History and Culture of Dominica

Apwé Bondyé sé la té
After God, the earth
Dr. Lennox Honychurch

- Born 1952, Portsmouth, Dominica
- D. Phil. And M. Phil, Anthropology,
- St. Hugh’s College, University of Oxford, UK
- Historian, Artist, Poet
Several Groups of Amerindians in Caribbean

• All groups migrated from the South - from northern coast of South America
• First groups reached Caribbean about 5000 bc
• Moved northward along the island chain
The Ortoiroid Peoples

- Arrived in Caribbean about 5000 bc
- Reached Puerto Rico by 1000 bc
- Occupied Dominica from 3000 bc to 400 bc
- Formerly referred to as the “Ciboney”, another group that lived in Cuba
- Hunter-gatherers - lived close to shore
- Artifacts are basic stone tools, grinders, weights for fishing nets
The Arawakan Speakers

- Arawak is family of languages distributed in Amazon River basin
- Colonized lesser Antilles starting 400 bc
- Eventually occupied entire region
- Introduced slash and burn agriculture and ceramics (pottery)
- Some groups very sophisticated - plazas in cities, ball courts, well developed artistic traditions
The Igneri

• Group of Arawakan speakers
• Arrived on Dominica 400 ad
• Skilled potters and weavers of cotton
• Made canoes - central part of their culture
  – Migration, trade, fishing, hunting
• Processed cassava
• Built strong houses
• Farmed maize, beans, peppers, sweet potatoes, pineapple, fruit trees, bitter manioc
• Society balanced between natural cycles of land and an animistic religion of spirits
The Kalinago or “Carib” people

• Arrived about 1400 ad
• Also spoke an Arawakan language
• Controlled Lesser Antilles from about 1400 ad to about 1700 ad
• Moved between mainland and Windward Islands
• Raided islands for bride capture

The Kalinago

• Encountered by Columbus and early explorers
• Killed Igneri men during bride capture raids
• Often severed limbs or heads as trophies
• Led to reputation for cannibalism
• No eyewitness accounts of cannibalism
3. *Insulae canibalium* (The Islands of the Cannibals). An engraving in Honorius Philoponus, *Nova typis transacta navigatio novi orbis Indiae Occidentalis* (Venice, 1621), pl. 5. The Bodleian Library: VET. L2. d1. Honorius Philoponus was the pseudonym of the Austrian Benedictine monk Caspar Plautius. The text of this volume concerns the history of Benedictine evangelism in the New World from Brendan's legendary travels to Fray Juan Buyl's arrival in Española on Columbus's fleet.
The Kalinago

• Question of cannabilism has dominated historical writing
• Built elaborate straw houses
• Males lived in central men’s house
• Visited wives in surrounding family huts
• Wives continued to speak original languages
The Kalinago

- Originally from rainforest areas of the Guianas, South America
- Favored moist, mountainous islands like Dominica
- Advanced hunting, agriculture, and particularly sea-faring
- Used celestial navigation on the open sea
- Made canoes from “gommier” and other huge rainforest trees
Church in Salibia, Carib Territory, mural by Dr. Lennox Honychurch
Carib Names for the Islands
The Carib Territory

- Chief and Tribal Council are elected
- Some autonomy from Dominica
Carib Legends
Arrival of the Europeans

- Columbus arrived 1492
- Discovered Dominica on second voyage in 1493
- Passed by eastern shore and made landfall at Portsmouth
The Spanish

- Quickly established colonies in the Antilles, particularly on Hispaniola
- Also Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Panamá
- Gold mines major preoccupation
- Treated indigenous people as slaves
The Spanish

- Killed off people on larger islands first
- Then raided smaller islands for slave labor
- Most of population of Caribbean gone by middle of 16th century
- 250,000 to 6,000,000 people
- Caribs (Kalinago) survived due to fierce, warlike nature
The Spanish

- Gold put into pipeline for shipment back to Spain
- Large convoys from Portobello (Panamá), Havana, Puerto Rico, Cartagena (Colombia)
Pirate Culture

- Active by 16th and 17th centuries
- Openly encouraged by England
- Some islands, Tortuga, completely controlled by bucanneers
Settlement of Lesser Antilles

- Dutch, English and French arrive early 17th Century
- Windward islands largely French
- Vicious attacks vs. Caribs on Martinique and Guadalupe - Dominica largely spared
- First French Settlement of Dominica early 17th Century
Sugar Production

- Dominated caribbean settlements, particularly on larger or flatter islands
- Large estates, plantation type agriculture
- Requires large labor force
- Initially indentured servants from Europe
- Quickly replaced by slaves from West Africa
Population of Dominica in 1633

