

“*Gente bárbara*”: Indigenous Rebellion, Resistance and Persistence in Colonial Cuba, c. 1500-1800

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“Spanish colonization destroyed the Indians of Cuba, though perhaps not as soon as has come to be accepted.”¹ So asserted Cuban scholar Felipe Pichardo Moya in his 1945 study *Caverna, costa y meseta: interpretaciones de arqueología indocubana*. That same year, in an address to the Cuban Academy of History, Pichardo took his colleagues to task for their complicity in perpetuating the widespread belief that the indigenous peoples of Cuba were effectively exterminated in the century after the conquest of the island.² Half a century later, this understanding of Cuba’s colonial history continues to dominate European, North American, and Cuban historiography. Recently, for example, scholars L. Antonio Curet and Massimo Livi-Bacci both agreed that, “a few decades after Columbus’s landfall,” the Taínos of the Greater Antilles “completed their course to extinction.”³ At the same time, this history, on closer examination, had significant gaps that raised a number of questions. [1]

Compared to the rich history of European colonialism and aboriginal culture and influence in the American continents, however, beyond the first several decades of colonization, this question remains understudied if not neglected in the Caribbean, and has only recently been seriously addressed—though, arguably, to a greater extent by archaeologists and anthropologists than by historians. What follows is an attempt at an historical narrative, an overview, based on preliminary research in the relatively scarce secondary sources available and the relevant primary sources, toward the beginnings of a better understanding of the history of Cuba’s indigenous peoples, the nature and implications of Spanish colonialism in Cuba, and the European-indigenous relationship in the largest island in the Caribbean. As this essay will argue, to the extent that indigenous peoples in Cuba survived and persisted for a period well beyond the first century of the conquest in Cuba, they did so through a combination of violent and more subtle forms of resistance that were, in turn, facilitated by additional factors of varying influence, including Amerindian and Spanish colonial migration patterns, and Spanish imperial laws, policies and administration. This paper will focus on these and on some of the Amerindian communities and individuals who persisted in Cuba through active indigenous resistance in forms that included fight, flight and negotiated acculturation, including (though beyond the scope of this introductory summary) marriage, that is, *mestizaje*. Our story begins, however, as it should: with the people who were there long before the Europeans. [2]

Of the three major cultural communities that predominated in the Caribbean at the end of the fifteenth century—the Guanahatebey; the Taíno (classic, western); and the Carib, the namesake of the sea and the region—the Taíno, the first settlers, and the first indigenous group encountered by Columbus in the New World, were the largest population and would become the best known of Cuba’s aboriginal people. Descended from the larger Arahuan cultural and linguistic family of South America, they were, as even Columbus

conceded, substantial navigators and seafarers, and their migrations have been tracked in the Antilles and throughout the Caribbean, from the Orinoco River in Venezuela as far as the Bahamas.⁴ The Taíno reached their highest level of development on Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and Dominican Republic), where they developed more highly-organized, sedentary agricultural communities territorially organized into *cacicazgos* or “chiefdoms,”⁵ and it was from here that they moved to eastern Cuba at least as early as the third century AD, a movement that would become intensified with Spanish conquest and colonization of Hispaniola. ⁶[3]

The isolated development of the indigenous Cuban population effectively ended in 1492, the year of the beginning of indigenous encounters with Europeans. As is by now generally established, Columbus and his expedition made their first landfall upon having reached the Bahamian Archipelago on October 12, 1492, specifically, the island that the (Lucayan) Taíno called Guanahaní and which the navigator renamed San Salvador. Using a number of Taíno first encountered in the Bahamas as guides, Columbus was then directed to Cuba, where he arrived on October 28, 1492. Having gone ashore at Bariay, near the present town of Gibara, Columbus sent emissaries inland to investigate reports by his indigenous guides that the local cacique (leader) possessed objects of gold.⁷ [4]

By 1508, when Cuba was circumnavigated and the Spaniards realized that it was an island and not part of a continent as Columbus had believed, the expansion of Spanish colonization in Hispaniola had reached a point where the competition for shrinking resources had intensified.⁸ As well, the decline of the laboring indigenous population there through conquest, continued “pacification” campaigns, disease and harsh working conditions, and abuse by settlers determined to raise production and profits under the *encomienda* labor system had considerably reduced the labor force. Finally, the rumors of gold elsewhere persisted. Attention shifted back onto Cuba. [5]

