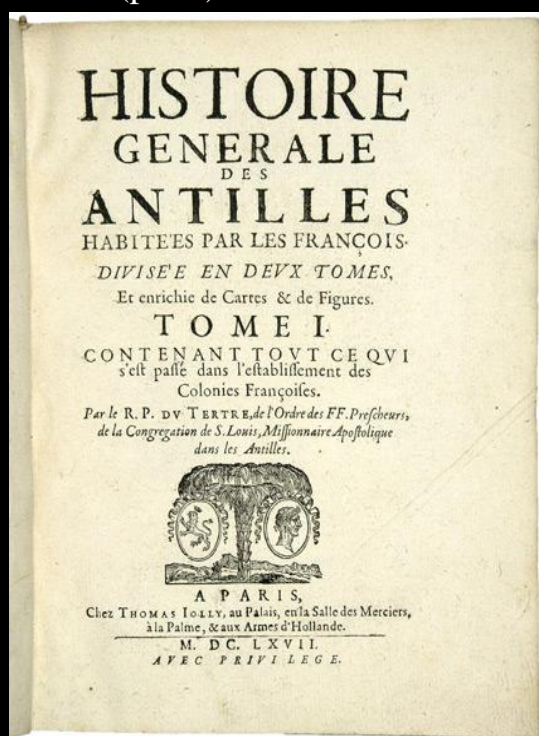


# THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL and Dominica's first Catholics. Part II by Bernard Lauwyck



Roseau Cathedral stained glass window with mitre and crosier

In the previous article we found that up to the present time, misconceptions about the Kalinago are propagated: James A. Michener's "Caribbean", a 1990 bestseller, states "*The heritage of the Caribs was brutality, warfare and little else*". (p. 11).



Another French missionary of the Preachers order (Dominican friar) Jean Baptiste DuTertre would have been very upset with Mr. Michener's harsh judgement and dismissal. In his "Histoire Générale des Antilles habitués par les François" Friar Du Tertre writes on the Kalinago :

*"They have good reasoning, and a mind as subtle as could be found among people who have no smattering of letters at all, and who have never been refined and polished by the human sciences, which often, while refining our minds, fill them for us with malice; and I can say in all truth that if our Savages are more ignorant than us, so they are much less vicious, even indeed that almost all the malice they do know is taught them by us French."*

Father du Tertre (1610-1687) based his writings on his 18 years in the French West Indies, from 1640 to 1658, and published his work in 1667.

Based on the Kalinago in Dominica, he introduced the concept of “Noble Savage” from his long time experience in the islands, Man in their natural state, as he describes it, free from the corrupting influences of civilization and I translate from French:

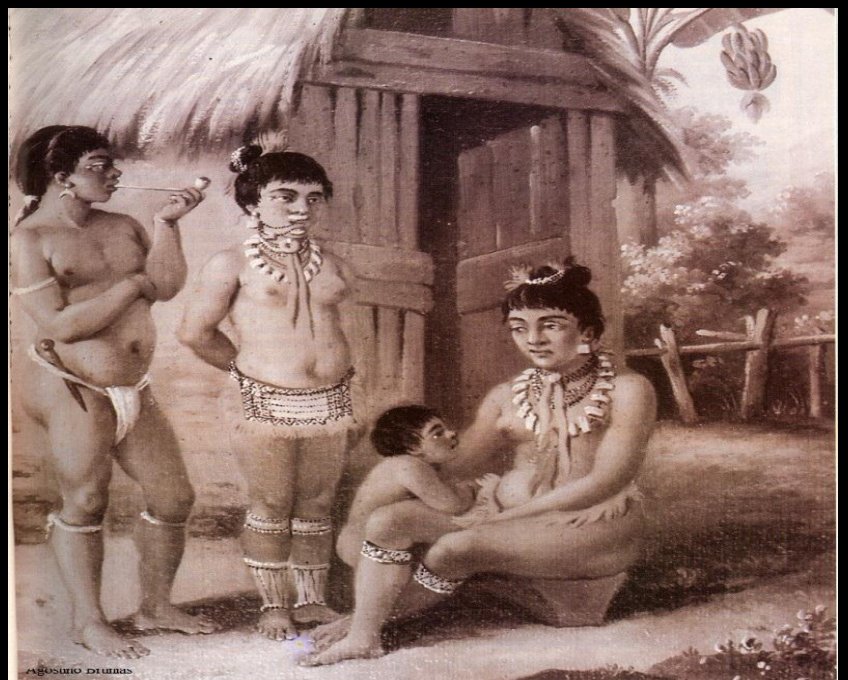
“ *Man in the pure state of nature*

*The savages of these islands are the most contented, less vicious, the most sociable, less artificial and have less sickness than all the nations in the world because they are one with nature, living with a great simplicity and natural innocence. They are all equal and do not know master or servant, poor or rich and only take from nature what is absolutely necessary to survive... They do not have any clothing except what nature gave them. (Histoire générale des Antilles, Paris, Jolly, 1667)*

This concept of the "noble savage", based on the writings of the first missionaries (on the Kalinago of Dominica) was greatly expanded by famous philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who saw a fundamental divide between society and human nature.

While the French missionary, limited by the Christian concept of “original sin”, could call no man free of evil, the French philosopher Rousseau had no such constraints and contended that man was good by nature when in the state of nature (which is the state of all the other animals). This was the condition of humankind before the corruption by civilization and society.

