

Cultural Diversity in the Caribbean

The Caribbean is a group of islands and mainland territories that is located south of North America, north of South America and east of Central America. This arrangement of beautiful islands and mainland territories is known worldwide because of its vibrant and colourful culture which is as a result of cultural diversity. This, therefore, highlights the fact that Caribbean societies are influenced by cultural diversity, and it is this fact, that gives the Caribbean its unique identity.

Cultural diversity refers to the variety of ethnic groups, such as Indians, Africans, Chinese and Europeans that exist within the Caribbean society and the particular ways of life manifested by each group. The cultural diversity of this region has resulted from colonization of the Europeans in the fifteenth century, the forced migration of the Africans between the mid- seventeenth to nineteenth century, and the voluntary migration of the Asians in the nineteenth century.

Each ethnic group brought with them their traditional practices, for example the Indians brought their traditional foods such as curry and other spices, and the Africans brought their religious practices such as voodoo. These practices by the ethnic groups have all been incorporated to create what is known as the “Caribbean Culture”. In other words, as a result of cultural diversity, we have developed our own unique identity which is associated only with the Caribbean.

Cultural diversity has influenced the society greatly, as it has played a major role on the creation of our Caribbean cuisine. For example, the curry brought to us by the Indians has been incorporated with various local foods to create sumptuous dishes.

Traditional medicines, which are widely used throughout the Caribbean, have resulted from cultural diversity. Traditional medicine is the terminology used to refer to different herbs and other substances which are used for healing purposes by the different ethnic groups. This cultural tradition has had a major influence on, especially the rural areas, of each Caribbean territory. For example, 'bushy' is a herbaceous plant which is widely used by Jamaicans for the ailment, ptomaine poison. In St. Lucia, "eddoes" or cocoa, which is an edible root, is used as a blood thickener when it is crushed and boiled in soup.

Our traditional music, such as 'Mento' in Jamaica, was brought by the Africans and 'Hindi music' and 'chutney' in Trinidad and Guyana was brought by the Indians. The rhythms and beats from these traditional music have been remodelled to create music which is uniquely our own, such as Reggae in Jamaica and Soca in Trinidad. This has influenced the Caribbean greatly as it said that music is life and Caribbean people strive on music. The Caribbean music also helped to boost the tourism economy. The Caribbean depends heavily on tourism and so their music especially Reggae, has placed the Caribbean "on the map".

Religion plays a major role in the Caribbean and these religions are too, as a result of cultural diversity. Hinduism and Islam are prevalent religions which are practiced in Trinidad and Guyana, and were brought to the Caribbean by the Indians. Christianity which is the most prevalent religion, was introduced by the Europeans and Voodoo and Pocomania were brought by the Africans, and is widely practiced in Jamaica and Haiti. Cultural diversity has also boost the tourism industry and so has an influence on the Caribbean economy. Foreigners are attracted to the dress, music and foods and so they visit the region each year to experience the Caribbean culture. Industries which showcase

the arts have also developed as a result of cultural diversity, for example the Craft Market Industry.

The Caribbean is therefore greatly influenced by cultural diversity as it not only provides us with an identity, it is incorporated in the everyday lives of people.