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The Historical Background to the Culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract

This paper examines the historical background to the present-day culture of violence in Trinidad and Tobago, with reference to the period from pre-Columbian times to the mid-twentieth century. After noting the horrific violence associated with initial Spanish colonization and the decimation of the indigenes, the paper goes on to examine the nature of enslavement and its links to coercion and brutalization of the enslaved people. After the formal end of slavery, the paper considers the system of indentured immigration, which, though less violent than enslavement, was nevertheless a harsh system of forced labour. Aspects of the history of Trinidad in the period between the 1830s and the 1940s, as they helped to shape an often violent culture and society, are considered, especially those relating to domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women. Finally, the social evolution of Tobago is examined, to show that by and large, that island had not developed a culture of violence comparable to that of Trinidad, at least up to the mid-twentieth century.

Key words: violence, slavery, indenture, Trinidad, Tobago