In 1511, Governor Diego Velázquez began the conquest of Cuba in the mountainous, rugged eastern region of the island. The first European settlement in Cuba was founded on the north coast of the easternmost point of the island, in the middle of an Indian settlement, Baracoa; Velázquez renamed it Nuestra Señora de la Asunción de Baracoa. In November 1513, the second European settlement was established in another indigenous community, Bayamo, renamed San Salvador de Bayamo. During the early stage of colonization, seven settlements, including Trinidad and Havana, were established. After the founding of a third center in Santiago de Cuba (1515), Cuba was considered “conquered,” and for many years Santiago, Baracoa and Bayamo were the only European settlements in eastern Cuba.⁹ At the same time, each of these was also a center of jurisdiction whose borders had not been precisely determined and that included large areas that remained unsettled. The sites chosen by the Spaniards had much to do, of course, with strategic considerations and economic interests. A number of these towns were expected to play an important supportive role in Spanish expansion into Central and South America.¹⁰ Also, gold deposits and the proximity of Indian populations were key considerations. [6]

With Santiago de Cuba established as the (initial) center of administration (replaced by the eighteenth century by a more accessible Havana), the Spaniards proceeded to extract from land and labor in repetition of the colonial experience back on Hispaniola. The early settlements flourished as gold deposits were located in the stream systems of the central highland ranges and in the Sierra Maestra mountains. As I.A. Wright observed, “it was with every intention to obtain control and service of natives under the repartimiento [labor draft] system in order to use them to gather gold, that the Spanish swarmed into Cuba in 1512-1513, almost emptying Hispaniola, just as later they swarmed over Cuba and on, into Mexico and into Peru, leaving this island in its turn almost depopulated of whites.”¹¹[7]

Yet the conquistadors also distributed land and indigenous laborers among themselves. In many cases they appropriated the fields and produce previously cultivated by the Indians for their own sustenance. While colonists appropriated and adopted the indigenous food sources of the island, particularly yucca, boniato, and maize, they also introduced European staples like wheat, rice, bananas and sugar cane. Whether production for domestic consumption or for export, whether in agriculture, livestock raising or mining, by 1515, Cuba’s young colonial economy was thriving. As navigator Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo then observed, “much gold was had, because the island is rich in mines, and livestock from La Española thrived as did all the plants and herbs taken over from here and from Spain.... In fine, the island of Cuba came to be very prosperous and well populated with Christians and full of Indians, and Diego Velazquez [became] very rich.”¹² Cuba eventually replaced Hispaniola as Castile’s precious Antillean pearl. The principle source of labor and the foundation of this economy, like that in Hispaniola, was the Indian. By 1519, with the establishment of the first Spanish settlements, the early colonization of Cuba had been completed, including the first stage of relations with the original inhabitants of the island. [8]

As has been exhaustively documented, however, the prospects for the sustenance of the indigenous population in early colonial Cuba appeared bleak. Many died in the war to turn back the Spanish invaders (more on this below). Many also died from the abuse, overwork, and generally harsh working conditions suffered under colonists or *encomenderos*, representative of the considerable gap between the theory and brutal practice of the *encomienda*.¹³ Indigenous peoples were devastated as much by malnutrition as by maltreatment. Within an extremely short period of time after the Spanish conquest, Indian peoples simultaneously lost control over their labor and the cultivation of their land. Imperial Spain’s introduction of European agriculture violently displaced Indian farming. Spanish colonists “let loose onto the land vast droves of livestock.” Faced with few New World predators and free of Old World diseases, the animals flourished and multiplied massively, grazing without restriction on both the natural vegetation and the unfenced cultivated fields on which the Indians depended for their sustenance.¹⁴ [9]

The consequences for the Taíno were catastrophic. Indigenous agriculture declined precipitously as Indian farmers struggled with the widespread destruction of their crops by large unrestrained herds of beasts—cattle, goats, horses, pigs and sheep—variously

grazing and trampling indigenous produce under hoof. Famine plagued Indian peoples as food supplies deteriorated. Families were devastated, infant mortality rates and infanticide increased, and fertility rates dropped. Suicide became a common form of indigenous protest, in some cases reportedly involving whole villages.¹⁵ [10]

