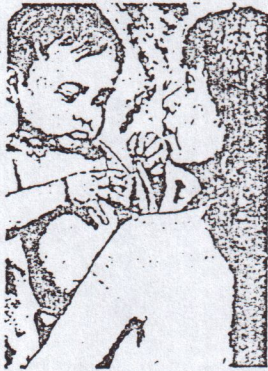




THE TAINO WOMAN

by Bobby Gonzalez

(reprinted by permission
of Latino Village Press
8/16-9/15/94)



The recognition of the Taino would certainly lead to land claims, repatriation of sacred objects from museums and a tacit admission of five hundred years of physical, cultural and spiritual genocide.

These minor obstacles notwithstanding, the Taino People have reemerged and are involved in an ongoing dialogue with Native Nations through North, South, and Central America and the Caribbean.

Guakia Taino Cuan Yahobo (we the Taino are still here).

The strength of a nation resides in its women. A political or cultural unit cannot truly grow or flourish if it suppresses members of the female gender and denies them basic rights. At the time of the European invasion in 1492, the Taino culture of the Caribbean Islands was in the incipient stage of a classical era of a dynamic indigenous civilization. An integral component of this Taino civilization was and is the Taino woman.

We the Taino have always respected the significant role of the woman in our society. Columbus and his colleagues could not understand this respect. Their lack of understanding manifested itself in their ravaging of Mother Earth. Most of all, they showed their gross disrespect by the rape of our women. In a letter written by Michele de Cuneo is found the first written documentation of a rape in the Americas. The primary accomplice in the crime was Christopher Columbus.

The importance of the woman can be found in the traditional religion of the Taino. Unlike the Christian masculine creator, the creator of the world for the Taino is a female entity, one of whose names is Atabei. She made this world without the aid of any man. She also bore children without the help of any male energy. In our myths, our sacred teaching stories, it is almost always a woman who is the healer, the teacher, the giver of sacred gifts to the people. This holds true for men of the Native nations North and South.

Fifteenth Century Taino societies were characterized by the active participation of women in all aspects of political, social and religious life.

The Taino had a great number of women who occupied the position of cacique (note: *cacica* is not a Taino word; it is a Spanish variation of the Taino word *cacique*). One of these women was Anacaona who governed in the western end of Haiti. Luisa was a cacique in the eastern part of Boriken. There were other lesser known women chiefs such as Barohona and María de Luna.

Taino society was matrilineal. When a cacique died, the successor was the deceased chief's sister's eldest child. The administrative abilities and political skills of women were appreciated and utilized.

The Taino medicine person is called the *bohique*. This individual is entrusted with a number of duties including interceding with the spirit world, teaching the stories and histories to the young ones, and healing the sick. The *bohique* is priest, doctor, psychiatrist and school teacher all rolled up into one. Many of the *bohiques* were and are women. We are told of elder women who were wise in the ways of using herbs to cure the ill.

BENA KIBA GUA AJIA (until again we talk).