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UNIT OF STUDY

ON THE

SIGNIFICANCE OF DECEMBER 5, 1492

IN THE

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF  
DECEMBER 5, 1492 IN SANTO DOMINGO

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The inhabitants of Quisqueya or Haytí were largely Taínos of the Arawak culture having come from Venezuela. Indians of other areas also settled in Quisqueya, namely the Ciguayos and Lucayas. This is why we do not refer to the "Taíno race" but rather to the "Taíno society or Taíno culture".

In their language Quisqueya meant "mother land" and Haytí meant "high land". The inhabitants were of moderate stature, had long hard black hair and copper-colored skin. There were several Indian groups represented on the island:

taínos (most civilized)  
ciguayos  
arahuacos  
macoriges  
caribes (most warlike)

The Taínos in Quisqueya fished with nets woven out of henequén (a plant fiber). Fish hooks of shell or bone and bows and arrows were also used. They hoed the land with a stick called a coa and cultivated yuca, corn, yautía, sweet potato and other edible tubers. Mortar and pestle were used to grind plants to obtain dyes. The cibucán (a cloth of interwoven fibers) was used to wring out the liquid from the yuca dough.

They ignited fires with an apparatus consisting of two sticks that were rubbed together. They produced cloth from maguey or henequén threads and used it in married women's naguas (skirts) and hammocks. They also utilized the art of weaving in the production of baskets made of leaves.

Burenes (smooth plates) were sculpted from stone or molded from clay for cooking. The cacique's throne or duho was carved from tree trunks.

Within the bohío (house) the following utensils could be found: plates, bowls, spoons, knives, trays, hammocks, baskets, mortars, axes, grinders, bows, arrows, wooden clubs.

The Taínos used bows and arrows in war, resin balls to play bató, hammocks and barbacoas to sleep. Their areitos (festivals) had flute music and wooden bells with small rocks inside. Their god was called Lucuo and lived in turey (heaven). They carved cemies (religious idols) for worship.

When Columbus arrived on December 5, 1492, Quisqueya had five major divisions. Each cacicazgo had its cacique:

Guarionex- territory of Magua  
Caonabo- territory of Maguana  
Bohechío- territory of Jaragua  
Guacangarí- territory of Marién  
Cayacoa- territory of Higüey

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Christopher Columbus was looking for India on his first voyage with the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa Maria. He travelled with 95 men and enough food to last a year. When he arrived in Quisqueya on December 5, 1492 he changed the island's name to La Española. The port of Spanish arrival was named San Nicolás. Upon the arrival of the Spaniards, many Indians fled to the caves where today there are still samples of their art.

The cacique Guacanagarí invited Columbus to visit his cacicazgo when he had recently arrived. Columbus had accepted the invitation when he learned that the Santa Maria had crashed on the rocks. Guacanagarí sent his men to help repair the ship. When other caciques such as Guatiguana, Guarionex, and Caonabo rebelled against the injustices and abuses of the Spaniards Guacanagarí aided the Europeans as an informer.

When Columbus returned to Spain, he took samples of woods, Indians, gold etc. When the Catholic King and Queen saw these things they paid for another voyage for Columbus with 1500 men and 17 caravels.

Upon returning to La Española in 1493 Columbus found the Fortín de la Navidad destroyed. Due to mistreatment by the Spaniards, Caonabo and Maireni and their followers had wrecked the fort as a manifestation of their discontent.

Caonabo was a leader who wanted to form an alliance of caciques against the Spaniards. The latter invited Caonabo to bathe with them in the river at which time they handed him a pair of handcuffs. Since the Indian had never seen handcuffs before he assumed them to be a form of adornment. He put them on himself and thus was tricked and captured.

Anacaona was Caonabo's wife and the sister of Bohechío of Jaragua. After her husband's death Anacaona was the cacica of Jaragua. The Spaniards tricked Anacaona by offering her friendship only to get into her town. Once they were in and participating in an areito that she had in their honor, the Spaniards began their bloody massacre. They hanged Anacaona. In her language Ana meant "flower" and Caona "gold". Her name was "flower of gold". That massacre was so frightening that many Taínos fled Quisqueya. Hatuey, for example, ran away to Cuba.

Enriquillo was a cacique baptized and educated by Franciscan monks. His name had been Guarocuya. He is considered the "liberator of his race" for the following events. When a Spaniard was disrespectful to Enriquillo's wife, Mencía, Enriquillo asked the colonial authorities to punish the white man. When they denied his petition, the cacique took a group of his men to the Baoruco mountains. The fighting went on for 13 years and the Spaniards lost because they could not make the Indians submit to slavery and mistreatment. The king of Spain sent his ambassador Francisco Barrionuevo to give freedom and peace to the natives of Quisqueya. Enriquillo was also allotted a space of land in Boya also known as Pueblo Viejo de Azua.

Taíno Words Used in Contemporary  
Dominican Vocabulary

Animals

búcaro - bird  
caimán - crocodile  
carey - turtle  
cobo - snail  
jicotea - small turtle  
iguana - land lizzard  
jáiba - crab  
tiburón- shark

Places

Azua  
Barahona  
Cibao  
Higüey  
Jarabacoa  
Jimaní  
Macorís  
Maguana  
Neiba  
Río Ozama  
Samaná  
Río Yaque

Plants

ají - green pepper  
anón - fruit  
batata - sweet potato  
bejuco - fibrous plant  
boniato - yuca  
caoba - large tree  
ceiba - large tree  
guanábana - sour sop fruit  
guayaba - guava fruit  
henequén - fibrous plant  
higüero - similar to squash  
jobo - fruit  
mabí - root for making a drink  
maguey - textile plant  
maíz - corn  
mamei - pulpy fruit  
maní - peanuts  
tabaco - tobacco  
yautía - edible tuber  
yuca - edible tuber