Understandably, under such conditions, indigenous susceptibility to disease epidemics that passed through Cuba during this period increased considerably. Smallpox, measles, typhoid and dysentery destroyed a number of Indian communities. Estimates of indigenous mortality from epidemics like that in 1519 and later range from 60 to 90 percent.¹⁶ Cuba's indigenous population, estimated at about 112,000 (to 300,000) on the eve of Spanish conquest, is believed to have declined to less than 10,000 by the early 1530s.¹⁷ To the present day, however, while scholars of Latin America may agree that indigenous population decline was greatest in Cuba and the Caribbean, estimates of the decline and surviving population continue to be greatly debated, particularly since more critical analyses have been made of colonial documentary records.¹⁸ Some estimates have been raised in light of recent archaeological and historical evidence. In the case of Cuba, this includes evidence literally uncovered through the joint efforts of Cuban and Canadian archaeologists of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) that suggests later survival of Taíno communities in isolated areas.¹⁹ At the same time, while the decline of the Taíno cannot be denied, the precise extent of that decline has never been definitively determined, nor were they the only population undergoing decline at that time. Much less studied is the size of the Spanish colonial population during the same period. [11]

In one of the very few scholarly accounts to directly address the issue, historian Franklin Knight, not unlike Pichardo Moya, challenged the predominant literature on the conquest and colonization of the Spanish Caribbean: [12]

neither the Spanish conquest nor the growth of the Spanish population should be exaggerated. Spanish towns, though they claimed contiguous boundaries, were merely enclaves in the various territories, like islands in a sea of either Indian-occupied or uninhabited land. Moreover, towns designated as "Spanish" indicated a cultural rather than an ethnic or phenotypical collection of people. Neither numbers of people nor descriptions were reliably or consistently given.²⁰ [13]

In this respect, Cuba was exemplary. During the same period, the demographics for Cuba's colonist populations also underwent substantial quantitative change, and by no means did this necessarily imply growth. Until 1519, "the Spanish Caribbean tried desperately to assume the sociopolitical profile of a newly reconquered Andalusian territory," with its carefully constructed towns run by *cabildos* or municipal councils, and the *vecinos* (resident citizens) of substance and influence "whose rising prosperity had been tied to the number of Indians they held in *encomienda*," a service arrangement influenced by the Iberian frontier of medieval times.²¹ Yet Cuba's prosperity did not endure. By 1519, colonist dissension was considerable, the source of the island's wealth, indigenous labor, was in decline, and Hernán Cortes's successful campaign against the Aztec empire in Mexico soon relegated the status of Cuba in imperial eyes to a secondary position as supply base for the droves of Spaniards who, in cyclical fashion, abandoned

the island in an exodus to the Spanish Main in search of their own El Dorados. For the remainder of the sixteenth century, Cuba stagnated economically and demographically, as it “played second fiddle to the gold- and silver-producing mainland colonies [Mexico and Peru] for the succeeding centuries, only its strategic location saving it from total eclipse.”²² With the replacement of Santiago de Cuba by the port city of Havana as Spain’s strategic supply center, Cuba’s development, while stagnant, did not cease altogether but rather shifted perceptibly to the western region and became concentrated in and around Havana. For the next several centuries, as Pérez and other Cuba scholars have pointed out, this would leave the eastern regions of Cuba relatively isolated and abandoned, compared to the imperial attention directed at the development of western Cuba, particularly Havana. During the first century of colonialism in Cuba, however, throughout the island, the Spanish presence was reduced to a shadow of its former existence as “the promise of the mainland” continued to motivate flight to the continents, and depopulation became “a real danger.”²³ [14]

By mid-century even Havana, the new colonial capital and Spain’s new strategic center in the Caribbean, sat at barely 60 households—based on the heads of the households or *vecinos*—a number that it would not begin to significantly recover from until the seventeenth century.²⁴ The Spanish population of the old capital, Santiago de Cuba, declined to about 30 households, or 150 colonists. Down from some 4000 people since the 1510s, by the mid-sixteenth century, Cuba’s Spanish population had fallen to an estimated 700 settlers.²⁵ This, compared to an estimated 3000-7000 recorded Taíno survivors for the same period, would appear to suggest that Spanish colonists were considerably outnumbered for an extended period of time. [15]

In spite of efforts by the Spanish imperial government to stem migration from Cuba to the mainland, Spanish settlements and towns continued to shrink: some, like Baracoa, were virtually abandoned, while others such as Trinidad were deserted altogether. Only one new Spanish town was founded during this period, El Cobre, a copper-mining town in the east. Not until the seventeenth century would another Spanish town be established in Cuba, when some modest recovery had occurred as a result of imperial Spain’s recognition of the island as a strategic gateway in and out of the Caribbean in general, and after England’s occupation of Jamaica in 1655 in particular. In the meantime, virtually all of the new settlements established were in the form of *reducciones* or Indian towns (more on this later).²⁶ [16]

