

IMPRESSIONS

a neighboring tribe called the Caribs.

Technology created another gulf between the groups. The Europeans had been rapidly inventing the "high-tech" wonders of their day, including printing presses and guns. They concentrated on finding new resources rather than conserving the ones they had. In fact, it was the search for gold and spices that brought Columbus to the New World in the first place.

In contrast, the Tainos developed technology only to meet their immediate needs. Their houses were simple, but carefully built to withstand hurricanes. They planned for long-term survival, cultivating their land so it would remain fertile.

THE LAST WORD

What could such totally different groups have thought of each other? We have a pretty good idea about what Columbus thought of the Tainos—on his first voyage, he recorded his reactions in a journal.

But what did the Tainos think of Columbus? Unfortunately, we can't be sure. Unlike the Spanish, the Tainos had no written language—they could only pass on their stories through word of mouth. And within 50 years of Columbus's landing, the Spanish had practically killed off all the Tainos. As usual, it was the winners who got to tell the stories.

That's where literature steps in. Novelists don't know what the Tainos thought, but they can try to imagine it from a Taino's point of view. The following excerpts are accounts of the first encounter between peoples of the Old World and the New. The first is from Columbus's journal. The second was written in the 20th-century, and imagines the event from the Tainos' point of view. The third—also written recently—narrates the story from the perspective of an invisible observer.

—Michael Lapp

They're all decked out like the jack of clubs in all this heat!



FIRST

Look, they all go naked as their mothers bore them!

Columbus told us what he thought of the Taino Indians; but what did they think of him?

Imagine: You arrive by boat on the shore of a strange new land. All of a sudden you're surrounded by naked men and women, their bodies painted in bright colors, their noses adorned with jewelry. Sound wild? Columbus thought so when he landed on the Caribbean island he called San Salvador and met the inhabitants, the Tainos.

Now imagine another scene: You're enjoying a day at the beach when huge canoes with enormous sheets tied above them land on the beach. Out jump a bunch of strange pink men sweating under layers of clothes and speaking jibberish. Sound like a bad dream? Well, that could be what some Tainos thought when they saw Columbus's crew.

Before the Europeans and the Tainos met in 1492, neither had a clue that the other existed. It was an astounding encounter, made even more bizarre by the fact that the members of the two groups were from wildly different cultures.

A WORLD APART

The Europeans came from Spain, a powerful country headed by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. The Tainos, on the other hand, lived in small villages connected by loose ties of friendship and marriage.

European countries like Spain gained their wealth and power by fighting wars against other groups, defeating them, and bringing home their treasures. The Tainos' battles were limited to small skirmishes with