

'Indigenous peoples must overcome discrimination' --advisor on indigenous rights

Stabroek News

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Indigenous peoples must overcome discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion from many activities by the state to give their lives full meaning, said former United Nations officer, Augusto Willemsen Diaz.

Delivering a presentation on the "Rights of indigenous peoples and human rights in a plural society" at the Park Hotel last Tuesday afternoon, Diaz said that in dealing with the issue of the prevention and elimination of discrimination against indigenous peoples, the international instruments governing the full rights of peoples must be taken advantage of.

Diaz of Guatemala, worked along with the Constitutional Reform Commission as an advisor. He came to assist at the invitation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Association of Guyana (UNAG). Diaz was specially selected to speak at this time of the constitutional reform process, because of his work and his experience in the area of indigenous peoples' rights.

The aim of the international instruments, Diaz said, was to bring people who had been disadvantaged, such as indigenous peoples and women, to a position where they enjoyed the same equal rights and freedoms that everybody should enjoy.

On the issue of territory, Diaz said that indigenous peoples had a spiritual relationship to Mother Earth which they considered their own. They did not see land as a commodity. Their idea of territory was the land on which they lived and what was above and below the surface. It included the flora, fauna and resources on the land, its ecology and bio-diversity to which they had so handsomely contributed, and the environment as a whole concept, he said.

The indigenous peoples did not have private property but collective tenure of land, which was coupled with community which Diaz described as another pillar of their existence. These two aspects were essential to the subsistence of indigenous peoples.

On the socio-cultural level, they had rights to the spiritual beliefs, rights to own knowledge, science and technology. These rights, the human rights proponent said, were very much under attack by transnational efforts to control plants and this was being resisted by the indigenous peoples. The rights to medical practices should also be respected.

Education, Diaz said, had been seen as a process of alienating indigenous people from their traditional and special customs to bring them to modern life. While education was very important, Diaz said that they benefited from informal education and their forms and ways of teaching may differ. Nevertheless, this was something that had to be respected and incorporated into the teaching of indigenous peoples. Public schools, he continued, had to take into account the right of indigenous peoples to use their languages which they had used for centuries, noting that in some Latin American countries, the language of the indigenous peoples was an official language in addition to the country's national language.

In speaking about the rights of indigenous peoples to self-government within the state, Diaz said that indigenous peoples chose to remain in society as a distinct people and would not convert into something else because of their own systems which had been in place for centuries and with which they identified.

In the sociological and political areas, he said that the indigenous peoples had their own legal system that was harmonious with world views. This judicial system should be respected as so much depended on its application each day to solve problems and conflicts of a legal nature. These had been applied for centuries and had been successful in solving conflicts which arose in communities.

Giving a background into the status of indigenous peoples, Diaz said that just a few decades ago indigenous peoples had no consultative status at the United Nations (UN) and other international fora. They were forced to ask one of the consultative agencies established as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) to give them of their time in an

oral presentation or a few lines in their documents. This was readily agreed to by an international commission of jurists and anti-slavery NGOs but better could have been done, he said.

Subsequently, "so-called discrimination studies on minorities" were undertaken and the focus on indigenous peoples began. The two main efforts were to get indigenous peoples included in the document on human rights and another endeavour was to have them appear before the organs of the UN. "These were the two processes started and which fortunately were brought to a good ending", Diaz said.

A voluntary fund for indigenous peoples was subsequently proposed in 1974 for a working group to take fully into account the views of the indigenous peoples as presented to them by those people themselves. The fund was subsequently established in 1985 and a working group set up. The working group ensured consultative status. The fund has since catered for over 900 representatives of indigenous peoples all over the world attending the working groups commission.

At present, there are about 300 to 350 million indigenous peoples around the world. They have a very active indigenous international movement which is actively representing their views before inter-governmental organisations around the world. (Miranda La Rose)



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Guyana: Land of Six Peoples

Herbal medicines and the indigenous peoples

A GINA feature By Natasha Victor

[Guyana Chronicle](#)

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HERBAL medicine is fundamental to the survival of many indigenous people living in rural environments, without accessibility to medical attention in cases of emergency.

Due to the geographical locations of the four regions that the indigenous people inhabit in Guyana, the cost of travelling to urban areas for healthcare is prohibitive in most cases, due to unfortunate economic circumstances. In particular areas such as Region Eight, it is only possible to reach a city hospital by aircraft.

Living in a developing country, means that although there is progress being made in the medical sector, government expenditure cannot stretch to dispense pharmaceutical drugs all over the country.

Consequently, many Amerindian tribes within the interior regions are obliged to use their own traditional medicines which their ancestors have used for centuries. Their medicines are composed mainly of natural ingredients, both flora and fauna, and deal with widespread problems such as malaria and snakebites.

Herbal remedies are therefore crucial to the survival of the tribes in the four regions, but the question at hand is, do they really work?

Community Development Officer, Mr. Ovid Williams, a member of the Patamona tribe in Region Eight, gave a deeper insight into the practices of Amerindian medicine.

He said: "I have grown up with these customs, and believe me I have seen them work!"

Mr. Williams, who was born in Paramakatoi and studied at Queens College, Georgetown, explained that traditional medicine has been used amongst the native tribes as far back as the pre-Columbian era.

"It is an adulterated form of treatment, which I use myself. It would be very beneficial for the Guyanese people to be educated on alternative medicine in this country," he continued.

With 8,000 people living in Region Eight alone, everyday problems such as headaches and the common cold need to be dealt with. Mr. Williams gave the following information, as to how the Patamona tribe treats these problems.

For a simple headache, they use a black, shiny insect called a 'Uyuk' which is about 2cm in length. The indigenous people sting themselves around the temples with the Uyuk's sting and this relieves the pain.

For a prolonged migraine, a stem of razor grass is inserted into the nostril and yanked downwards, cutting the inside of the nostril. The initial bleeding in the nostril gives immediate relief.

Many elderly people suffering from arthritis in their knees, use a ginger which is slightly different from that used in Georgetown. The individual cuts his/her knee very lightly several times, and rubs the ginger on the wounds. Although this is initially painful and burns, the pain is eliminated after a period of time.

The Patamona tribe has developed an antidote for snakebites, which requires them to kill a Caiman and take out the teeth. Mr. Williams explained that when you scrape the Caiman tooth onto the bite, and strap it down for three hours, it draws the venom out of the blood. The tooth needs to be changed every two to three hours, but it certainly works.

He explained: "There seems to be some kind of magnetic force, which draws the venom out of the body. You can actually see the venom in your arm as it travels in your bloodstream."

As there is not enough quinine in the villages to treat malaria, they discovered this remedy by experiment: Cut four lemons into quarters and pick a handful of young lime leaves or bamboo leaves. Then boil them in 500ml of water and add a bottle of Guinness. Boil until half the liquid has evaporated and drink a shot of this concoction three times daily. Symptoms of malaria, such as fever, stop normally on the second day. It is not evident as to whether the malaria is completely rid of the body. However, Mr. Williams claims the individual no longer suffers the normal symptoms of the disease.

The Patamona tribe takes preventative measures against the common cold. They gather vegetables similar to wild eddoes, cut them up, boil them until they resemble calaloo. You leave the mixture until it begins to rot and develops a porridge-like texture. The boys training to be hunters in the forest, drink this and then push a small plant called "busy-busy" down their throats in order to regurgitate it. They then begin to build resistance against the virus.

Dr. Desiree Fox, a lecturer at the University of Guyana, and part of the Amerindian Research Unit, said that there have been many research projects into the medicinal history, initiation and constituents of the herbal remedies used by the indigenous tribes.

Dr. Fox explained that there have been publications on Amerindian medicine as far back as 1980, and these are available for the public to peruse on request in the Caribbean Section (CRL) at the University of Guyana's Library.

The American Smithsonian Institute, has also taken an interest in the research of their traditional medicines, but there is still much more analysis to be done.

The Chinese are an example of a people who use effective, ancient medicine in the contemporary world. In the Western hemisphere, Chinese herbal medicine has become abundant on the market and is recognised by "conventionalists" as being effective.

There is a danger however, of over-exceeding the daily doses of health products. It should only be taken in moderation. In Europe, the company Holland and Barrett are specialists in selling herbal medicines, offering alternatives to prescribed drugs, such as Camomile for relaxation and Evening Primrose Oil to aid the discomfort of menstruation.

The British Ministry of Health in London, stated in August 2003, that compared to Western drugs, Chinese medicines are generally considered to be relatively less toxic. They usually contain naturally occurring constituents such as herbs in low individual concentrations because of the long historical usage.

The situation is the same with traditional Amerindian medicine.

The Chinese confronted a similar problem to the Amerindians with the disease malaria. The disease is caused by a parasite, Plasmodium Falciparum, and had started becoming resistant to the antidote quinine or Quinidine. Chinese scientists discovered over three decades ago, that the use of extracts from the herb wormwood is highly effective in treating malaria.

Dutch researchers concluded that the wormwood extract, artemether, is as effective as quinine.

The Chinese also claim that ginger, which is used in the treatment of stomach problems, nausea, coughs and rheumatism (Amerindians use it for arthritis), is also a preventative measure against cancerous tumours.

Researchers at the Forest Research Institute, Malaysia, concluded that populations with high risks of cancer should be encouraged to include a lot of ginger in their diet.

