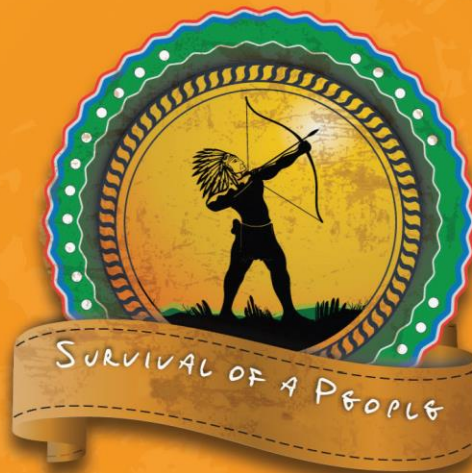




# RE-IGNITING THE ANCESTRAL FIRES:

HERITAGE, TRADITIONS, AND LEGACIES  
OF THE FIRST PEOPLES



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The University of Trinidad and Tobago Press

First edition in Trinidad and Tobago, 2017.

Published by:

The University of Trinidad and Tobago Press  
Wrightson Road,  
Port of Spain,  
Trinidad and Tobago,  
W.I.

The Santa Rosa First Peoples' Community of Arima,  
No. 7 Paul Mitchell Street,  
Arima,  
Trinidad and Tobago,  
W.I.

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Cover design and book layout by Jason Windsor  
Cover logo by Kevin Solomon

ISBN: 978-976-95786-2-3

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# Foreword

The Santa Rosa First Peoples' Community is the only organized area demonstrative of the Amerindian/First Peoples' survival in Trinidad and Tobago. This area, according to carbon dating of recent archaeological findings, was inhabited from as far back as 5,000 BC. It was formally recognised as representative of the indigenous peoples of the twin-island State by the national government in 1990.

The Santa Rosa First Peoples Community initially conceived of an International Conference in June 2013 with themes that would document the legacy of the First Peoples of the region. With members of the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago holding the Chair of the Caribbean Organization of Indigenous Peoples (COIP), the idea was presented to the wider body and unanimously approved. It was also agreed that the conference would form part of the First Peoples' Heritage Week in Trinidad in October 2013. The proposal was then presented to Hon. Clifton De Coteau, former Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration and his permanent secretary who agreed to the venture. With this Ministry's backing, the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) was then approached for its support for the physical and intellectual resources to ensure a successful conference.

This International Conference marked the launch of the 13th Annual Santa Rosa First Peoples Community's Heritage Week. Thirteen years before, in 2000, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had officially designated 14th October as a 'Day of Recognition', for it was on this date in 1637 that the Nepuyo Chief Hyarima [Hierryima], having escaped from a Spanish encomienda, mustered his native warriors and with the help of the Dutch already camping in Tobago, ransacked and burned the Spanish

Capital of Trinidad, San José de Oruña [St Joseph], forcing the Spanish colonisers to retreat temporarily. It was indeed a daring and valorous act of a brave and bold nationalist leader, the first in the recorded history of Trinidad. This date of 14th October is therefore of special significance in the history of Kairi, renamed Trinidad by the Genoese navigator Christopher Columbus.

The system of the *encomienda* was introduced by the Spanish Crown as a way to transform the indigenous way of life into a Spanish imperialist one, by providing a Spanish colonialist legal title to land and guardianship over a large group of the native population. The *encomienda* forcibly converted Trinidad's First Peoples to Roman Catholicism and made them suffer the indignities of serfdom and prosecution. This European-derived exploitation and annihilation of indigenous culture increased after the 1797 British conquest of Trinidad.

Under the administration of the Hon. A.N.R Robinson's National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) government, in 1990 the State finally acknowledged the presence of the First Peoples' (Carib) Community of Arima as representative of the First Peoples' of Trinidad and Tobago and provided them with an annual subvention of \$30,000.00 for the celebrations of their rituals and festivals. Then in year 2000, the Hon. Basdeo Panday, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, finally granted the 'Day of Recognition' to the First Peoples of Santa Rosa of Arima in recognition of Chief Hyarima's daring campaign and major assault of the Spanish Capital of St Joseph.