- 349 French
- 338 slaves
- 938 Carib in 22 villages
The Slave Trade

- Particularly vicious in Caribbean
- Death rate exceeded birth rate
- Required constant shipment of new slaves
- Caribbean sugar planters enormously powerful and wealthy
The Slave Trade
also known as
The Maafa (Swahili for holocaust or great disaster)
The African Diaspora
The Slave Trade

A slave pen, 21’ x 30’, used to house slaves being shipped to auction, Mason Co. Kentucky National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati, OH

Shackle ring in 2nd floor joist
The Slave Trade

TO BE SOLD,
On the 3rd day of August, 1769,
A CARGO of
Ninety-Four
Prime, Healthy
NEGROES,
Consisting of
Thirty-nine Men, Fifteen Boys,
Twenty-four Women, and
Sixteen Girls.
Just arrived
In the Brigantine Dembia, Francis Barc, Master, from Sierra-
Leone, by
David & John Deas.

Ranaway
FROM the Subscriber
some months past, a Negro Man named
GEORGE,
a Carpenter by trade, well known in and
about Roseau, and the Country—A reasonable reward will be given for his apprehension.
September 13,
DOMINICA

WILLIAM BOYD.

One of the many notices in the local press at that time advertising rewards for the return of Maroons.
Slave Rebellions - The Maroons

- Active in 18th and 19th Centuries
- Waged guerilla war against British and French on Dominica
- Controlled interior of island
- Dominica a center of activity and refuge for slaves from other islands
British take control of Dominica

- First captured Dominica 1762
- Recaptured by French
- Admiral George Rodney won the Battle of The Saintes, 1782
Free ‘people of colour’ promenade on the outskirts of Roseau during the 1780s. By 1813 there were 3,111 free coloured people in Dominica and only 1,261 whites. These mainly French families were the ancestors of the influential merchants and planters of the twentieth century. From an oil painting by Agostino Brunias. (Courtesy Mark Gilbey.)
Dominican dancers in the eighteenth century.

Bellaire Dance, Dominica B. W. I.

A fascinating comparison can be made of these two pictures (above). One was drawn in the 1780s by Agostino Brunias, the other is a photograph of 1910. In spite of being 130 years apart they show an identical scene of Bellaire dancing.
Citrus

- Slaves freed on Dominica in 1834
- By 1880 sugar industry went into decline
- Lime industry started by British in 18th century
- Royal Navy needed limes to prevent scurvy
- Some export of citrus from Dominica through the 1990’s
The Banana Industry

- Developed on Dominica in 1950’s
- Mostly for European market
- GEEST corporation
- Formerly, price protected by European Union
- “yellow gold”
- Small family farms on Dominica
Dominican Culture

• Mixture of French and English influences
• Native language is Creole (Kwényòl)
  – French vocabulary
  – West African grammatical structure
• 95% of population is Catholic
• Educational and political systems on English model
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>French Occupation</th>
<th>Present Status</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>1667</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>5,500,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guadeloupe</td>
<td>1635</td>
<td>Departement</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinique</td>
<td>1635</td>
<td>Departement</td>
<td>375,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>1650</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>1650</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayenne</td>
<td>1637</td>
<td>Departement</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunion</td>
<td>1663</td>
<td>Departement</td>
<td>500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>1721</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>1770</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodrigues</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>Dependency of Mauritius</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>1698</td>
<td>USA (State)</td>
<td>20,000 ?</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**TOTAL** 8,220,000

*Approx. Number of Speakers in Diaspora 2,780,000*
Dominican Culture
Traditional Dress

Traditional dress illustration with labels:
- **Tete mawe**
- **gard zowiei**
- **mouche vanille**
- **chemise decollotée**
- **portes bonheur**
- **Jupe**
- **jupon or cotillon**

Text explains:
- Che mwe ouvé.
  - My heart is free.
- Che mwe engage mais ou sa pon yon chance.
  - My heart is engaged but you can take a chance.
- Che mwe pon deja.
  - My heart is already taken.
- Mwe ni yon place pou tout yo ki vie mwe.
  - I have a place for whoever desires.

The number of points or Pitons on the headtie carried a message from the wearer to any of her admirers.
Creole Names
Kai Kweol

Partition open at top for air circulation. Fancy fretwork for privacy and decoration.

Hip roof best against hurricane.

Rafters:
- Angellin (Anodina inermis)
- Caconier

Main posts and beams:
- Balata (Mimusops)
- Carapite
- Amanoa (Gribbana)

Jalousie windows and strong hurricane shutters.

Beams:
- Bwa lezard (Vitex dianaricata)
- Laurier caca (Guettarda parviflora)

Hurricane buttress posts: "prap".

Stakes and piles: "Bideau" (Pillar trees)
- Mang rouge (Rizophora mangle)
- Mang blanc (Acouquoi)
- Laurier bord-demer etc.

Laths for shingles:
- Bwa Riviere (Chimarris cymosa)
- Bwa lezard

Shingles:
- Caconier (Gomosia dasycarpa)
- Bwa lezard

Roof must be steep for quick water runoff.