Of course, colonist migration does not account entirely for the survival of Cuba’s first peoples. The demographics of an early, mobile colonialism in Cuba only partly (though significantly) accounts for indigenous persistence in Spain’s largest Caribbean colony. In addition to this, it must be noted that the process of Spanish conquest and colonization in Cuba did not proceed without early, multifaceted, and extensive resistance from the island’s first settlers (even, notably, in the face of disease epidemics). Indigenous resistance emerged in the earliest stages of conquest, Velázquez and his forces barely setting foot on Cuba’s shores. [17]

Unlike the indigenous peoples of Hispaniola, the Taíno of eastern Cuba were “neither unfamiliar with Spanish motives nor unprepared for Spanish methods.”²⁷ Many had been victims of Spanish pacification campaigns and labor drafts on Hispaniola and, in desperation, had sought refuge in the more accessible eastern region of Cuba. This exodus over a period of several years (a migratory process that would be repeated in later centuries) accounts in some part for the decline in the aboriginal population in Hispaniola as well as for the indigenous awareness of, and resistance to, Velázquez’s expedition. As Las Casas observed, the Taíno escapees had learned much and enlightened the other Indians concerning the character and conduct of the Christians, of which they had become aware by hard experience.²⁸ [18]

One of the most notable of these fugitives was Hatuey, a cacique of western Hispaniola. Hatuey had fled with a number of followers and settled in Cuba the year before the Spanish conquest, apparently establishing a significant *cacicazgo*. According to Las Casas, Hatuey, alerted to the Spaniards’ expedition by his informants, rallied the Cuban Taíno to resist the conquistadors. Resist they did. In contrast to the relatively warm reception experienced in Hispaniola by Columbus in 1492, Velázquez’s 1511 expedition in Cuba encountered resistance almost immediately upon landing. Having learned the lessons of the Taíno in Hispaniola, Cuban Taíno were considerably more well-informed, and therefore generally more hostile to the first Spanish attempts to conquer Cuba. The four-month struggle that followed eventually found indigenous forces retreating into the mountains, and the cacique Hatuey captured by the Spaniards. As is well-known in Cuba and elsewhere, Hatuey was sentenced to be burned at the stake. Just moments from death, Hatuey was confronted by a Franciscan friar who offered salvation for the cacique’s soul and a place in heaven if he accepted the Christian faith. Hatuey inquired whether it was true that Christians who died went to heaven. When told that they did, the cacique answered that he would rather not go there.²⁹ As for those Taíno captured in battle, the Spanish Crown ordered them enslaved as punishment for taking part in Hatuey’s “rebellion.”³⁰ [19]

As the conquistadors penetrated westward through the interior, other caciques and their followers continued to resist the invaders. The combined force and ferocity of Spanish infantry, cavalry and coastal forces, however, eventually exhausted Taíno efforts to repel the invaders. As Las Casas had documented and as Louis Pérez summarized, the Spanish advance inland became [20]

an odyssey of pillage and plunder, of death and destruction, culminating in an unprovoked massacre at the village of Caonao in Northern Camaguey. The carnage at Caonao was not random violence—its purpose was as much to overcome the Indian wherewithal to resist as it was to undermine the Indian will to resist. The strategy was not without effect. Word of Caonao spread quickly, and organized resistance...all but ceased.³¹ [21]

Many surrendered, but indigenous resistance to the Spanish colonizers also became more diffuse, ranging from continued but smaller raids on Spanish settlements and flight to the mountains and other isolated regions, to more subtle, covert forms James Scott has

referred to as “everyday forms of resistance.”³² The latter form of indigenous struggle became manifest in the early years of Spanish colonialism in Cuba. [22]

Peoples who had thrived for thousands of years were not so easily done away with. As many scholars have noted, but, to date, a scarce few have seriously addressed (beyond a limited period), not all Indians “acquiesced passively” to their exploitation under Spanish colonialism.³³ At the same time, nor were all Spaniards singularly preoccupied with the more immediate concerns of generating wealth through economic development on the backs of a heavily exploited and diminishing indigenous population, and expanding that wealth through further exploration and imperial expansion. A number of factors, to date understudied in the context of empires and indigenous peoples in Cuba and the Caribbean, demand examination toward a more nuanced, accurate and complete understanding of the nature of empire and the conditions and role(s) of the indigenous cultures who both resisted overtly and covertly (and contributed to) the colonial societies that emerged in the region under Spanish imperial oversight. [23]