It can be argued, that there are many advantages and disadvantages to using herbal remedies in Guyana. On the one hand, using Paracetamol to relieve a headache is more straightforward, than stinging your temples with an insect.

Further research is necessary to find out what are the long-term effects of particular herbal

medicines on the human body. There are doctors and scientists who oppose the use of herbal medicines, arguing that particular ingredients are damaging to the internal organs. However, this is yet to be proven. In the scheme of things, it is very cost-effective for those who cannot afford conventional Western medicine and rely upon nature itself to help their communities to survive.

We do not know what the likelihood is of using traditional Amerindian medicine in the cities. However, unless more research is done, we may never know whether cures or remedies for our serious problems are right on our doorsteps.

Honouring the people who gave this land its name Editorial

[Guyana Chronicle](#)

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IN HIS message to mark International Day of the World's Indigenous People in August 1996, Mr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations exhorted this present generation to do more than apologise for the wrongs indigenous peoples have faced over the decades, and to help them to take their rightful place as full participants in the community of nations. Noting that discrimination, oppression and disease have all taken a terrible toll on indigenous peoples around the world, Mr Boutros-Ghali urged, "Theirs is a unique suffering, compounded by centuries of misunderstanding, discrimination and neglect. The international community can do more, however, than apologise for the wrongs of the past. This will require a conscious shift in national and international priorities.... Our starting point must be that of the indigenous peoples themselves ... to uphold, respect and promote legitimate demands for basic human, political and economic rights."

The UN Secretary-General conceded that at the national level, many states were already encouraging the direct political involvement of indigenous peoples to combat racism and discrimination and to alleviate poverty and environmental destruction. "At the international level," Mr Boutros-Ghali said, "we can do more to ensure a coordinated, informed and committed response to the unique challenges faced by indigenous people around the world."

Seven years after these pronouncements, and nine years into the UN Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004), the words of Mr Boutros-Ghali still argue relevance for humankind. While we must concede that within the last decade, the situation of Aborigines has been improving at a rapid pace through greater consciousness-raising and the advocacy of scores of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on every continent, Mr Boutros-Ghali's radiant vision of indigenous peoples taking their rightful place in the community of nations is yet to be realised. There are countless cases of Guyanese coastlanders migrating to the hinterland, and in the process of earning their livelihood, perpetrating acts of exploitation and sexual and physical abuse on Amerindians. As recently as the 1990s, middle-class matrons in the Capital would voice their wishes to acquire the services of "good, Amerindian girls" to be live-in maids -- the assumption being that such persons would be docile, biddable, and not liable to demand the level of earnings commensurate with the chores they are asked to perform.

Such exploitation diminishes the inherent dignity of Amerindians and pays no homage to the fact that Guyana's nine tribes of Aborigines are the true people of the New World. Their presence here predates not only the much-celebrated arrival of the Genoese navigator, but also by thousands of years the birth of Christ. The late Guyanese scientist, artist and archaeologist, Dr

Denis Williams, who conducted excavations at Barabina in the North Western region of Guyana, established with the authentication of the Smithsonian Institute, that Amerindians began peopling this country over 6,000 years ago. It was they, who named this portion of South America ‘Guyana’, which means “Land of Many Waters”.

As we have noted in this column before, it would be difficult to list all the contributions Guyana’s first people have made to this nation, which possesses one of the richest amalgams of the melting-pot society in this hemisphere. Our Aborigines have had a distinctive hand in defining this nation’s material culture as well as the broad poetics of myths, lore, prehistoric petroglyphs and creation stories. Those coastlanders, who have had the privilege of visiting Guyana’s hinterland, would know that for many Amerindians, time is measured by the movements of the sun and the moon and the rising of the dark river waters. Amerindians commune instinctively with the environment, and for them the rivers, the rocks, the forests and the mountains are sources of legend and inspiration as well as sustenance.

It is meet and right that a period of time has been identified annually for the observance of Amerindian cultural activities. Let us hope that the other groups that comprise this society find the time to reflect on the many ways in which Guyana’s first people have enriched the ethos of this country.

Conference seeks to push rights of indigenous peoples in Commonwealth

[Stabroek News](#)

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A three-day workshop to examine the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples within Commonwealth nations commenced at the Tower Hotel yesterday with a view to outlining recommendations for the next Heads of Government Summit in Abuja, Nigeria in December.

The workshop is being attended by various interest and lobbying groups, both local and overseas, and is co-ordinated by the United Kingdom-based Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit (CPSU) in collaboration with the Commonwealth Association of Indigenous Peoples (CAIP) and the local Amerindian Peoples Association (APA). The CPSU is a part of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London.

This group conducts research and lobbies for the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the 54 nations making up the Commonwealth of Nations, which is home to 150 million indigenous peoples. In February 2001, CPSU received funding from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Commission to embark on a project for research and advocacy in the Commonwealth states.

Head of the CPSU, Richard Bourne, said, "we are only scratching the surface, there is a lot more that we can do. We want to develop a project on environmental sustainability and land rights and also the constitutional status of Indigenous Peoples and how they can improve. [We] want to look at the whole issue of common law [in which] a precedent in Guyana can influence a decision of this kind in another country."

One of the aims of the workshop, which concludes tomorrow, is to craft a sentence on the rights of Indigenous Peoples which would be circulated to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Abuja. This sentence would act as a basis on which an improved Commonwealth position would be made. Dr Helena Whall, the CPSU project officer, said that there seemed to be great reluctance by the Commonwealth to accept its responsibilities to Indigenous Peoples. She said the Commonwealth, in the absence of a clear policy, had left the burden on each member state to deal with the issues of Indigenous Peoples according to its own policy. The CPSU, Whall said, was in no way affiliated with and had no formal relationship with the Commonwealth Secretariat in the UK. She said that the CPSU acted as a critiquing body to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

At yesterday's forum, participants from Guyana, Belize, Dominica and Canada came together for the first time to strongly make the case that Commonwealth must commit to promote and protect the rights of its first peoples.

One of the most contentious issues concerning Indigenous rights is that of land and land ownership, said Carolyn Rodrigues, Minister of Amerindian Affairs. She told the gathering that flexibility should characterise all deliberations because of the social and political differences in each country. She outlined that in Guyana there were 60,000 indigenous persons in 120 communities.

She noted that in many Amerindian communities, surveys and demarcations had been done although there was some degree of resistance to this as some felt that such processes would encroach on what was rightfully theirs. Out of the 120 communities, 76 had received some land titles, and 36 within the 76 communities had been demarcated. She conceded that the arrangement in place would not allow for persons to use such land as collateral for securing a loan.

Whall, in giving a background to the Commonwealth position, said that in 1979 the first and only commitment was made by the Heads of Government regarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Hubert Wong of the Guyana Organisation of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP) made the point that the structure had to be created where lobbying for the rights of Indigenous Peoples could be strengthened, calling the issue one which was hardly new. (Johann Earle)



Govt. seeking to make indigenous communities viable

By Chamanlall Naipaul

[Guyana Chronicle](#)

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A three-day conference on Indigenous Rights in the Commonwealth Caribbean and Americas got underway yesterday at Hotel Tower, Main Street, Georgetown.

Delivering an address at the opening of the conference Minister of Amerindian Affairs, Ms. Carolyn Rodrigues, said the biggest challenge facing her Ministry and the Amerindians in Guyana is to make the indigenous communities viable through the implementation of economic projects.

She noted that because of the logistical problems associated with remote villages it is essential that economic activities are established within the communities themselves, moving away from depending only on the traditional subsistence means of living.

In this regard, the minister pointed out that the canning of the Heart of Palm in Region 1 (Barima/Waini) and an organic pineapple processing facility at Mainstay on the Essequibo Coast by Amazon Caribbean Company are two such projects. Most of the employees at these two facilities are Amerindians, she added.

Ms. Rodrigues told participants that one of the “front burner” issues being dealt with by the Government is land rights for the Amerindians, which is also a similar issue for indigenous peoples in other countries. However, while the problem is similar its resolution has to be found within the uniqueness, history and culture of every country.

The establishment of a National Protected Areas System (NPAS) where the indigenous people live would also be of economic benefit to them when it is implemented, the minister said

She disclosed that of the 120 indigenous communities in Guyana, 76 have communal titles with mining rights on these lands being retained by the state, while 36 of them have been demarcated.

The demarcation and surveys to determine the boundaries of Amerindian lands that began in 1996 have had varying responses from the communities mainly because of the manner in which the process was executed, the minister observed, pointing out that there was poor communication on the matter with the indigenous people.

In addition, she said some Amerindians are of the view that individual titles should be issued rather than communal ones because the latter cannot be used as collateral to obtain loans from commercial banks.

She also noted that the need for the revision of the Amerindian Act of 1951 in order to keep up with the dynamics of present day developments, and in this respect consultations have been completed and the recommendations are to be compiled in a summarized report which should be ready during next year. The establishment of an Indigenous People's Commission is to come on stream shortly, she added, explaining that its establishment was delayed because of the absence of the main opposition party from parliament for some time.

President of the Amerindian peoples Association (APA), Tony James, drew attention to participants of the environmental problems being caused in indigenous communities through mining operations.

However, he made it categorically clear that Amerindians recognize the need for growth and therefore are not against such operations in principle, but are concerned that they are executed in an environmentally friendly manner.

