



Reaching the Un-Reached

In Trinidad and Tobago, a Black movement refers to organized and informal efforts by Afro-Trinidadians to resist racial oppression, assert African identity, and gain political, economic, and cultural power within a colonial and post-colonial society.

Slavery Period (c. 1700s–1834)

Africans were enslaved under Spanish rule (until 1797) and British rule (after 1797).

Resistance included work slowdowns, revolts, escape, and preservation of African-derived religions, music, and social structures.

The population of African descent became the numerical majority by the late 18th century.

Emancipation and Apprenticeship (1834–1838)

Slavery was legally abolished in 1834; full freedom came in 1838.

Formerly enslaved people faced restricted access to land, capital, and political power.

Afro-Trinidadians formed free villages, mutual aid societies, churches, and schools as survival and advancement strategies.

Cultural and Social Resistance (19th century)

Can Boulay processions, stick fighting (kalinda), drumming, and masquerade developed among freed Africans.

Colonial authorities criminalized or restricted these practices.

The Can Boulay Riots of 1881 occurred after police attempts to suppress African street festivals.

These conflicts helped establish Carnival as a central arena of Afro-Trinidadian expression.

Early Political and Intellectual Development (1920s–1940s)

Afro-Trinidadian workers were central to labor unions and anti-colonial organizing.

C. L. R. James produced influential works on colonialism, Black history, and revolution.

Arthur Andrew Cipriani led labor reforms and represented working-class interests.

Labor uprisings in the 1930s pressured Britain to introduce limited self-government and social reforms.

Black Power Movement (1968–1972)

Influenced by African independence movements and U.S. Black Power ideology.



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The 1970 Black Power Revolution involved mass demonstrations, strikes, and university activism.

The National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) was a leading organization.

Core demands included:

Greater Black ownership of land, banks, and industry

Curriculum reform to include African history

Reduction of foreign (especially U.S. and British) economic control

The government declared a state of emergency; parts of the army mutinied.

While the uprising did not overthrow the state, it accelerated “localization” of businesses and expanded racial consciousness.

Post-1970 Period

Black activism became more institutional and less revolutionary.

Emancipation Day became a public holiday in 1985.

African history, dress, and religious traditions gained wider public recognition.

The Emancipation Support Committee of Trinidad and Tobago focuses on African heritage, education, and reparations advocacy.

Overall Historical Pattern

Black movements in Trinidad were continuous rather than singular.

They combined cultural resistance, labor organizing, and political activism.

These movements significantly shaped national identity, cultural policy, and post-colonial governance

