

## Unit 1: Who is "Caribbean?"



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## Introduction

### Who is Caribbean?

The answer may differ depending on who you ask. The region known as the Caribbean consists of Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; Aruba; Bahamas; Barbados; Bonaire; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Cuba; Curaçao; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Grenada; Guadeloupe; Haiti; Jamaica; Martinique; Montserrat; Puerto Rico; Saba; Saint Barthélemy; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Martin; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Sint Eustatius; Trinidad and Tobago; Turks and Caicos Islands; and United States Virgin Islands.

Other people may further categorize the region into “the Greater Antilles” and “the Lesser Antilles.” The Greater Antilles comprises Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. The Lesser Antilles includes Anguilla, Barbuda, Antigua, Guadeloupe, Trinidad and Tobago, Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao.

Other definitions of the Caribbean also include the South American countries of Belize, Suriname, Guyana, and French Guiana due to their historical and cultural connections to the islands (Sunshine and Warner 3). Regardless of what definition is used, it is important to recognize that although there are similarities between the islands, the Caribbean is a diverse region with contrasting histories, politics, languages, cultures, and economies.

### Where did the Caribbean people originate from?

Years before the Spanish arrived in the Caribbean in 1492, indigenous people from Central and South America migrated to the region. One of the first inhabitants were the hunter-gatherer Ciboneys who lived in the Northern tips of Cuba and Hispaniola (Rogozinski 14). After the Ciboneys came the peaceful farming Arawak community who primarily inhabited the Bahamas, Greater Antilles, and Trinidad & Tobago. One of the most known Arawak communities—especially those from the Greater Antilles—are the Taíno. The Taínos were the principal inhabitants of Cuba, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Puerto Rico. One of the last groups native to the Caribbean were the Carib. These were fearless warriors who raided Arawak settlements and forced them to move north. As a result, they took over the Lesser Antilles and Northwest tip of Trinidad.

### Colonization in the Caribbean

By 1492, Christopher Columbus—in an attempt to find a new route to Asia—landed in the Caribbean. Setting their eyes on gold, Columbus and his men enslaved the natives and forced them to “dig up a set amount of gold,” (Rogozinski 26). Quickly, the Spanish realized that there was little gold to be found causing them to turn to sugarcane. Sugarcane was an easy crop to grow in the region and led to a great amount of wealth for the European landowners. At its height, the Caribbean islands supplied 80 to 90 percent of the sugar consumed by Western Europeans (Rogozinski). Since sugarcane became the primary export, profit-driven colonists had the incentive to continuously grow sugarcane, however they encountered one obstacle: the death of Caribbean natives. The once populous indigenous communities were killed off due to diseases and poor living conditions. The Spanish were not the only ones to treat the indigenous

inhumanely—so did France, Holland, and England. The treatment of these indigenous communities was consistent throughout the region, nearly causing the extinction of Caribbean indigenous peoples. Consequently, these countries needed to find another source of forced labor which they found among the African slaves. Many of the imported slaves were taken from West Africa as part of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Concerned with sugar profits and seeing that slaves were essential with keeping up with the demand, European powers continued to forcibly import 5 million enslaved Africans to the Caribbean.

### Resistance and Rebellion in the Caribbean

Resistance took on several forms in the Caribbean. There was everyday resistance performed by slaves whose goal was not to topple the institution of slavery, but reduce its efficiency. An example of this would be runaway slaves who, despite creating communities of refuge, would also collaborate with the Europeans to bring back escaped enslaved people in order to keep their autonomy. Other forms of resistance actively sought to dismantle the institution of slavery such as slave rebellions which were numerous in Haiti.

In exerting their own agency, many slaves would run away from the plantations. These runaway slaves were known as maroons (or quilombos in Portuguese) and would create separate African communities which served as a refuge for those escaping slavery. These communities survived for many years by living in areas that had dense brush or high up in the mountains so no one could find them. The maroons were prominent in Jamaica and Saint-Domingue (present day Haiti) until the 1700s when it became increasingly difficult for them to exist due to the expansion of the sugar plantations.

Slaves who were unable to escape to a maroon community yet dreamed of freedom rebelled directly on the plantations. Compared to the U.S., slave rebellions were very frequent in the Caribbean and involved the participation of hundreds of thousands of slaves. Haiti became the first black republic in the Western Hemisphere due to a series of slave revolts occurring in the 1790s.

By the 1800s, the colonial powers began to abolish slavery causing plantation owners to seek other forms of forced labor. They turned to indentured servants from India, China, and elsewhere from South Asia. This mixture of descendants from Africa, India, and South Asia has resulted in a diverse community within the Caribbean who speak different languages, have different customs, and contrasting histories.

### **Bibliography**

- Rogoziński, Jan. *A Brief History of the Caribbean : From the Arawak and the Carib to the Present*. Revised edition., Plume, 2000.
- Sunshine, Catherine A., and Deborah Menkart, editors. *Jamaica. Teaching for Change*, 1991.
- Sunshine, Cathy, and Keith Q. Warner, editors. *Caribbean Connections: Moving North. Network of Educators on the Americas*, 1998.

### **Objectives**

Students will...

- Be able to locate the Caribbean islands on a map
- Recognize indigenous presence in the Caribbean
- Trace the history of slavery/forced labor on the islands and how it has impacted the current demographics

### **Essential Questions**

- In what ways do the various definitions of “Caribbean” differ from each other?
- How has the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade affected the Caribbean?
- How have Caribbean slaves resisted and rebelled?

### **Activities**

[Activity #1](#): Find These Countries

[Activity #2](#): Analyzing Maroon Art

[Activity #3](#): The Haitian Revolution

[Activity #4](#): Indentured Servants

### **Assessments**

- Class participation
- [Map Quiz](#)

### **UbD Template and Lesson Plan**

- [Lesson 1: Who is "Caribbean" Lesson Plan.docx](#)

### **Other Lesson Plans/Activities**

- [The National Archives Education Service - Resistance and Rebellion in the Caribbean](#)
- [Pierre Toussaint-L'Ouverture Leads a Slave Revolt in Haiti - Teaching with Primary Sources](#)
- [Caribbean Connections, Overview of Regional History and Classroom Resources.pdf](#)

### **Complementary Sources**

- Relevant Scholarship
  - Rogoziński, Jan. A Brief History of the Caribbean : From the Arawak and the Carib to the Present. Revised edition., Plume, 2000.
  - Sunshine, Catherine A., and Deborah Menkart, editors. Jamaica. Teaching for Change, 1991.
  - Sunshine, Catherine A., and Deborah Menkart, editors. Caribbean Connections: Overview of Regional History, Classroom Resources for Secondary Schools. Network of Educators on the Americas, 1991.
  - Sunshine, Cathy, and Keith Q. Warner, editors. Caribbean Connections: Moving North. Network of Educators on the Americas, 1998.
  - Williams, Eric. From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969

- Videos
  - [Haitian Revolutions: Crash Course World History #30](#)
- Film
  - Quilombo (1986) dir. Carlos Diegues
- Art
  - Paintings depicting enslaved people producing sugar in Antigua, 1823
    - <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/cutting-the-sugar-cane-antigua>
- Websites
  - [The Puerto Rico Citizenship Archives Project](#)
    - The Puerto Rico Citizenship Archives Project created by UConn Professor Charles R. Venator-Santiago.
  - [The Maroons of Jamaica | Black resistance against slavery](#)
  - [The Jamaican Maroons](#)
  - <https://www.bl.uk/west-india-regiment/articles/an-introduction-to-the-caribbean-empire-and-slavery>