Head of the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, Mr. Richard Bourne, said a three-year study funded by the European Union (EU) was conducted to seriously examine the living conditions and rights of indigenous people within the Commonwealth, noting that the Commonwealth has been lagging in this respect compared to other parts of the world.



New law should empower the Amerindian

-consultation on new Act told

Many views on land, elected chiefs and alcohol

By Miranda La Rose

[Stabroek News](#)

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The empowerment of the Amerindian was the theme which ran through the individual submissions made to the Technical Team receiving recommendations for the revision of the Amerindian Act.

At the final session for public presentations of submissions at City Hall on Sunday, a small but vocal set of speakers made lively presentations to the technical team which is headed by attorney-at-law Arif Bulkan.

Hubert Wong felt that the empowerment must be done in the context of creating an institutional mechanism in which the Amerindian enjoyed the same privileges, such as educational opportunities, as other Guyanese.

Wong said it was going to be a tricky process as many Amerindians themselves would want laws prohibiting the consumption of alcohol and for the Minister of Amerindian Affairs to keep control over the welfare of Amerindians.

But he described the current Amerindian Act as “the most oppressive piece of legislation” still in existence in this country. And while he felt that the whole act should be discarded in favour of Amerindian integration into wider society, it was not practical at this time “because of the forces that still impinge on the Amerindians in the country.”

Also sharing similar sentiments were pilot, Captain Fazel Khan and attorney-at-law, Llewellyn John of the Guyana Association of Local Authorities (GALA) and Chairman of the Guyana Action Party, Edwin Glenn. They all agreed that the act may have been seen as appropriate at the time it was created in a bid to demonstrate from a legal standpoint that Amerindians needed protection.

Wong felt that three sections in the current act which should be struck out were the question of the rights of Amerindians to the sub-surface minerals found from beyond six inches below the surface of the earth; secondly, the clause pertaining to the consumption of alcohol; and the government’s representative who under the act has the complete right to do whatever he/she feels concerning

Amerindian welfare.

John submitted that any revision of the Amerindian Act should be viewed against a background that there was today a clamour for advancement of the democratic process in the management of affairs in Amerindian communities.

He suggested the reduction of the powers of the government representative under Section 12 which gave him or her the power to take possession of, retain, sell or dispose of the property of an Amerindian. Other members of the audience suggested that this section be removed in its entirety as it was paternalistic.

Instead of the appointment of captains, John suggested that democratic elections be held. This process, he said, should be upgraded to the system under which elections for local government in the villages and rural communities were held.

The making of regulations by the minister responsible for Amerindian Affairs prohibiting any rates and customs which in the opinion of the minister were injurious to the welfare of Amerindians should be frowned upon. He said such regulations should not be left entirely to the discretion of the minister but to an established body including Amerindians.

In addition, he noted the need for preservation of elements of Amerindian history and culture, such as the language of the Wai-Wais.

Khan, who has worked among the Amerindians as a pilot for some 30 years felt that the revised act should only be a temporary piece of legislation effective for some two to three decades from now.

He said that one of the worse things would be for the government of Guyana to continue to segregate its people by law. He said Guyana does not have the resources to keep people apart as it would be easier in a process of coming together.

He recalled the early 1950's when Amerindians then needed protection just like the indentured labourers at the time. He noted that the office which protected indentured labourers did not exist any more and he asked how long more would the Amerindians need exclusive laws for protection.

He had seen abject poverty among the Amerindians and suggested that education should become a priority. The issue of education and training was also emphasised by three other speakers including former TUF (The United Force) member of parliament, Michael Abraham and the chairman of the Guyana Action Party.

He would like to see the Amerindian child have the same access to a primary, secondary and university education as any other Guyanese. He had suggested that President's College be used as a residential school for such students and others from hinterland and communities around mining areas.

Optician Don Gomes, who submitted a written presentation on behalf of a number of hinterland

students attending tertiary institutions in Georgetown, supported the deletion of the provision that prohibits the sale and consumption of alcohol to Amerindians. His submission also looked at the empowerment of the Amerindian.

The issue of 'Who is an Amerindian' was also a subject of debate and there were several recommendations.

Khan said that there was already a national registration and census taking in Guyana so he did not see the need for registration for Amerindians.

But one student felt that some commission should undertake that task and registration should be voluntary as there would be persons of mixed race who would by affirmation claim they were Amerindians.

Khan questioned the current act which made provision for communal ownership. He did not see the reason why an Amerindian could not own a house lot in his/her community as in other parts of the country.

Bulkan noted that the approach to ownership in indigenous communities around the world was communal. There are moves in part of Latin America such as Peru to move to individual ownership, which he said had not been a great success. However, he noted that outside of the Amerindian communities, Amerindians had the right to own a house lot.

Khan recommended that there be a survey of Amerindians who had moved out of the village system to see whether they were doing better or worse than they were doing 20 years ago. He said a number of Amerindians were involved in various professions and trades and had been successful.

Glenn felt the country's leaders needed to strengthen the socio-economic base of Amerindians as quickly as possible through education and training.

He said that in education the curricula should pay attention to those aspects that address exploitation and referred to the denial of rights to Amerindians to what was deeper than six inches below the surface of the soil. To deal with the issue of exploitation he suggested training in the field of law - to include criminal law, international law and constitutional law; geology; and research.

He said Amerindians needed to know that the progressive hi-tech world had used up its natural resources and was currently using up these resources at a tremendous rate. "Countries like Guyana, whether you like to hear it or not, are being put aside as a reserve" by organisations claiming to be conservationists. He said, "they are looking really at how you regard your natural resources... When they are ready they will come with some fancy trade agreement" and the resources would be lost.

Another individual Ashton Simon, recommended that the word Amerindian be deleted and be replaced with the word indigenous. He suggested that the act should clearly define the land issue in terms of what was an Amerindian and what was an Amerindian area, district, village and

settlement.

Simon recommended a system of taxation for business entities using Amerindian lands. This would include the aircraft owners association, tourists, contractors, cattle dealers, entrepreneurs, miners, foresters and researchers among others. He suggested that tolls be extracted from non-Amerindians travelling by road through an Amerindian community.

This could be the responsibility of a ‘First Peoples Commission.’

He suggested that this commission would have wide-ranging powers to deal with the issue of Amerindian welfare including Amerindians girls who were forced into prostitution.

Several other speakers including Wong and Khan felt that the issue of gender discrimination and exploitation were dealt with adequately in gender related laws and any provision for the female Amerindian should be in keeping with the laws of the wider society under the broader ambit of the constitution.

Another contributor, Ramjit felt that there should be included in the revised act an agricultural development blueprint providing for Amerindians who depended on subsistence farming.

He noted that Amerindians lived on some of the best soil for certain types of non-traditional agricultural produce but because of a lack of agricultural knowledge many hunt for three to four days for wild animals.

Instead they could have been tending poultry or cultivating their land.

Minister of Amerindian Affairs, Carolyn Rodrigues said she was happy to hear the recommendations transferring some of the powers to the communities or other bodies. However, she cautioned that in transferring that power some persons might be left open to further exploitation. She gave the example of one captain telling her that someone stole the community’s royalties of \$300,000 from under his pillow. Yet there was evidence to show that he had made purchases to the value of that money.

Rodrigues said that in another case she was forced to use her “executive powers” under the Amerindian Act to remove a former captain of Orealla because he could not account for millions of dollars at a time when no funding agency wanted to fund any projects in the village.

She said that after every election many members of the councils including the captains were found guilty of neglecting their duties and the people come to the minister to ask to remove the elected officials. Emphasising the need for education and training to combat ignorance, she said that many communities were unaware of illicit businesses and entered into agreements in which they were the losers. These cases were then left to the Amerindian Affairs Ministry to deal with.

Rodrigues felt that the issue of who was an Amerindian should be left to the captains.

In relation to education, Rodrigues said that the ministry was working to include Amerindians in scholarship schemes at the secondary and tertiary levels.

But some participants felt that there should be no concessions made for the Amerindians to be granted certain scholarships for professional development but that they must earn this on merit just like other Guyanese students.



Team gathering recommendations for new Amerindian Act

[Guyana Chronicle](#)

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A TECHNICAL team involved with the revision of the Amerindian Act project by the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, is in the field soliciting recommendations for formalising the new Act, Minister of Amerindian Affairs, Ms. Carolyn Rodrigues has said.

She hopes that by the end of April all the recommendations would be available for a review and to be formulated into the new piece of legislation.

The revision of the Amerindian Act, which started last year, was among the priority projects on the ministry's agenda.

However several factors caused the process not to be completed.

The Technical Committee comprises a private lawyer, a lawyer from the Attorney General's Chambers, representatives from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, villages and the Amerindian organisations.

So far, they have engaged the people of Region 10 (Upper Demerara/Berbice) in discussions and are in Region Nine (Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo) receiving suggestions for revising and possible inclusion in the new Act.

The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs had during the first quarter of last year, made and distributed copies of the existing Amerindian Act to Amerindian communities for their perusal and possible input.

The communities are expected to forward their recommendations to the technical team for inclusion in the revised Act.

The Amerindian Act stipulates how Amerindian communities should be governed.

However, many of the articles in the legal document are outdated and do not apply to today's society.

