**Celebrating Taino Bravery; Not European Pillaging**

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There is a long and painful history of genocides and carnage all across the Caribbean and in the Americas perpetrated by and in the name of European explorers. It is a history of initially fooling the native tribes into friendship and betraying them later with armies, guns and canons. It is also a history of forcefully snatching lands from underneath cultures as old as time and violently turning the rightful owners into slaves who would now live to provide endless unpaid labor over their own lands to European settlers. However, since the status quo has been dominated by certain sections of the global society for a very long time, it has become custom to confuse colonizing, plundering, slavery and mass extermination with conquests and global exploration. I wholeheartedly believe it is high time we shifted that tide to instead celebrate heroes who stood up for their communities and their people and demanded respect and humanity from the European handlers of death and destruction.

Exploring the global west was without question an unprecedented feat for the Europe of fifteenth century that was looking to consolidate empires and accumulate wealth. Soon it became clear that they did not care how the wealth was collected as long as it eventually drained into their pockets. It is therefore vital to understand the context and the aggressively materialistic intent behind the ‘global exploration’ that Europe and its people are so proud of. Although it is quite evident that the colonizers managed to successfully sell the carnage and the genocide as ‘discovering new lands’ and ‘civilizing’ the inhabitants of said newly discovered land. This statement, in itself, is a contradiction. Discovering new land must mean that the land does not originally belong to anyone. Yet the need for civilizing it must only arise if a community is already settled on it. The only available explanation to the whole world going along with this is the fact that the European settlers economically ended up on the better side of the history and therefore chose which way to tell it.

The documentary that we saw challenges several of these notions. However, the primary idea that it successfully challenges is the image of European explorers that the global west has still managed to uphold. The current image of the face of European expeditions to the new world and the leader ‘explorer’, Christopher Columbus is a living testimony to this fabrication of history and erasure of cultures. Columbus is still hailed as the master voyager who ‘discovered’ America. He is revered and remembered as a hero for Americans and as the founder of the culture and the tradition that made America. The documentary shatters that image and presents the side of history that has been diligently covered up with lies and distractions. No one from Europe discovered America or the islands on the Caribbean because it was not theirs to discover. Similar to the Taino people who already inhabited and sustainably flourished on the islands of modern-day Haiti and Dominican Republic, the indigenous people of the Americas were also the rightful owners and inhabitants of the lands that were violently taken from them.

Once it can be agreed upon that the documentary and several others like it serve the purpose of carving a new and a more historically accurate image of the European explorers, we can move on to the alternate heroes that the documentary provides. It describes the explorers as deceitful plunderers and therefore eliminates any perception of heroism attached to them. However, it does not leave the position empty and provides us with better alternatives to remember and cherish. Rather than Columbus and his crew of pillagers, it is more morally justifiable to instead remember the heroes of the tribes who fought Columbus.

The documentary narrates the account of the Paramount Chief of one region of the island: Waka Nagiri. He is shown to be unexceptionally hospitable to the European voyagers who were in trouble and needed help. He is also shown as a humble leader who did manual labor with his people. Their kindness and generosity had only resulted in Columbus getting fixated on their gold. The inherent entitlement of the European settlers who automatically believed it was their birthright to snatch lands from their inhabitants is shown in stark contrast with the Taino people of Hispaniola who had so wholeheartedly welcomed Columbus into their home. Waka Nagiri is later mentioned as having fled into the mountains when the Spanish army enslaved his people and mercilessly murdered his subjects. It still takes nothing away from his beneficence and his magnanimity towards the Europeans when they were in need of his help and his food.

However, the true Taino hero of this story who literally emerges from the ashes of slain Taino leaders is Enrique. He witnessed his father being fooled into a meeting with the Europeans who had only intended to kill the leaders while they were all present under one roof. He had also witnessed the fire that ate away one of the last hopes of the otherwise enslaved Taino people. This meant that although Enrique was taken away from his home and raised by Spanish missionaries, his bond with his own identity and the identity of his people was unbroken. The strength and the pride of his Taino identity was spurred by the savage actions of his Spanish ‘master’ and Enrique went on to lead a well-maintained rebellion against the Spanish colonizers for over a decade.

Therefore I sincerely hold on to the belief that instead of celebrating plunderers and murderers like Christopher Columbus, we should focus instead on celebrating people like the Taino hero Enrique.