Heritage. Often, the justifying logic for this state support is that the Caribs have contributed to the national foundation, especially in such commonly cited areas as herbal knowledge (see Rickwood 2000), cassava processing, weaving, and festivals.

Contrary to the perception that indigeneity is absent in the cultural construction of Trinidadian national identity, my objective here has been to argue that, in fact, indigeneity is very much present. Interest and support for the organized Carib Community is also well out of proportion to the actual size of the organization. This is owing, I suggested, to the special symbolic value accruing to the Amerindian as a conceptual device of constructing a long-term, authentic, and primordial sense of national identity.

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