The International Conference of October 14th had a two-fold aim: first, to correct false notions and information handed down by Eurocentric narratives and second, to re-adjust these perspectives for future generations and posterity. With great pride, I therefore join with the Community's Queen Jennifer Cassar, and Pyai Cristo Adonis, in offering this publication

“Reigniting the Ancestral Fires”, as a body of information that reflects and forms part of the history and Legacy of the First Peoples Community of Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and the Americas. It is a vital tool in our journey towards greater recognition and development.

**Ricardo Bharath Hernandez**  
**Chief and President**  
**Santa Rosa first Peoples Community of Arima.**



# Preface and Acknowledgements

On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2013, delegates and participants from the USA, India, Belize, Guyana, Suriname, St Vincent, Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago celebrated the joint formal inauguration of an International Conference and the launch of the *Heritage Week* of the Santa Rosa First Peoples community of Trinidad and Tobago. The conference derived its theme from the overall theme for the celebration of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Heritage Week of activities 2013 entitled: *Exploring Heritage, Consolidating Traditions and Creating a Legacy*.

The audience comprising invited guests from all sectors of society; political and religious leaders, spiritualists, nature lovers, artists, researchers and students, showcased a glittering array of colours, attractive First Peoples' costumes and mesmerizing sounds. The Conference venue - the Atrium of the Administrative building, the Head Office of The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) - was transformed into a living museum of ancient artefacts, alongside living aspects of First Peoples' ceremonial attire, musical instruments, arts and crafts, all against a backdrop of décor that reflected the aesthetics and soul of the First Peoples. UTT's President, Prof Dyer Narinesingh, commented appreciatively on the inaugural evening of the conference, particularly on the artistic décor which transformed the University's Atrium.

This First Major International Conference, organized by the Santa Rosa First Peoples' Community, Arima, Trinidad for the purpose of deliberating on matters affecting and related to The First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and the Americas was convened from the 11th to 13th October 2013 at the UTT. The idea of an International Conference was conceived at a planning meeting of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community in June 2013. It was then massaged, crystalized and proposed to the Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration (MND&SI) Hon. Clifton De Coteau, and subsequently to the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). The proposal was intended to coincide

with the end of the UN decade of First Peoples and the Trinidad and Tobago's Chairmanship of the Caribbean Organization of Indigenous Peoples (COIP). The overall response to this proposal was very favourable. With support from The MND&SI and the UTT, and its officers on the Conference Steering Committee, the conference themes, logistics and a static exhibition were mounted.

The three-day international assembly reflected a unique blend of academia and the arts. Historians, anthropologists, sociologists and economists presented their research to the diverse audience. Artists and spiritualists, Peyais and shamans, made oral presentations on the culture and belief systems of the First Peoples of the region, their music, poetry, dance, chants, water and fire rituals and smoke ceremonies.

The conference panels were all reflective of the overall theme of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community's week long celebrations 2013. The panels covered the following sub-themes:

- i. Indigenous World Views, Spirituality, Rituals and Festivals
- ii. Governance and Politics: Historical Perspectives
- iii. Culture & Natural Environment
- iv. Governance & Politics: Contemporary Perspectives
- v. Youth, Gender and Elders of the First Peoples Communities
- vi. Arts, Crafts, Cuisine and Wear: Exhibition and Technique

A total of 40 presenters, and more than one hundred collaborators, many of whom were themselves First Peoples - or who traced their ancestry to First Peoples - along with other researchers and scholars engaged one another and their audiences in expounding on historical, traditional and heritage matters. They debated contemporary issues; and advanced new perspectives for the future directions of the First Peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas. Archaeological artefacts and other exhibits displayed at this conference also provided support to the debates. Of special significance in this exhibition were artefacts of archaeologist, the late Peter Harris, recovered from the Banwarie Trace excavations in Penal, Trinidad. Carbon dating of these artefacts has proven that this land of Kairi was inhabited by First Peoples even before 5000 BC.

The conference presenters came from several Universities in the Caribbean and North America including City University of New York

(CUNY), University of the West Indies (UWI) and UTT. There were not less than 50 delegates from First Peoples in the Caribbean alone; Guyana, Suriname, Belize, Dominica, St. Vincent and Trinidad and Tobago. The Conference programme, presenters and participants shared in-depth research and engaged in animated and serious discussions on issues of far-reaching implications to First Peoples' communities. The Conference presentations explored several aspects of a heritage nature, consolidated unique features of traditions and advanced proposals for the creation of a lasting legacy for the First Peoples of the region.