As is often the case in history, many things happen at roughly the same time, contributing, however unevenly, to certain outcomes: in early colonial Cuba, while indigenous resistance was generated by a combination of events and processes such as early Spanish colonial exploitation, violence, and disease, it was also facilitated by early Spanish out-migration, and was dynamic and adaptive enough to evolve and change in order to facilitate Amerindian persistence during eras of change in colonial society. As will be seen below, this could translate into adapting and reorganizing the indigenous use of violence in order to ensure existence within new colonial frameworks, with and/or against the colonial power. It could also translate into new, less violent and more subtle forms of resistance and persistence altogether. [24]

In Cuba, as elsewhere in the New World, miscegenation or *mestizaje*, often initially imposed violently by Spanish conquistadors, became a form of adaptation and resistance exercised by indigenous women, whose social status advanced with marriage to Spanish colonial elites (the women becoming “Spanish”). In turn, the Crown encouraged unions with the daughters of indigenous nobility (*nitainos*), a pattern that would be followed on the mainland later on.³⁴ Sauer and others suggest that by the 1520s, on Hispaniola, the Spanish American colony established earliest and in which Spanish wives were present in most towns, one husband in three had a native wife. At least as early as 1514, Spain encouraged the movement of some of Hispaniola’s Hispanic population to Cuba, “where,” as the Crown observed, “there are few Spanish and many Indians.”³⁵ [25]

More than a century after conquest, Cuba remained very much a colony without European women. From this, along with the fact that many colonists from Hispaniola brought their Indian wives and Indian slaves over to Cuba by the 1520s, it may be inferred that the proportion of Spanish-Indian unions (formal and informal) was comparable if not higher.³⁶ Indian women, furthermore, played an active role in perpetuating indigenous lifeways. As scholar Clara Sue Kidwell succinctly put it, indigenous women were “the first important mediators of meaning between the cultures of two worlds.”³⁷ In Cuba and the Caribbean, African women were also cultural

mediators. Indian and African women moved “fluidly between and among cultures.” While they adopted the outwardly Spanish styles of dress and language, Indian and African women also retained traditional indigenous and African ways, including foods and food preparation, medicines, language, music, song and dance, kinship, reciprocity, child-raising, and land and resource use generally. [26]

Historical and archaeological evidence from a number of areas of Cuba and Hispaniola indicates a high retention level, especially in the countryside, of Indian traditions, complemented, reinforced and modified by African cultural traditions.³⁸ Preliminary findings from the analysis of fragmentary historical evidence suggest that the offspring of a number of such unions became members of Cuba’s colonial society at various socioeconomic levels. Even a minority who came to be members of the colonial elite, as, for example, military officers and colonial officials, retained knowledge of their indigenous cultural roots. Wright notes that, by the mid- to late sixteenth century, a number of individuals of Taíno heritage from eastern Cuba eventually rose to social prominence: one, for example, a Captain Juan Ferrer de Vargas from Bayamo, and another, Captain Juan Recio, were both close acquaintances of the governor of Cuba, both considered brave and talented officers, and apparently skilled dancers of the *areito*.³⁹ Notably, some of these were the products of Spanish “pacification” of “rebellious” indigenous fugitive communities and their relocation to “Indian towns” or villages like Guanabacoa.⁴⁰ [27]

Next to the more passive forms of resistance—or infiltration—more active indigenous resistance was expressed in the refusal to comply with the demands of the colonists and in flight. In his *Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies*, Las Casas makes several references to indigenes who fled and took refuge in the mountains.⁴¹ Many became fugitives. Many escaped into the interior, into the inaccessible forests and coastal mountain ranges, and even onto offshore keys and islands, beyond the reach of colonial authorities (or censuses). For decades, revolts, uprisings and raids against Spanish settlements persisted from such bases. By the 1520s, Velázquez and his successor, Governor Gonzalo de Guzmán, reported a number of Indian raids against Spanish towns and estates, with livestock taken, property destroyed, and in some cases, Spaniards killed. These attacks were carried out from bases in fugitive (*cimarron*) indigenous communities that were formed in some of the more rugged terrain in eastern Cuba as well as in some of Cuba’s many islets and keys. Raiders from these latter locations were in fact referred to by Spanish authorities as *indios cayos* or “key Indians.”⁴³ [28]