“ Many other Enlightenment philosophers were profoundly influenced by the work of the missionaries. Indeed Jean-Jacques Rousseau used du Tertre's characterization of the Caribs as "noble savages" as a point of departure in his writings on human nature and society” (Wild Majesty: encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the present day: an anthology by Peter Hulme & Neil . Whitehead 1992) .



**Agostino Brunias' Carib family around 1780**

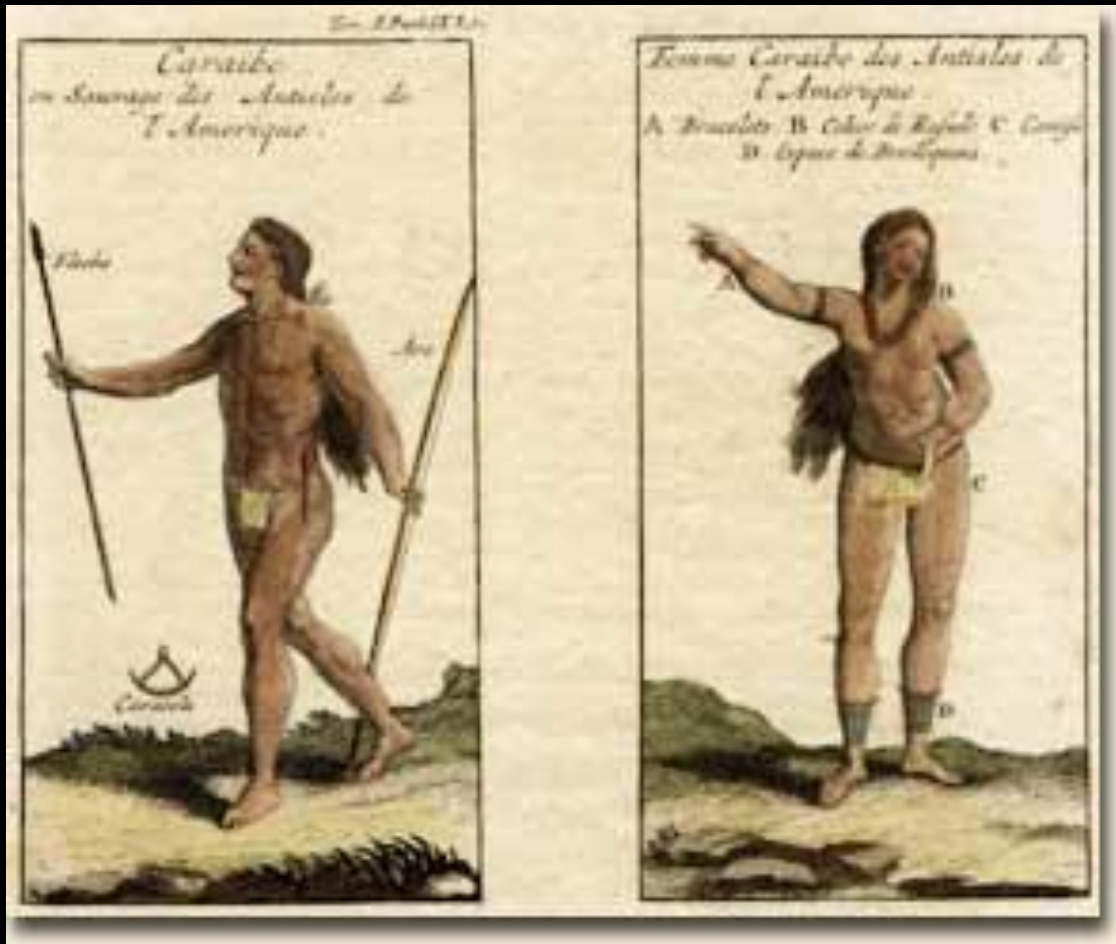
Ideas developed from interaction with the Kalinago of Dominica, inspired Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was the main philosophical force behind the ideas of the French revolution. His main idea can be summed up in the first line of his most famous work “Le *Social Contract*” (1762): “Man is born free, but everywhere is in chains”

In turn, the ideas of the French Revolution inspired the slave revolts in the islands and the revolution that led to Haitian independence from the colonial rule of

France. Jean-Jacques Rousseau ideas had a major influence on Toussaint L'Ouverture, the main architect and driving force behind the Haitian struggle.

Dominica influences the world, the world influences the region.

### Yes, Dominica was the “Land of the Brave”.



A lot more is available on the life style of the Kalinago in original French documents (Labat, Breton, Du Tertre )on Google books and I encourage students to take up this topic. Dr. Honychurch did his doctoral anthropology thesis on the topic of 500 years of Kalinago history and archaeology at Oxford. Dr.Helen Seaman did her doctorate on Kalinago history at UWI, Rev. Fr. Vanty Auguste C.Ss.R. did his Master of Theology thesis on Family Ministry among the Kalinago and now, Mr. Cozier Frederick of the Kalinago Territory is doing his Masters on Kalinago history of the Territory at the University of the West Indies. And there is more research to be done!!

In the next article, we will look at another group of early Catholics in Dominica, the group that visitor Jean Baptiste Labat did not care to report about: the early French settlers of Dominica.

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