

indigenous contributions to caribbean culture today

Different cultural traditions - indigenous, African and European, were mixed together to form today's Caribbean culture. There is evidence of the survival of indigenous culture in many areas- the knowledge of the use of medicinal herbs, food and cooking, in crafts such as basketry and in the construction of canoes and ways of fishing. Indigenous culture also exists in more subtle ways, such as through traditional stories and superstitions and in relations with the natural world.

Indigenous language survives in various forms – in plant, food and animal names, agricultural terms and practices. In all parts of the Caribbean place names are a readily recognisable source of indigenous words.

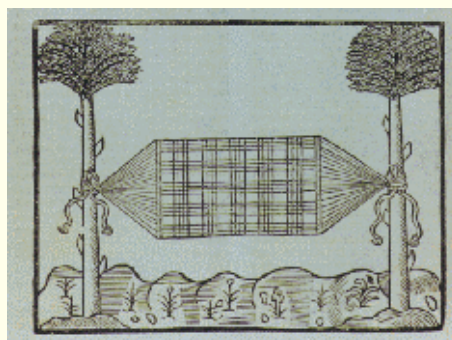
The world also owes many important food crops to the indigenous people- manioc, maize, cocoa, pineapple and other fruits and vegetables.

Beliefs And Values

Indigenous spiritual beliefs and ancestral values still exist in Caribbean culture. Taíno concepts of family relations and hospitality customs exist in the Dominican Republic and Cuba. In Guadeloupe, the way living spaces are arranged into private and public and the orientation of the house to the sea, are connected with indigenous practices. Many farmers use indigenous spiritual practices of agriculture such as avoiding certain days and using the lunar cycle to plant.

Island Caribs' gardens were placed at a distance from the home and were protected private spaces. In Dominica the practice of locating the garden in the hills behind the house still exists today. The way Caribbean gardens are mixed, with tree crops, root crops, spices and peppers all together, shows a link with indigenous practices. People in rural Cuba, Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic still live in traditional houses called bohios, a Taíno name.

Many Creole stories have indigenous origins, including supernatural beings such as the Ciguapa or Lajables, a beautiful woman beast with long hair and inverted or cow's feet.



Early European illustration of a hammock, an invention of the people of the Caribbean.