A significant deviation of this conference from other conferences was the inclusion of two (2) panels, one on each day, which addressed the exhibition and techniques of some of the indigenous performative traditions on Arts, Crafts, Cuisine, attire, vocal and instrumental music (including drumming) and dances. These interactive sessions were both informative and entertaining. A static exhibition, mounted at the conference venue included displays of artefacts, crafts, fabrics, and aspects of interior décor using indigenous materials, colours and hues.

At the closing session of the three-day event, the delegates debated and unanimously approved a series of conference resolutions. The resolutions, photographs of conference exhibits and other conference highlights form part of this publication.

Over eight hundred people attended the event, making it one of the most successful First Peoples' outreach endeavours in the modern history of the Caribbean. An interesting feature of the event was the participation of teachers and students of the country's secondary schools with support from the Ministry of Education of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The conference registration, meals and refreshments were all sponsored by the UTT. The media coverage of the event was extensive and encouraging.

On the Day of Recognition on 14th October the conference foreign delegates assembled at the UTT conference venue, converted into an Amerindian Benab. In their respective tribal attire and distinctive musical celebratory chants they extended a ceremonial welcome to official dignitaries: local and foreign, members of the academic community, political, business and civil society leaders, headed by the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency Anthony Carmona. They celebrated with the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community this Day of

Recognition when their Nepuyo Chief Hyarima, with the help of others, burned the first Spanish capital city of St Joseph - San José de Oruna- in 1637. It was a fitting end to a successful conference gathering.

As initiator of the proposal, Chairman of the Conference Steering Committee and of the Editorial Committee, and on behalf of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community's Conference Advisory and Technical Team, I wish to publicly express appreciation to the Ministries, the various Agencies, the Business community and civil society for their support in this venture. These include but are not restricted to the former Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, and its Ministers, Mr. Clifton De Coteau and later Dr Roger Samuel; the Permanent Secretary, Jacinta Sobers Bailey and her successor; The University of Trinidad and Tobago - the Provost, the Business Development Unit Sandra Ganness and her officers of the Corporate Communications Unit and Ms Lana Allard, Administrative head of the Academy for Arts, Letters, Culture and Public Affairs. Thanks are also expressed to the public and private supporters, including the business community. Special mention must be made of Arima businessman Mr. Baliram Maharaj who injected the first sum into this project, one year before the event, as venture capital for the planning of the overall week of celebrations. The media, particularly the Sunday Guardian and the Government Information Service (Channel 4); other members of civil society and 'Friends of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community' all contributed significantly to the success of this event.

I also express sincere appreciation to the Members of the Conference Steering Committee for the planning and successful execution of the event and to the successor Editorial Committee for providing their time, experience and expertise, gratis, in editing this volume. Thanks also to Shane Pantin for editorial assistance. The Editorial team comprises Professor Emeritus Brinsley Samaroo, Dr Armando Garcia de la Torre (UWI), Professor Hollis Liverpool (UTT), and Dr. Patricia Belcon (Medgar Evars College, CUNY).

Sincere thanks are also extended to the UTT for demonstrating confidence in the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community and in me to Chair both the planning and implementation process and then the Editorial Committee for this successful International Conference entitled: "*Exploring Heritage, Consolidating Traditions and Creating a Legacy*".

Finally on behalf of Queen Jennifer Cassar, Chief Ricardo Bharath

Hernandez and the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community of Arima, the editorial team, and on my own behalf I express sincere gratitude to Professor Emeritus Kenneth Julien (the current Chairman of the Board of Governors of UTT) for facilitating this publication.

I trust that this volume of Conference Papers provides you the researcher and reader with an additional insight and knowledge into the history, sociology and cultural practices of the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean region and the Americas. It has been our honour and privilege to package and present this publication.

**Satnarine Balkaransingh**  
**Chair,**  
**Conference Planning Committee**  
**Conference Proceedings**  
**Editorial Committee**  
**September 2017**