The Act was last amended in 1976.

As a result, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, under the guidance of Minister Rodrigues has seen it as necessary and urgent to have a revised Act. (GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AGENCY - GINA)



Revision of Amerindian Act

No request received for extension of consultations

-ministry

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The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs says it is not in receipt of any formal request for the extension of time for community consultations in the revision process for the Amerindian Act.

The Ministry yesterday in a press release expressed concern over a report in the Stabroek News of November 2 captioned "Revision of Amerindian Act - Region Two touchaus want more time for community consultation".

That report, sourced to eight named signatories in a statement from the Amerindian communities in Region Two, contended that more time was needed so the communities could be better prepared to make recommendations to the technical team. The touchaus had suggested in their release a time extension until March 15, 2003.

According to the Ministry, however, "discussions were held with some touchaus, including one from Region Two and Amerindian organisations, inter alia, with respect to time allocated for each section of the process for the revision of the Amerindian Act."

"It was as a result of these consultations," the ministry said, "that three months was agreed upon for the local facilitators to do community consultations."

The ministry also noted that Region Two, unlike Regions One, Seven, Eight and Nine, has a total of nine Amerindian communities that are quite accessible and three local facilitators. Therefore, each facilitator will work with three communities for three months in explaining the existing Act before recommendations are made.

"Unless there are profound hindrances, the allocation time is considered adequate.

If unforeseen difficulties are being encountered, solutions can only be found if these are communicated directly with the ministry rather than via the press," the ministry declared.

The release said that Minister of Amerindian Affairs Carolyn Rodrigues had a meeting with the captains and councillors of Region Two on November 1 at the Charity Extension Centre to discuss various issues.

"None of the captains indicated that the time allocated for community consultations was

inadequate, neither has the facilitators," the release said.

It noted also that some communities in other regions have already signalled their readiness to start making their recommendations, long before the date assigned for that activity.

The ministry warned "persons trying to thwart the process of the revision of the Amerindian Act to refrain from such activities since it could only harm the progress made so far by both the communities and the ministry."

The revision of the Amerindian Act, the release said, had been requested for a long time and various persons and organisations have made several recommendations. As such, for the most part this is not something that is now being introduced to communities.

President opens library in Amerindian hostel
-- boon for hinterland youths studying in city By Abigail Butler

[Guyana Chronicle](#)

September 21, 2002

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A STUDENT of the Government Technical Institute cuts the ribbon to symbolically open the library. The student is assisted by President Jagdeo and Minister Rodrigues. (Delano Williams photo)

HINTERLAND youths studying in the city will have access to their own library and computer facilities now in place at the Amerindian Hostel, Princes Street, Georgetown.

The small but important centre was commissioned during a simple ceremony on Thursday afternoon.

Among officials at the gathering were President Bharrat Jagdeo, Amerindian Affairs Minister Ms. Carolyn Rodrigues, Canadian High Commissioner Mr. Serge Marcoux and representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Minister Rodrigues explained that the request for the establishment of the library was made to the President a year ago during the Amerindian Month celebrations, and he had then promised to make it a reality.

She said that more than \$5M was spent on books, computers and furniture for the facility. Assistance came from UNICEF and the Canadian High Commission.

The minister expressed the hope that with the students now having access to their own library and computers, more than the six who left for Cuba yesterday, will be eligible for studies in Cuba as well as on other scholarship programmes.

Rodrigues urged the students to make full use of the facility and stressed that should they destroy it, the chance will not come again.

The students provided the list of books needed for the library, the Chronicle understands.

In his address to the gathering, President Jagdeo said he had experienced no reservations about responding to the plea for the library since his Government is committed to enhancing the education sector. He said this was another opportunity to prepare the youths for the future.

"Education is absolutely important in the changing world. I have often spoken of the need for people to be prepared for the changing world. And if we were to examine what is happening we will see that the areas that are experiencing the fastest growth, the areas that are providing more and more opportunities are the areas that focus on knowledge and ideas," he stated.

According to the President, if the nation is not prepared for the changing world, it will not just remain in the state it is, but will fall further behind.

"So we have to focus on developing our people, and what better way than to start with our young people?"

The Head of State re-emphasised that education is the Government's priority, not only in the allocation of resources, but also in the development of a whole new strategy for the education sector.

Among other things, Mr. Jagdeo said, this involves more training for teachers, and he noted that today there are training programmes for teachers all across Guyana, so that those in the hinterland and rural areas do not necessarily have to travel to Georgetown for training.

Attention is also being placed on curriculum reform, the President said, and he pointed out that greater emphasis is on training and on access to tertiary education through the extension of campuses.

"And we hope that with Distance Education we will be able to offer tertiary training and improve secondary training in the hinterland areas in the future," President Jagdeo added.

"These are all important things, but most important to me is the fact that this tradition has always been biased, and the hinterland people never had the opportunities that people on the coast had. We have a deliberate policy to narrow that gap. We may not be able to eliminate it totally but we can narrow it...", he stated.

Mr. Jagdeo explained that it is for this reason that secondary education programmes have been extended to Regions One (Barima/Waini), Seven (Cuyuni/Mazaruni), Eight (Potaro/Siparuni), Nine (Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo).

He pointed out that things are progressing since more children from the hinterland communities are going to study in Georgetown and are attending the top schools.

The President promised that the Government will extend tertiary education to the disadvantaged areas and communities.

"My Government will continue with this policy of putting education first. That is our top priority..."

President Jagdeo added that the Government is pumping a lot of resources into the coastal areas as well noting that "we are making investments into education". This expenditure, he said, has long-term benefits.

"Many of you here today are fortunate since there are many others within the hinterland communities who want the opportunity to come out and go to school," he said.

Rodrigues was asked to look into a situation in Region Nine (Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo) where some students cannot go to school since there are not enough places in the secondary school. This problem is compounded by an age restriction for acceptance in the dormitory.

"We cannot deny them an education for fear that anything might happen in the dormitory. We cannot do that. We have to make sure we work on this...they want to go to school. Their parents want them to go to school, but they can't go. And they are wasting their lives and we have to correct that...The education system is still not responsive to the needs of all our children..." the President said.

He told the students that they have the support of the Government, which will do all it can to make their lives easier as they try to secure an education for themselves.

'What do we mean by Amerindian heritage?'

--Asks Carol Ann Marcus of the Amerindian Peoples Association

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Halekuba!

THIS is Amerindian Heritage Month and I want us to look at what exactly do we mean when we talk about Amerindian Heritage?

There have been changes in our ways of life over the years with more drastic changes taking place during the colonial period and after. It is often said that culture, which for us, is also our way of life, is constantly evolving and this is indeed true for Amerindian culture. It would be unrealistic to think that our culture would have remained as it was six hundred years ago. Yet most of the changes that took place among Amerindians were not voluntary changes but were mostly impositions occurring because of external intrusions and pressure beginning with the accidental landing of Christopher Columbus on the islands, which are now called the West Indies. For all of the indigenous peoples of the western hemisphere, this meant the decimation of their populations and the destruction of their cultures. They were told that their cultural practices were barbaric and "uncivilised", and were forced to practise forms of religion not understood by them, to speak through languages completely foreign to them and to forgo forms of government for systems introduced by their "conquerors". The majority of the indigenous peoples throughout the western hemisphere were not spared these impositions and the Amerindians of Guyana were no exception though this began taking place somewhat later than others.

For us, various waves of imposition have meant new systems of education, health, government, and more generally, a changed culture. Upon all of this we have lost the majority of our lands or have seen its destruction through the careless extraction of its resources. Today we are grappling with a number of issues including the resuscitation and revitalisation of our culture, the legal titling of our traditional lands, appropriate and adequate forms of education for our children, proper health facilities to maintain our population, proper representation of our peoples, adequate government systems, and better transportation and communication systems, among others.

Even though we are celebrating Amerindian Heritage Month, and there is some cause for celebration in that we have managed to maintain various forms of our culture, we cannot truly celebrate until we have legal recognition of our lands which is the basis of our culture, until our languages are recognised in the formal school systems, until the school curriculum includes teachings on our culture and the things that are most important to us as Amerindians, until more

education facilities are provided for our children in the environment in which they are most comfortable, until the health and medical care systems ensure that communities are properly serviced, until it is recognised that we can govern ourselves and that we do not need to be treated like children or have others make decisions on our behalf.

Many have spoken about integration into the wider Guyanese society but what are we talking about - adopting other people's culture to the detriment of ours? This must never happen. We can be Amerindians and yet be Guyanese. As an Amerindian I would like to urge all of us to look into ourselves and see where we are and where we want to go. We would like to have our own doctors, lawyers, accountants and other professionals and I urge the youths to strive towards achieving these goals, but I also urge you to recognise that our languages, our relationship to our lands, our music, our dances - to sum it up, our way of life -- is what makes us a people and we must never lose sight of these.

Paying homage to Guyana's aboriginal peoples Editorial

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September 9, 2002

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IN THE first half of the year 1995, two young Amerindian sisters, Bertina and Bernadette, 13 and nine years old respectively, undertook a remarkable 30-day journey through the Guyana hinterland. It was the end of the Easter term and the girls were being taken by a male relative to rejoin their parents and other siblings in another village. Something unpleasant happened along the way, and the girls, finding themselves virtual hostages, made the amazing decision to escape from their captor, and to trek through the jungle until they found some place of safety.