Verandah roof separate. It can blow off without taking main roof.

Bamboo or board guttering.

Earthenware jar (je) for cool drinking water.

Boards:
- Bwa Bande (Chiona galba)
- Bwa Riviere (Chimarris cymosa)
- Bwa Sept-ans (Melosma sp.)
- Noyer (Zanthoxylum tragodes)
MAKING A CANOE

Felling Gommier (Dacryodes hexandra)

Old days: Fire and stone axe
Today: Axe or chainsaw

Shape and dig-out or fouyay the trunk using axe and adz.

Canoe called along joint with plantain straw or cotton lint soaked in mixture of shark oil and powdered gum boiled together

Outboard motors now replace sail

Opening the canoe with boulders and water inside. Heat from fire outside.

PWI-PWI
Rafts of Bwa Canot and Bwa Flo for inshore fishing.

Calm West Coast Pwi-Pwi

Rough North & East Coast Pwi-Pwi

La bot or Santwa
Originally made in Les Saintes, La bot is used in the north from Portsmouth to Marigot

rowed pouyay (white oar)
bordage (Gommier)
tachets
pulling on bordage, tachets, and nowed
Fishing

**OFF ROCKS**
- tanche, lipi, ciwizien, cibouli, valiwa

**SHORE NET**
- sardines
- pisquet
- caiyee

**AROUND ROCKS**
- chadron - sea egg
- chatou - octopus, chaloup, lambi (further out)
- bugou, sea moss - for drink

**FISHPOT**
- vivaneau
- guan gel
- pag etc.

**SEIN**
- balaou
- zorfi
- jacks

**INSHORE**
- pirame
- bouse
- cawange
- vyay
- vivanneau
- vive
- zorwe-hwe
- paj
- gwand-guel

**EN CANAL**
- volant
- ton
- dowad
- weche-
- vawe-
- me-
- taza
Jing Ping Band

Boom-boom gwage, Tambal or Tambou, Accordion
Popular Music on Dominica

- Zouk – French Islands and West African
- Reggae - Jamaica, originally “ska”, “rock-steady”
- Latin music - Cuba and the Dominica Republic
  - Meringue, cumbia, rumba, son, bolero etc.
- Calypso, Soca - originally carnival music from Trinidad
Educational System

- European or British Model
- Students take standardized exams that determine future options
- Two year college in Roseau
- Many excellent science students
Political System

- Crown Colony of Great Britain until 3 Nov. 1978
- Now Commonwealth Country
- President elected by House of Assembly
- Cabinet of Ministers elected by Prime Minister
Three Major Parties

• Freedom Party (green)
  – First Prime Minister, Mary Eugenia Charles
  – Conservative, represents the establishment
• Labour Party (red)
  – Leftist
• United Workers Party (blue)
  – Represents business interests

Prime Minister Eugenia Charles inspecting a detachment of the Defence Force on 24 July 1980, the day after taking office. She was already aware of the animosity among senior officers against her.
Current Government

• Labour Party
  – Coalition with Freedom Party
• Prime Minister: Hon. Roosevelt Skerrit
• President: His Excellency, Hon. Charles Savarin
• Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries: Hon. Johnson Drigo

Prime Minister,
Hon. Roosevelt Skerrit
Mas Dominik
Dominica’s Carnival
“The Real Mas!”

- Dominica's Carnival, held at the traditional pre-lenten time, is a feast of calypso, shows and two exciting days of street jump-up. Carnival is formally opened about a month before the two final days of jump-up.

- “Téwé Vaval”, practiced in Dublanc and in Carib Territory
  - Afternoon of Ash Wednesday
  - Effigies of Vaval are made of old clothes, stuffed with fiber, with cardboard masks
  - paraded and burned at sunset to mark the end of Carnival and beginning of Lent
Dominica Carnival 2016

Calypso Monarch: 
King Dice

Miss Dominica 2016: 
Tasia Flossiac

Dominica Carnival 2016
Another Carnival in Colihaut
Bann Mové Musicians

The Musicians
Oldest Person in the World?

- Mrs. Elizabeth “Ma Pampo” Israel
- Born January 27, 1875
- Passed away on October 14, 2003
- Daughter of former slaves
- Went to school until age 12, then worked as a laborer
- In later life, lived in Glanvillia, just south of Portsmouth
- Her next-door neighbor, Mrs. Rose Peters, died at the age of 118
- In 2000 there were over 20 centenarians in Dominica (four were living close to Mrs. Israel)
Tévé Vaval

- “Tévé Vaval”, practiced in Dublanc and in Carib Territory
- Afternoon of Ash Wednesday
- Effigies of Vaval are made of old clothes, stuffed with fiber, with cardboard masks
- paraded and burned at sunset to mark the end of Carnival and beginning of Lent