Notably, runaway fugitive slave communities are more commonly associated in the historical literature with African slavery. The first *cimarrones*, however, were indigenous or Taíno runaways (and also understudied and neglected by the historiography), who began the formation of these fugitive communities or *palenques* in the sixteenth century, which a number of enslaved African fugitives joined later on.⁴⁴⁵ Conditions for the formation of such sanctuaries, or more accurately, settlements, as these communities became, as noted, were particularly propitious by the end of the first decade of Spanish colonialism in Cuba. [29] In fact, most of the first fugitive slave communities in Cuba were founded by Indians.

Importantly, and with some irony, the conquest of the Mexica-Aztec and Incan empires, and the exodus of most of Cuba's Spanish colonists to the continents thereafter, facilitated the persistence and expansion of Taíno resistance in the form of flight, and attacks or what may be termed guerrilla warfare, particularly as a component of fugitive community formation. Arguably, at the same time, a considerable degree of autonomy could be gained by Cuba's remaining colonial and, more notably, indigenous population. In the east, the Taínos certainly appear to have been aware of Cuba's depopulation during this time. When Spanish towns were not threatened by out-migration, they underwent stepped-up attacks. Indigenous uprisings occurred on at least two significant occasions—one in 1524-1532, after the exodus to Mexico, and one in 1538-1544, during a period of Spanish migration to Peru and Florida. Concentrated in the east, Indian rebellions "threatened Spanish settlements with extinction." Some, like Puerto Principe and Bayamo, were destroyed and rebuilt, then destroyed all over again; others, like Baracoa, underwent a series of relentless attacks.⁴⁶ [30]

The organization, duration and membership of Taíno bases for attacks, the fugitive communities, appear to have varied depending in part on the leadership and cohesiveness of the group, their location, and also the efficacy, or, in some cases, willingness, of Spanish authorities to pursue them. In the process of organizing search and destroy (and/or capture) parties to counteract what had become considerable and aggressive indigenous resistance, and through interrogation of their captives, Spanish authorities came to realize the levels of organization of some of the indigenous fugitive communities from which raids and attacks originated. In 1533, deputy governor and chief magistrate Manuel de Rojas interrogated a number of men and women captured in the eastern mountain regions. These had either escaped the service of their *vecinos*⁴⁷ At the same time, the report noted that many men, women and children remained hidden in the jungle and mountain regions.⁴⁸ [31] and/or had taken part in raids on Spanish settlements. After questioning and cross-examination, it was determined that these "fugitive Indians" had been in hiding for various periods of time (depending on their time of flight), ranging from one to more than eight years.

At least one of these, Guama, a rebel cacique in the mountainous eastern region, had, according to a report submitted by the *cabildo* of Santiago de Cuba, lived out in a hidden runaway community "for many years" with about sixty followers, many of whom were escapees from the Baracoa mines.⁴⁹ Guama was reported to have had "many cultivated lands in the wilderness."⁵⁰ That this group was formidable in resistance is suggested by Spanish colonial authorities' simultaneous knowledge and avoidance of molesting the community. The decision to finally "extirpate" the rebel community in the mid-1530s was prompted by Spanish suspicions of an alliance between Guama and the formidable forces under the rebel chieftain Enriquillo in Hispaniola. Notably, only when the colonial government began its attacks on Guama's camps did the cacique and his followers attack the Spaniards in various locations around Santiago, including Venta de Cauto, an important trade center.⁵¹ [32]

Over the next several decades of the sixteenth century, raids, uprisings and protests, by Indians and the smaller but growing numbers of African slaves alike, continued to

challenge Spanish authorities and aggravate colonists. Colonials distinguished between “wild” Indians (*cimarrones*) and “domesticated” (*manso*) or “peaceful” Indians (*indios de paz*). Yet to some like Governor Gonzalo de Guzmán, the distinction was illusory. Guzmán insisted on the augmentation of Spanish arms in Cuba: “they are needed to keep down even the tame Indians who accept intercourse with Spaniards as cheerfully as they would dig out their own eyes.”⁵² Typically also, a merchant from Santiago de Cuba wrote in 1543: “In the twenty years that I have lived in Cuba, there has not been one in which a tax has not been levied for pacifying and conquering the runaway or rebellious Indians.”⁵³ By the latter part of the sixteenth century, even after recurring smallpox epidemics, revolts against the Spanish continued. In the late sixteenth century, colonial authorities continued to discover Indian villages “theretofore entirely unknown to Spaniards.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, according to Cuban scholar Pérez De la Riva, [33]