Bertina and Bernadette performed a stupendous feat. They spent a month trekking through the savannahs and Guyana's heartland defying the odds of being harmed by numerous wild beasts. They walked by daylight and existed on wild berries, peppers and the flesh of roasted fish, which they caught by probably using traditional skills. In the cold jungle nights, they would climb trees and settle in a crotch of branches hugging each other for warmth. One day, they arrived upon a clearing, which turned out to be a miners' camp. The girls quietly walked up to the astonished pork-knockers and wished them a polite 'Good afternoon!'

These two young ladies demonstrated a fortitude and resourcefulness way beyond their years. They calmly related their encounters with snakes and their meeting with a jaguar. The girls must have subconsciously drawn upon all the ancient survival arts known to their brave ancestors, who have explored this land for millennia. Bertina and Bernadette succeeded in an odyssey, which would cause many so-called heroes of American television survivor drama to pale into insipidness. Later that year, the Guyana Government honoured Bertina and Bernadette with well-deserved National Awards.

It is fitting that we remember the adventure of these brave girls during this month when Guyana pays homage to its aboriginal peoples, who have contributed so much in the naming of this land and to its material culture. The existence of the Amerindians did not begin when the Genoese navigator Christopher Columbus and his 'huge burdened caravels slanted to the shore' in the late 15th century. Like their siblings in the rest of the Americas, Guyana's first people crossed the Bering Straits during the fourth ice age as hunter-gatherers. In the early 1980s, the late Dr Denis Williams, archaeologist and anthropologist excavated scores of skeletons and dozens of pieces of potsherds at Barabina in the North West District, where Amerindians of antiquity lived. The skeletons were later confirmed by the Smithsonian as being over 7,000 years old.

After territories in this part of the world were claimed in the name of European kingdoms and

Christianity, there began the methodical decimation of the native peoples. Over the following decades of European expansionism, the indigenous peoples were enslaved and robbed of their lands and many of their priceless artifacts. Thousands died resisting enslavement, while many others were displaced. The Caribs of Saint Lucia were forced to make their way to other lands, and to this day, their descendants, the Garifunas of Belize, who appear to be black, complain bitterly of their forced exodus 200 years ago.

In the modern history of the Americas, Guyana is one of the few territories in which the population of indigenous people is on the increase. For decades, many hundreds of Amerindians have been trained as teachers, nurses, midwives, Medexes, religious and artists. We are constrained to admit that discrimination, exploitation and sexual abuse are still the lot of some Amerindians who have sought employment in urban communities. Many otherwise respectable citizens, still import Amerindian women from the hinterland to be live-in workers. These women are assumed to be naïve and unworldly, and therefore would not quibble over low pay and inhuman hours of labour. Fortunately nowadays, Aborigines the world over are networking and making their voices heard in most councils where their concerns and aspirations are listened to respectfully and not patronisingly.

In the words of former Secretary General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali, society must do more than just apologise for the historical wrongs indigenous peoples have faced. He admonished that tribals must be helped in taking their rightful place as full participants in the community of nations.



Cultural Links

Sea Kings of the Antilles

By Peter Muilenburg

ONE THING EVERYBODY KNOWS about the Caribs is that they were cannibals. This indelibly impressed itself on the European imagination when Columbus' crew first pulled up their longboat on the shore of Guadeloupe, poked through a hastily abandoned Carib village, and came upon a peacefully bubbling cauldron. Inevitably one of them lifted the lid to see what these folk fancied for dinner- and gagged at what lay stewing within.

This electrifying discovery stereotyped the Caribs as savages from that moment on, but did so unfairly. Fierce cannibals they were, but they were also accomplished seafarers who made the most impressive voyages of pre Columbian America. Far from being primitive fishing folk who stumbled half-drowned on each new island as storms drove them, the Caribs roamed the Caribbean at will, like New World vikings.

Significantly, when the Spaniards burst upon the scene, the Caribs survived the Conquest. They even thrived by raiding the new settlements and defying the cross and the sword. For almost two centuries after the wholesale extermination of the island Arawaks, the Caribs remained a force to be reckoned with in the eastern Caribbean. By the time they retreated back to their ancestral jungles in Venezuela they had stamped their name on the sea that was once theirs.

Caribs and Arawaks originated in the delta forests of the Rio Orinoco, and hated each other as far back as legend can tell. The Arawaks were the first to migrate up the Lesser Antilles, those mountainous emerald isles that stretch in a sparkling area from South America up the eastern border of the Caribbean. Using them as

stepping stones, the Arawaks moved up through the Greater Antilles, evolving a culture remarked at by the early Europeans for its balanced, healthy, peaceful way of life.

Eventually the Caribs made a similar migration, capturing island after island of the Lesser Antilles until they reached the Anegada Passage, a wide, often rough barrier of water that separated them from Puerto Rico. That island proved too strong for them to take and here the Caribs had to call halt to their migration, but not to their seafaring.

Instead they became a pirate people, a race of seagoing warriors equally at home on the water or ashore. Every hurricane season the Caribs would take advantage of the weakened tradewinds and prevailing calms to launch their dugouts, disappear over the horizon, and strike at the Arawaks of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola, or those of the South American mainland. Into their hollowed-out trees (as long as 80 feet) they could cram over one hundred men with gear and provisions and paddle almost a thousand miles to raid an unsuspecting town. They stopped at night to rest and cook, pulling their vessels up on the beach. Five hundred men in massive war dugouts formed a mobile, lethal strike force that had little to fear. With good reason they were called the "Camajuya," meaning "thunderbolt" since they fell on coastal villages at dawn like a blast of lightning, leaving smoke and blood to mark their course. They loved weapons, lived for combat, and delighted in rape.

Being a spartan lot, material loot did not interest the Caribs nearly as much as women did. They would paddle thousands of miles to capture female slaves, "especially the young and beautiful whom they keep as servants and concubines," as an early eyewitness commented. They took so many Arawak women that the Carib women spoke a different language from the men . . . they spoke Arawak. European ships that touched at the Carib islands often picked up Arawak women escaping from slavery in Carib beds and fields.

The Caribs also brought back men and boys, for the titillation of castrating them, storing them in wooden cages, and butchering them for ceremonial feasts. At these bacchanals they would drink prodigious quantities of their casava beer and dance on wooden boards over a pit that sounded like a giant drum. According to a priest who stayed with them, the Caribs decided on their next marauding voyage while drunk and frenzied.

That such long distance passage making could be performed in dugouts surprises anyone who supposes they were fit only for rivers and sheltered waters. In fact, the dugout was quite capable and well-suited to the Caribs' environment and

several advantages over European sailing ships. For one thing it was of strong and trouble-free construction, with no seams to caulk, no planks to spring, no fastenings to rot. From small one man fishing skiffs to enormous war dugouts, each vessel came from a single tree. A large one took over a year to build. Without steel tools the Caribs felled a tree by firing its roots, then hollowed it out by laying live coals on it and scraping out the charcoal with stone adzes. Appropriate carvings on the stem and stern finished off what was the Caribs' most valued possession and their culture's highest expression.

Built of hardwoods and hauled out of the water when not in use, the dugout was free of the toredos that riddled the white man's vessels in the West Indies-one of Columbus' ships had to be beached in Jamaica because the planking had turned to Swiss cheese. Propulsion was another strong suit- paddles were supremely reliable. Wind or no wind, the dugout moved and maneuvered on command, it always started, never broke down, needed no spares and in calms or light air could weave figure eights around clumsy sailing ships. Best of all, they could not sink, being wholly wood without any ballast. At worst a dugout might capsize. In that event its occupants righted their vessel, bailed it dry with calabash scoops, and climbed back in to resume their voyage. The Caribs, men and women both, were marvellous swimmers, something noted by European observers with a certain astonishment. A ducking in the sea was about as debilitating to a Carib as it would be to a pelican.

While the Arawaks of the Greater Antilles seemed incapable of serious resistance to their enemies, the Arawaks in South America fought back with a creative vengeance. After a particularly violent Carib raid of the mainland, outraged Arawaks in the Orinoco delta gathered baskets full of deadly poisonous fer-de-lance vipers and carried them in dugouts up to the islands of St. Lucia and Martinique. Here they disembarked the squirming guerrillas to wreak havoc on the local Carib inhabitants. To this day these snakes are found in none of the other Antillean islands. An account written by an old Spanish friar illustrates the day to-day struggle in the sixteenth century when power was dispersed between Caribs, Arawaks and Spaniards. Aracoraima, cacique of the Trinidad Arawaks, steered a dugout across the current wracked channel known as the Dragon's Mouth, where brown water boils past the rocky tip of South America's rugged Paria Peninsula. Twenty four women paddled his wives and his collateral-for a loan Aracoraima wanted from the Spaniards of Isla Margarita. He needed axes and adzes of steel in order to construct a fleet of war dugouts to fight the Windward Island Caribs who had devastated the coastline of Trinidad. The Arawaks intended to launch a raid of their own that would cripple the island pirates for years to come. Halfway across the channel the paddlers saw a sight that must have sent their adrenaline pumping. Six dark slivers lifted on a distant swell, then disappeared in a trough . . . Caribs. Aracoraima and his wives turned to flee but were spotted and pursued.

