

Introduction:

Historians believe that the earliest peoples to settle the Western Hemisphere did so between 15,000 to 20,000 years ago. They were a set of people that were nomadic: always on the go in search of food and warmer climate. This is the reason, it is believed, they came across the Bering Strait during the winter when it formed a land bridge connecting Asia to Alaska.

Among these groups of early settlers were the -

1. Incas of Peru
2. Aztecs of Mexico
3. **Mayans** of Yucatan Peninsula (Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Northern Honduras and a part of Southern Mexico)
4. **Kalinagos** and the **Tainos** who occupied the Venezuela and the Guianas.

The CXC syllabus requires us to study the last three groups: the Mayans, Kalinagos and the Tainos. Because there was so much interaction between the Tainos and the Kalinagos, we will examine them first.

We begin by tracing the path that they took to the Greater and Lesser Antilles. Continuous rivalry between the two groups for land, women and food forced the docile Tainos to leave the regions of South America and move upwards into the neighboring island of Trinidad. The Kalinagos still followed them so some of the Tainos left Trinidad and continued into the Lesser Antilles. Some remained so Trinidad was occupied by both Tainos and Kalinagos.

In time, the Kalinagos came to control the islands of the Lesser Antilles, for example Dominica and St. Vincent while the Tainos who had fled further upwards came to control the Greater Antilles, Jamaica, Cuba, Hispaniola and the Bahamas. Both groups shared the island of Puerto Rico.

Now that we know what islands they settled on let us look at the areas on these islands that they concentrated on.

The Tainos settled near the coasts or streams and rivers, for example Priestman's river in Jamaica. Why?

- (a) Fishing was an important source of food: protein
- (b) They could easily get water for domestic purposes such as washing their utensils or bathing
- (c) They could get water for their crops
- (d) They could go swimming

(e) It provided an excellent look out point. From this vantage point they could see the Kalinagos approaching and get ready to fight or run.

The Kalinagos settled near the coasts too. This is mainly because they were what we can call sea rovers. The sea was like a highway to them. They used it to get to and from the various islands of the Greater and Lesser Antilles where they conducted their raids. They were also excellent fishermen.

We will now look at the political, economic and social organization of these two groups before we move on to the Mayans.