Because of their extreme degree of mobility, the hamlets increased in number with the influx of runaway slaves and criminals, and with the passage of time they became permanent communities. These eventually gave rise to nuclei of the Cuban peasant population of today, which is dispersed throughout the most distant areas of the country....⁵⁵ [34]

As Spanish retaliation appeared to gain the upper hand on indigenous attacks, flight to isolated settlements continued. These *palenques* or runaway communities, whether among the Cuban keys or in the jungles and mountain regions of eastern Cuba, served as both sites of resistance and autonomous development, and transculturation. This was particularly the case as the numbers of African slaves imported into Cuba grew and as more of these escaped to the more isolated eastern regions of the island. Studies of this question in other parts of the Caribbean and especially in the southeastern region of the United States indicate that not all Indian *palenques* were necessarily receptive to African slave fugitives; some were quite hostile. The little research that has to date been conducted, even by Cuban scholars, suggests that a number of rebellions during the 16th century in Cuba included Indians and African slaves in the ranks. Again, most of the runaway slave settlements established were founded by Indians; a number were also founded by Indians and African slaves.⁵⁶ Although the extent of *palenque*⁵⁷ [35] miscegenation between Indians and African slaves in Cuba is not clear, it is clear that it did occur.

It is also plausible and arguable that indigenous populations in runaway communities survived and perhaps even thrived in relative isolation. Consider, for example, Spanish “discoveries” of new, previously unknown settlements even by the end of the sixteenth century. Although beyond the scope of this essay, similar settlements in more isolated regions of Cuba would be encountered as late as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the indigeneity of community members confirmed in local parish records.⁵⁸ It may also be argued, therefore, that Cuban Taínos did not become “extinct” by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is supported by scant but substantive historical evidence presented by a select few scholars like Knight (though, it seems, never pursued), Wright, and Pichardo Moya.⁵⁹ Fragmentary but significant historical evidence has also been uncovered in AGI records in the preliminary findings of the author (discussed

below), and in already noted recent archaeological evidence excavated by the ROM and Cuban archaeologists. [36]

The results of the analysis of a number of primary and secondary sources strongly suggest that a case may be made to argue that both the initiative of indigenous Cubans and of the Spanish Crown facilitated the survival of Cuba's aboriginal population. A population admittedly later reinforced to some degree by the migration (voluntary and involuntary) of indigenous peoples from other parts of the Caribbean and continental Americas, this is arguably qualified at least in part by geography and demographics. That is, many if not most indigenous visitors and/or immigrants appear to have been concentrated in western Cuba; added to this is the demographic fact that, at least until the beginning of the seventeenth century, *indígenas* in Cuba outnumbered Spanish settlers, suggesting, in turn, that a number of Indian towns or pueblos, at least and especially in eastern Cuba, were populated by Taíno majorities.⁶⁰ [37]

Pueblos like Guanabacoa and Jiguaní (founded nearly two centuries apart), for example, were originally founded for the purpose of congregating and protecting a declining and endangered (by encroaching colonists) indigenous population.⁶¹ Later Amerindian immigrant arrivals appear to have settled in some of these pueblos, particularly in western Cuba, and intermarried with some of the indigenous inhabitants.⁶² In addition to this, the available evidence further suggests that, as late as the mid-nineteenth century, the indigenous population in Cuba was reinforced by Taíno descendants immigrating to the island from Hispaniola.⁶³ Furthermore, the Spanish Crown facilitated survival through paternalistic Indian policies and legislation, such as the New Laws (1542), which probably had more impact in a Cuba depopulated of Spaniards than in a Mexico or Peru where Spanish populations grew, where demands for Indian labor were accumulating, and where the Spanish Crown itself had a far greater financial stake. [38]