With their long waterlines they soon overtook the Arawaks, overwhelmed them and left Aracoraima for dead in the stern. They tied the women in the bow and twelve young Carib braves began paddling the prize back to Dominica. Not much time passed before they noticed that some of the women were young and beautiful. The warriors stopped paddling, untied the ones they wanted and bent them over the gunnel.

By one of those uncanny true life strokes, Aracoraima had been stunned but not killed. Coming to his senses amidst the sobs of his wives and the gloating of the Caribs, he seized a war club and split the skull of the nearest pleasure-dazed lout. He faced forbidding odds but held powerful advantages too. He had caught the Caribs with their pants down, with women tangling their feet. Aracoraima had his weapon—a club sword of dense lignum-vitae, tipped with razor sharp flint while the Caribs were separated from theirs. And he had the advantageous position facing only one opponent at a time due to the narrow beam of a dugout. The cacique proceeded to kill every one of the young Caribs and returned home to Trinidad in triumph.

In the end Aracoraima did get to Isla Margarita and obtained the loan, but nothing came of it until years later when his nephew won a famous victory over a Carib raiding fleet caught in one of the mouths of the Orinoco. Though only 60 dugouts strong, the Arawaks demolished a Carib fleet of 120. Forty were captured and the rest fled. To save his life the Carib admiral promised fealty and tribute—an annual dugout loaded with cotton, hammocks and six slave girls.

When Columbus arrived he ingratiated himself with the caciques of Hispaniola by promising to protect the Arawaks against the Caribs. History tells us that the fulfillment of that promise did not work out quite as the Indians had hoped. Within a short span of years the Spaniards had wiped them out, and needing labor for the gold mines and plantations, they turned to the Carib islands for slaves. A few attempts showed them the impracticality of attacking Caribs on their home ground.

The Lesser Antilles, especially the Windward Islands, were so deeply forested and ruggedly dissected by ravines that Caribs could ambush a Spanish patrol from the other side of a gorge and be hours away from pursuit. The Spaniards found themselves clambering up and down brutal slopes, pestered by silent poisoned arrows that drove men raving mad before they died. It was not their kind of war, particularly since the islands held no obvious riches to exploit. Hence the Spaniards tried to ignore them.

But the Caribs would not settle for that. The concentration of Europeans with

firearms and armor in the islands to the west did nothing to intimidate the raiders, who were after the white man's steel, wine and women. The Caribs had conceived a well-deserved hatred of the Spaniards and lost no opportunity to express it. The early Hispanic settle meets suffered frequent assaults. Peter Martyr, a contemporary chronicler of the Indies, estimated in 1515 that the Caribs had taken 5000 inhabitants from Puerto Rico alone since the Discovery.

That year Ponce de Leon was sent across the Atlantic with an armada to stop and chastise the Caribs in Guadeloupe before continuing on to Puerto Rico. He anchored off a river, sent a party ashore-women to do the washing, sailors to fill the water casks and soldiers to guard them. The Caribs laid an ambush from dense cover, killed most of the men and seized the women. Ponce de Leon left in disgust. Similar disasters dogged subsequent attempts to subdue these first Antillean guerrillas.

Terror punctuated the sixteenth century for Puerto Rico. In September of 1520 when hurricane season calms gave the Caribs perfect paddling weather, five dugouts with 150 warriors ascended the Humacao River on Puerto Rico's east coast. They ravaged the farms and the mines, killing some 20 Spaniards and carrying off 50 Indians. They got away cleanly in their dugouts and not a boat on the coast could catch them. The Spanish troops, counterattacking too slowly, raged on the beach while the colonists sent a petition to the Crown for two fast oared boats to patrol the mouths of the rivers up which the Caribs made their forays.

The same drama was played out 500 miles south, where as late as 1620 a travelling friar noted in a report to royal officials: "These Granada Indians (Caribs) start out every year in late July or early August with their dugout navies on robbing expeditions along the whole coast of the Spanish Main, the islands of Trinidad, Margarita and others . . . and it will aid the service of God and his Majesty to conquer them, bringing them under subjection and killing the male Indians. . . thus getting rid of that pirate's nest of savage cannibals; with them there no security is possible in all the surrounding territories and islands; their conquest would bring quiet and tranquility."

Among the millions of documents in Seville's Archive of the Indies, a tattered parchment letter written to the king in 1568 gives an eyewitness feel to these events. His Excellency Don Daharnonde de Lugo, governor of Puerto Rico, received word that 800 warriors had landed on the south west coast, burnt the town of San German and massacred many of its citizens. He set out with a handful of men to assist the survivors who had fled to nearby swamps. Travelling toward San German on the south coast road, de Lugo caught sight of the Carib fleet making its way back, hugging the coast. Aware that they would stop every night,

the governor followed them by land, watching as they pillaged and burned coastal farms and hoping to get a chance to rescue the Spanish prisoners the Indians had taken which included the wife and two small sons of one of the survivors. Accumulating recruits as he went, waiting for the right circumstances, de Lugo finally struck one night when the Caribs had camped ashore near thick forest. With twenty men he crept unseen close to the camp and opened fire, while calling in Spanish for the prisoners to run into the forest.

The Caribs rallied enough to wound the governor with a poisoned arrow as they retreated to the safety of their dugouts. Most of the prisoners managed to escape, but the woman with two sons suddenly realized her children had been left behind. She broke free of the protective Spaniards and ran back to the beach to look in the dugouts for her sons. Caribs grabbed her, threw her in and pushed off to sea. The governor recovered from his wound with the help of a loyal Indian who knew the herbal antidote to the envenomed arrowhead. The rescue party found the abducted woman days later, wandering out of her wits in a river near the sea. The Caribs had grown impatient with her wailing and had beaten her and thrown her overboard. At the end of his account de Lugo stated that without a patrol of galleys to protect the coast, its inhabitants would abandon Puerto Rico for lands farther to the west. Such attacks and the periodic wreck of Spanish shipping in the Carib islands eventually gave rise to persistent reports of a considerable number of Christians being held captive in Dominica, and-of even greater interest-a mounting treasure in silver and gold. In 1588 the governor of Puerto Rico wrote to the Crown about the testimony of Luisa Navarrete, a mulata in her thirties who was married to a Spaniard and by all accounts "a worthy Christian woman." Ten years previously she had been living in Humacao when Caribs assaulted the hacienda and carried her off along with other blacks to Dominica.

In her four years of captivity she learned the language and found out about the precious hoard. The Caribs told her a ship carrying bullion had wrecked at the island, driven by a violent tempest. Some of the crew drowned, others were killed, and the rest scattered among neighboring islands. Since the recent eating of a friar had touched off the killing of many Caribs, they no longer ate Christians (unless they were also Indian). As a result, there were upwards of 50 white as well as 300 black captives. The gold and silver from the ships and the loot gathered in almost a century of raids had been piled up in a cave for safekeeping and it amounted to a fortune.

This information had San Juan agog with gold fever. Fifty Indian fighters from the Venezuelan frontier as well as a hundred adventurers from Puerto Rico and Hispaniola were poised to ransack the cave and rescue the prisoners if the king would make available two shallow draft, fast galleys. The king and council must have thought it impractical-after a few more letters on the subject, the

correspondence fades and it is not mentioned again.

Had the Lesser Antilles been inhabited by the peace-loving Arawaks, the Spaniards might well have settled and fortified them to control access to the Caribbean. As it was, the Spaniards mostly gave the implacable Caribs a wide berth, and into this vacuum sailed increasing numbers of French, Dutch and British corsairs, whom the Caribs often welcomed as enemies of their enemies. The relationship between the interloping ships and the Indians was not always smooth, but both sides had something to gain from interchange. The corsairs and smugglers brought tools, guns and wine to trade for poultry, vegetables and drinking water. The islands' location made them a convenient place to refresh a ship and its crew after the long transatlantic voyage and to pick up news about the Spanish realms to the leeward. The English stopped at Dominica while the French favored Guadeloupe. Often the Caribs paddled out to ships becalmed in the lee of the high islands to sell pineapples or turtles.

These visits led to individuals settling with the Caribs as merchants, factors or planters. Some of these adventurers accompanied their hosts into battle using guns on their behalf. In 1623 a joint British/French occupation of part of St. Kitts was agreed to by the Indians. Conflict came quickly, however. Warned of an impending Carib attack by the Carib mistress of one of the colonists, the whites struck first and massacred their hosts. In revenge a fleet of Caribs, thousands strong, killed a hundred whites in an assault on St. Kitts but was beaten back with heavy casualties. St. Kitts survived as a British colony and its Caribs retreated to Guadeloupe. Then followed a period of intermittent warfare between Caribs defending their territory and Europeans ever encroaching. Settlements attempted in Barbuda, Tobago, Marie Galant and St. Lucia were destroyed by the Caribs, and they came close to expunging the important colony on Antigua. As the newcomers gained control of each island its Caribs migrated to the strongholds of Dominica and St. Vincent or went back to Venezuela.

The two islands became beacons of refuge not only to the island Caribs but for Africans escaping from slavery. Once again the Caribs welcomed the enemy of their enemy. In 1672, Governor Stapleton estimated that 600 runaway slaves from the British Leeward Islands to the north had taken refuge with the Caribs in Dominica and St. Vincent. Ironically once again the welcome given to new allies proved the Indians' undoing. The runaway slaves joined with a group of free blacks and when the wreck of a slave ship nearby greatly augmented their numbers, they virtually displaced the Caribs.

