

Jíbaros

Art of Puerto Rico

Rebecca Hinson

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Jíbaros are the Puerto Rican pioneers who live simply, caring for homeland and family. They cultivate foods and raise livestock of their Taíno, Spanish, and African ancestors. Jíbaros have withstood the ravages of earthquakes, hurricanes, and foreign rule with natural wisdom and determination. They are a symbol of Puerto Rican pride.



Ruled by Borikén caciques (chiefs), the Taíno people fished, hunted, and cultivated crops. Living in bohíos (dwellings made of straw and yagua palm), they played ballgames and danced to music of the maracas, flute, and güiro (notched hollowed-Out gourd).



In 1493, Christopher Columbus colonized the island for Spain, changing its name from Borikén to San Juan Bautista. Later, the name would change again to Puerto Rico (“rich port”.) In 1508, the first governor of the island, Juan Ponce de León, founded the first Spanish settlement. He parcelled out 500 acres to each European settler.



The Spanish believed that God had given them the right to seize Indian land and enslave native peoples. After the Spanish took their land, Cacique Agüeybana el Bravo said, “Let he who was born in Spain, return to Spain.” He and other caciques led many brave Taíno warriors into battle against the Spanish conquistadors.



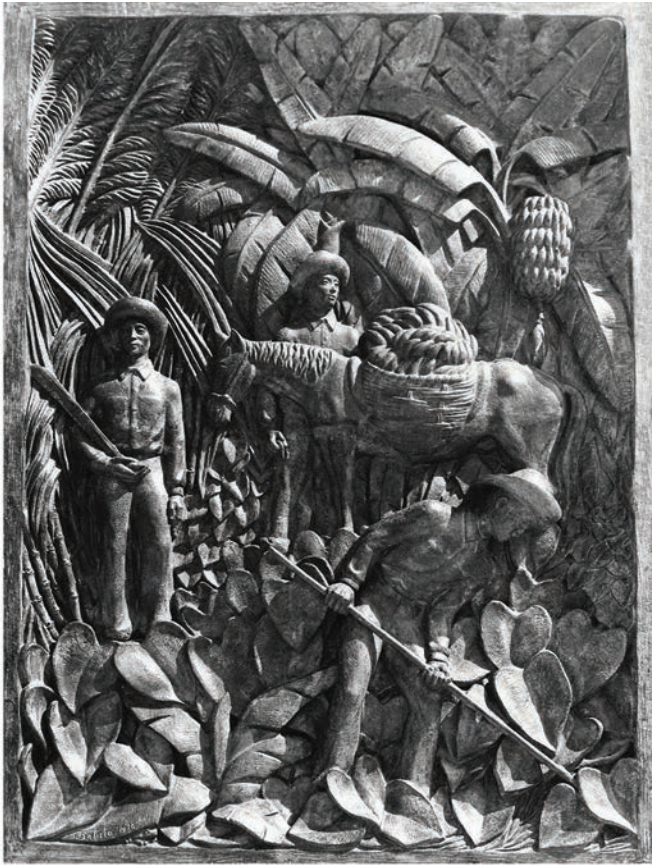
Within 25 years, most Taínos were captured or killed. The Spanish enslaved the remaining Taínos, forcing them to cultivate crops and mine for gold. The Spanish were excited by the existence of gold on the island, but only a small amount was found-- all within the first few years.



Native crops of the Taínos were pineapples, yuca, peppers, peanuts, guavas, cocoplums, pumpkins, palm tree fruit, beans, corn, tobacco, and cotton.



The Taínos made clay pottery and wove cloth. From gourds they carved güiros (above), utensils, and maracas.



The Spanish brought citrus fruit, wheat, garbanzos, onions, garlic, sugarcane, eggplant, horses, cattle, and pigs. On the island there were many marshes, gullies, and rivers to cross, and few roads. Horseback was the best means of transportation. Islanders quickly became accomplished riders.



As the Taínos and Spanish interbred, a new breed of islanders emerged. As a distinct culture the Taínos did not survive—eventually dying from harsh labor or European diseases.



In 1513, by Royal Spanish order, Africans were imported to replace the dwindling Taínos work force. Treated like livestock, slaves endured many cruelties. Slave codes gave sweeping powers to their masters.



Also imported from Africa were coconuts, plaintains, coffee, okra, yams, sesame seed, peas, and bananas. Plaintains became a mainstay of the islanders' diet: cooked as a vegetable, fried in the form of tostones, boiled in soup, and baked into bread for three daily meals.