It remains to assess the Caribs. Were they as savage and depraved as their enemies claimed? The loudest expressions of revulsion came from the Spaniards, who were themselves fresh from the genocide of a race-the island Arawaks-and

needed justification for enslaving Caribs to fill the gap in their labor force. But sixteenth-century Europe as a whole was far from civilized. It suffices to recall the stake, the public tortures and executions, and the savage civil wars of these times. If the Caribs were savage, theirs was the eastern Caribbean variant of a universal failure.

The role of torture in Carib society is paradoxically brutal yet spiritual. To prove his worthiness a Carib candidate for war captain had to fast for a year drinking only a hallucinogenic gruel, and then wear a stinging vest of wasp and ants so venomous that one bite would give a European a fever for a day. Afterwards two powerful warriors wielding whips flogged him. These rituals were intended to test the warrior's ability to transcend the body. Since fear of pain and death bar the way to the spiritual world and keep man anchored in the flesh, the Caribs respected the transcendence of pain as a mark of spiritual power. They tortured themselves to induce it and they tortured their enemies to witness the triumph of spirit at the moment of death. Although their cannibalism revolts us, it also had a religious significance. By eating their enemies the Caribs believed they would ingest the virtues of the slain; one who died bravely was eagerly eaten.

Given the challenges they faced, the Caribs' ferocity reminds one of claws on a tiger-necessary equipment for survival. The times called for a war like people. The Caribs survived two hundred year of the European incursion, holding onto their way of life until making a disciplined retreat back to their ancestral hearth. Compare their legacy to the of the Lucayans who, twenty years after the Conquest, were scorched off the face of the earth.

The last time I sailed to Dominica, I made my way over the rugged rain-forested hills to the village of Salybia on the windward coast. Here live the last full-blooded Caribs of the Antilles, a minute remnant, now as gentle and kindly as Arawaks once were. Unlike the other villagers who produced traditional basketry for the tourist market, one man was hewing out a sleek thirty-foot "canot" as dugouts are called in the local patois, from a tough "rained, rosy-hued log. While steel adzes have replaced the technique of fire hollowing, he still builds the traditional dugouts, slightly modified in the stern to take an outboard motor. He told me that the one under construction had been paid for in full by a French fisherman from Martinique, and that he could not begin to keep up with the demand.

St. Lucia is another island in which the dugout is the preferred vessel for the fishing fleet, which roars out of Castries harbor near dawn for a day's trolling in mid-channel when the dorado are running. Some of these boats are over seventy years old and still in active service. I got to know the owner of one, and we talked about the merits of various vessels in rough weather and calm. After a polite pause he informed me that while my boat was a fine yacht he, for his part, would feel

much safer in his battered old canot were the trades to start really blowing while he was out in mid-channel fishing. I checked the impulse to smile, and came to realize he was in dead earnest when I rode with him down the coast delivering coconuts from a nearby plantation to the copra factory in Soufriere.

I almost capsized the dugout when I stepped into it, and sat down muttering something derogatory about West Indian log rolling. But a little later, with well over a ton of coconuts and five people aboard I had to eat my words. The venerable hollowed out log was making an easy four knots, pushed by an ancient three horsepower outboard. I busied myself with bailing out the water that seeped in through cracks where the wood had checked over the years.

"Do these canoes ever capsize in mid-channel?" I asked.

"Sometimes. If de crew be drunk."

"Then what?"

"Well. . . de captin does le' go de engine off de stern, and de crew hoi' on til dey be rescue," he stated matter-of-factly. Simple enough, I thought to myself, remembering the clamp screws on my own outboard were seized with corrosion. Later in the week, as we sailed out from under the lee of the island into the full force of the winter trades, we slowly overhauled another vessel, a 20 foot canot sailing under the familiar Robin Hood Flour sack jib and main. Three men comprised the crew, one at the tiller with the main sheet in his hand, another hiking out for all he was worth, and the third man bailing constantly. They were en route to St. Vincent some thirty rough sea miles to the south. I had to give them, their dugout, and the Caribs immense credit.





Cultural Links

Columbus Landed Here-- Or Did He?

by Arne B. Molander

Almost five hundred years have passed since two o'clock that fateful Friday morning, when the lookout, Rodrigo de Triana, cried out "Tierra!" (Land ho!) to his weary shipmates on the deck of the Pinta. As the cannon of the Pinta thundered the news to the Santa Maria and the Nina, Christopher Columbus thanked God for a successful conclusion to his venturesome Enterprise of the Indies, unaware that he had opened up an entire new hemisphere to European exploitation.

The land discovered by Columbus on October 12, 1492, was an islet of the Bahamas, which was given the name San Salvador by the Admiral of the Ocean Sea. Columbus explored the Bahama Islands for twelve days, marveling at their lush vegetation and balmy breezes, before sailing on to Cuba and Hispaniola. During this period of discovery he explored and claimed three more of the Bahama Islands for Spain. He gave them the names of Santa Maria, Fernandina, and Isabela, in honor of his faith and of his patrons. Considering the detail and accuracy of his Journal, it would probably surprise Columbus to find that the identities of all four of his Bahama discoveries are today clouded by uncertainty.

There are many reasons for this uncertainty. The Bahamas were never developed by the Spaniards, who spurned their shallow banks in favor of the lofty peaks and gold deposits of Hispaniola. Not only are there no known surviving markers left by Columbus, there are very few contemporary descriptions of the discoveries. Finally, the original Journal of the voyage and its handwritten copy, the Barcelona Manuscript, both disappeared from history during the sixteenth century. Fortunately, a link to the original Journal was established in 1791 when Martin

Fernandez de Navarrete, a Spanish naval historian, came across some dusty pages in a library vault. They proved to be an abridged version of the Columbus Journal, handcopied from the Barcelona Manuscript by Father Bartolome de Las Casas in preparation for his famous History of the Indies. Apparently the crucial twelve-day interval in the Bahamas was copied without abridgement. When finally published in 1825, its wealth of descriptive clues encouraged many independent reconstructions of the Admiral's route through the Bahamas.

As diverse as these theories were, they all assumed that Columbus entered the Bahamas through Crooked Island Passage, one of the few deepwater passages across this six hundred mile-long archipelago. The choice of this southern route was dictated by a single entry in the Journal, which, taken at face value, clearly identifies Long Island as the Fernandina of Columbus. Once this association is made, then Watlings Island becomes the preferred candidate for San Salvador. In 1926, the Parliament of the Bahamas officially changed the name of Watlings Island to San Saivador, ending more than a century of debate.

Despite that official blessing, the southern route does not hold up very well when compared with sixty-five other clues that I have identified in the Journal. For example, Columbus used the diminutive term *isleta* (small isle) in his first reference to San Salvador. Such a description of the sixty square miles of Watlings would be inconsistent with his later use of the term to describe islets having only a few square miles of surface area in Tortuga. The Journal always refers to this seventy-two square mile island as an *isla* (island), twice reinforcing the definition with the adjective *grande* (large). Is it reasonable to suppose that Columbus would have downplayed the magnitude of his first discovery in his description to his sovereigns?

Columbus demonstrates the same kind of discipline in his use of the term *puerto* (harbor), which he consistently restricts to the flask-shaped harbors characteristic of the north coasts of Cuba and Hispaniola. Not once does he apply this term to the exposed shoal anchorages along these shores. How then does Samuel Eliot Morison, the chief spokesman for the southern route, elect wide-open Grahams Harbor on the exposed northeast corner of Watlings Island as the "harbor large enough for all the ships of Christendom, the entrance to which is very narrow." This selection becomes even less tenable when Columbus describes its surface as "no more disturbed than the water in a well." The Yachtsman's Guide to the Bahamas tells us that Grahams Harbor "always seems to carry a surge through it," and that "there are no really safe harbors on Watlings."

The location of suitable anchorages was of primary importance to Columbus. He found one on the west end of Santa Maria, and two off the east coast of Fernandina, before sailing on to Isabela. The Yachtsman's Guide describes

excellent anchorages at Port Nelson on Rum Cay, Morison's candidate for Santa Maria. Older editions of the Guide also showed a "temporary anchorage" in deep water right where Columbus would have seen it, but the editors of the Guide have since deleted it because of its "persistent surge." Why would Columbus have passed up excellent midafternoon anchorages at Port Nelson in order to reach the questionable anchorage at dusk?

The situation becomes even more difficult when we try to fit Columbus' descriptions of his third discovery, Fernandina, to Long Island, which is the currently accepted candidate. Columbus recorded two separate anchorages made by his fleet off the east coast of Fernandina. Even an inexperienced sailor would understand the hazards of trying to anchor off the hostile east coast of Long Island, a shore that is pounded by the Atlantic Ocean, and has nothing resembling an anchorage between Cape St. Maria and Clarence Harbor.

But the major failure of Long Island is due to the sparse nature of its vegetation. Repeatedly Columbus marveled at the verdant forests of Fernandina. One interesting entry focuses on a mastic tree that enthralled the Admiral with its several species of epiphytic plants. But the rainfall distribution of the Bahamas varies from lush tropical in its northwestern corner, down to half that value in the southeast corner. That's why both Rum Cay and Long Island have been home to a salt industry whose climatic demands are drastically different than those of the rain forest. The mastic tree is in fact not found southeast of New Providence Island. To the contrary. G. B. Shattuck, in his authoritative *The Bahama Islands*, continually refers to the extremely xerophytic growth existing on Long Island almost a century ago.

These are only a few of the major discrepancies between the entries in the Columbus Journal and the southern route of Morison. There are dozens more dealing with island dimensions, compass directions, fauna, and sailing directions; all suggest that maybe Columbus didn't enter the New World through Crooked Island Passage. The resolution of this speculation depends on reconstruction of both parts of his route—the ocean crossing as well as his travels in the Bahamas.

First, let's reconstruct his trans Atlantic crossing based on the data entered in his Journal. If all of the daily entries are taken at face value, their summation results in a landfall at the mouth of Northeast Providence Channel, ninety miles north of Watlings Island. Morison got around this problem by asserting that the Admiral navigated by dead-reckoning, that is, by combining compass headings with speed estimates to plot his daily position. Using this method of navigation, compass variations could have deflected his course to Watlings Island. But why would Columbus have relied on this dangerous form of navigation while his contemporaries were using a much more accurate alternative. Latitude sailing'

The method of latitude sailing is much more reliable than dead-reckoning since one of the ship's coordinates is always known, despite unknown variations in ship's speed and compass headings. In this technique, the navigator sails a fixed latitude by maintaining constant elevation angles to the sun and the stars. Thus he knows he'll eventually reach his latitude objective on the far shore, although speed errors may alter his time of arrival.

The superiority of latitude sailing is demonstrated by Morison himself in his classic work *The European Discovery of Africa*. He cites the 1497 performance of John Cabot, who employed latitude sailing to reach Newfoundland from Ireland with only four miles of error. Again, in 1534, Jacques Cartier used the same method to reach Newfoundland from France with only three miles of error. What reason could Columbus have had for using an inferior navigation system, one that resulted in a ninety-mile error? And if he did, could he have failed to notice that the bright star Dubhe, which sank to within one and a half degrees of the northern horizon at his departure point in the Canary Islands, was now brushing the horizon toward the end of his westward trek? It seems impossible that the Admiral failed to observe an angular change equivalent to a full two and a half diameters of the moon.

Columbus employed latitude sailing with the same degree of competence as his contemporaries. I believe, therefore, that his excellent navigation brought him to the northern shore of Eleuthera Island. This landfall is confirmed by records of the Ponce de Leon expedition of 1513, where San Salvador is described as being at a latitude of 25°40', just off the north coast of Eleuthera. This precise description has always been garbled or ignored by supporters of the Watlings Island theory, despite his demonstrated accuracy in measuring the latitude of Cape Canaveral, and his close association with Columbus.

I have supported this northern landfall by reconstructing a route through the Bahamas that fits the entire set of sixty-six clues in the Journal far better than the southern route does. Let's follow Columbus' progress along this proposed northern route as we refer to important clues in the Journal.

The moon, five days past full, hung high over his left shoulder like a lantern when Rodrigo de Triana finally glimpsed the northeast shore of Eleuthera "at a distance of about two leagues" off the port quarter. This was a surprisingly short detection range, considering the clarity of the atmosphere and the monetary reward for Rodrigo. But perhaps he was concentrating on the western horizon in front of the Pinta, and was late in picking out the thundering surf off to his left. (According to the *Yachtsman's Guide*, this is less than half the detection range expected for the

140foot limestone cliffs on the east shore of Watlings Island, even when viewed from sea level.)

Columbus stood clear of the reefs fronting the north shore of Eleuthera until morning. At dawn's first light, he followed the reef westward until he found an opening that would allow him to pass safely from the deep blue waters of the channel into the iridescent shallows of the Grand Bahama Bank. This opening is marked for modern sailors by a 112-foot tower on Egg Island, which I believe was the San Salvador of Columbus. The Admiral anchored and rowed ashore to take formal possession. His last Journal entry on this historic evening was that "I saw no beast of any kind in this island, except parrots." (The giant iguana of the southern Bahamas would have been a strange omission on Watlings Island.) He did not include his usual quantitative descriptors, apparently finding the melange of islets and sandbars on the Bank difficult to characterize.

Saturday he remained aboard and received the Indians and their sailing directions for Cuba, which could be reached by "going to the south or going round the island to the south," confirming the Indians uncertainty whether he could safely pass over the expanse of shoal water south of Egg Island. He endorsed the concept of latitude sailing by emphasizing that he was "in one line from east to west with the island of Hierro in the Canaries." Finally, his first substantive description of Egg Island correctly noted that "in the center of it, there is a very large lagoon."

On Sunday morning, Columbus ordered all rowboats readied and recorded that "I went along the island in a northnortheasterly direction, to see the other part of Royal Island which lay to the east" of Egg Island. He enthusiastically described Royal Island Harbor, using almost the same terms as the Yachtman's Guide, which calls it a "beautiful and almost landlocked harbor which affords protection in any weather." Before returning to his anchorage, he noted the peninsula "which is formed like an island" on the northwest side of Royal Island and "the loveliest group of trees" near Egg Island. This seven-mile rowing circuit (an impossible twenty-five miles on Watlings) lasted until mid-afternoon. He then sailed from his Egg Island anchorage, anxious to avoid the strong easterly set described in the Yachtman's Guide and which he must have observed the previous morning. As he left, he "saw so many islands" along the south side of the Channel (no islands are visible from Watlings) that he finally "resolved to steer for the largest." which is New Providence, the modern name for Columbus' island of Santa Maria. (Rum Cay is not the largest neighbor of Watlings Island).

He stood off shore all night and at daybreak Monday was near Pimlico Island, "seven leagues" from New Providence, which he did not reach until midday because "the tide was against me." (There is no tide between Watlings and Rum Cay.) He described the east coast of New Providence as running "north and south

for a distance of five leagues, and the other side, which I followed, runs east and west for more than ten leagues. Clearly, Columbus had the orientation and proportions correct, and if he N`as using the same land league that his sovereigns used for their land grants, there is no other island on the face of the earth that better fits his description. He had to "set sail to go all that day until night" since there are no anchorages along the north shore of New Providence, an`] "about sunset" he anchored south of the "westerly point," now known as Lyford Cay.

As he was departing this excellent anchorage Tuesday morning, an Indian canoe came "from the other cape," now called Clifton Point, in order to barter a ball of cotton for beads and other trinkets. He then sailed from the "islands" of New Providence (Rum Cay is solitary) for Andros Island, or Fernandina, which lay "eight leagues" to the west across the Tongue of the Ocean. "Ln the middle of the gulf between these two islands" Columbus picked up an Indian who was carrying tobacco, giving him an opportunity to write the first description of this highly prized plant. Under a light wind, he reached Andros Island too late to cross the third largest reef in the world safely, and so he stood off all night.

Wednesday morning he anchored behind the reef at Mastic Point, which he accurately described as "this point. where I came, and all this coast runs NNW and SSE" and "that on this side of the coast may extend for some twenty-eight leagues or more." The Admiral appropriately wrote that Andros was "very green and flat and very fertile." even by Bahama standards. He marveled at the mastic tree, which grows to great size on Andros, recording that "five of six different kinds" of branches all grew on a single tree. Before departing at midday, he described the reef fish, "of the finest colors in the world," and made his first references to " Lizards," widely distributed on Andros.

Wishing to sail south to Cuba, the Admiral was dissuaded by his Indian guides, who perhaps questioned whether his great ships could safely pass over the shoal water south of the Tongue of the Ocean. Accordingly, he followed their advice "that the island could be rounded more quickly in a north-northwesterly direction." (Inapplicable advice on Long Island.) "About two leagues from the head of the island," renamed Morgan's Bluff in honor of the pirate, Columbus anchored at Conch Sound, which he first assumed to be "the mouth of a river . . . wide enough for a hundred ships."

The wind shifted to WNW, forcingthe Admiral to reverse his course for Cuba. The next day he continued to sail before the wind, anchoring that night in the shoal water to the south of the Tongue of the Ocean. Friday morning he separated his fleet for the first time in the New World, fanning it out from ESE to SSE as he ventured into deep water west of Long Island. At midday they reached the western islet that " Lay on the course from the Island of Fernandina." Following

the coast twelve leagues to a cape, called South Point on Long Island, he accurately described it as "round and in deep water, with no shoals off it." Columbus stayed here until late Tuesday night, waiting for an east wind to carry him to Cuba.

At midday Wednesday he recorded the one important clue that is totally incompatible with the northern route as "Cape Verde, in the island of Fernandina, which is on the south side in the western part, lay to my northwest, and was seven leagues from me." But was it wise for the earlier analysts to hang their entire reconstruction on this single clue, especially since the Admiral had never mentioned this cape before and there is no cape on the west end of Long Island? Perhaps Father Las Casas' thirdhand copy was in error; if the distance had originally read seventy leagues, the clue would have correctly identified Andros rather than Long Island as Fernandina. According to the analysis presented here, the overwhelming weight of evidence points to Northeast Providence Channel as the entry of Columbus into the New World. The islands of Santa Maria and Fernandina have been identified with virtual certainty, while San Salvador is probable and Isabela is still questionable.