In the New World in general and Cuba in particular, Spanish imperial initiatives such as the Siete Partidas, the Patronato Real, Laws of Burgos, and then the New Laws, were all part and parcel of an attempt by imperial Spain to reconcile its conflicting moral and economic interests: to convert the Indians into Christians and ensure a modicum of protection from colonists in the process of "civilizing" them as subjects and workers. This was the essence of the *encomienda* ("commending") and *repartimiento* (distribution) of Native laborers to conquistadors and other colonists. To facilitate the process of evangelization and education, where Indian peoples were not already concentrated in Spanish-converted centers like Baracoa, they were relocated in new settlements or *reducciones* which later became known as *poblados indios* or *pueblos indios*—"Indian towns."⁶⁴ At least one of these, Guanabacoa, was situated in western Cuba. Most, however, were located in the east, and included Yara, Dos Brazos, Mayarí, Yateras, La Guira, El Caney, and Jiguaní. [39]

The conscientious and concomitant reforms of the Spanish Crown facilitated indigenous survival. Paradoxically, then, while the crown authorized by royal *cedulas* (decrees) retaliation against Indian attackers raiding Spanish settlements and estates, it also continued to demonstrate an interest in establishing the legitimacy of the Spanish

Catholic Empire in the New World by addressing the status of the indigenous inhabitants whose Christianization and well-being were supposed to have represented the conquest's cardinal inspiration. For the Spanish Catholic Empire, this meant paying heed to the rising conflict and debate over the conditions, aptitude and very nature of the indigenous American subjects within its realm. The Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas and other advocates for the Indians among the clergy had not relented in actively pointing out the shortcomings of the crown's Indian policy. Conflict remained unreconciled, for example, "between the theory, officially so frequently expressed, that the Cubeños [Cuban Indians] were the free, loyal vassals of the Crown, and the unlovely facts of the repartimiento system of their bondage."⁶⁵ [40]

In a "scathing recital of Spanish cruelties" in a document dated November 1526, Charles V made no less pointed criticism than Las Casas did of Spanish brutalities in conquest and colonization, and acknowledged the Spaniards' role in the devastation of the indigenous population.⁶⁶ In 1527 Fray Pedro Mexia de Trillo of Hispaniola, provincial of the Franciscan order, was instructed to investigate and punish mistreatment of "commended" Indians in Cuba. Fray Pedro was to "liberate the natives within the limits of right living and religion, that they might increase, not decrease."⁶⁷ Correspondence indicates that the settlers of Cuba got wind of the Crown's intentions and arranged through their governor and the *audiencia* (royal court) to test the Indians' capacity for liberty. Predictably, less than a month later, Governor Guzmán claimed to possess evidence proving the aboriginal people unfit for the responsibilities of freedom, and added that the Indians were rebelling against the Spaniards. The colonial government's lawyers also weighed in, insisting that the crown's policy of liberation would end in the massacre of Spanish settlers, a return to primitive vice and idolatry, and the end of the colony and the revenues that it generated. These colonial advocates petitioned for the retention of *encomiendas* and the status quo, arguing that "the said Indians would come the sooner into the true knowledge of our holy Catholic faith."⁶⁸ [41]

Not satisfied with these responses, Charles V reissued orders to Fray Pedro. Cuba was presented with a series of new Indian ordinances, the core of which was the Crown's own experiment to determine the capacity of Cuban Indians for self-government, or more accurately, to "live like Spaniards." The friar was to arrange the assembly of Indians into towns, for which "honest clergy" were to be appointed to oversee their instruction in living "like reasonable people." As insurance that the Indians be "liberated and administered as free vassals and so come into knowledge of the Holy Faith," the Bishop of Cuba, Fray Miguel Ramírez, was appointed protector of the Indians.⁶⁹ The crown's confidence, however, proved misplaced. The bishop proved more amenable to colonist than crown interests, accepting from the governor an *encomienda* of his own, in contravention of royal decrees. [42]

The imperial government's experiment to determine the capacity of Indians to live "like farmers in Castile" was slow in being implemented by the colonial government. By the early 1530s, its failure appeared imminent. The determination of most of the colony's white population to see the experiment fail, along with the inconsistent application, or even non-application, of the crown's instructions, seems to have foredoomed the

enterprise. One of the few officials who appears to have attempted to fulfill the crown's wishes, Manuel de Rojas reported having encountered great difficulty in attempting to put the experiment into practice. At the same time, according to Rojas, there appears to have been some willingness on the part of the indigenous population of the *pueblo* of Bayamo to comply.⁷⁰ The extent of indigenous participation (versus resistance), however, and of the process and progress of the experiment itself remain unclear and in need of more sustained research.⁷¹ [43]

Resistance on the part of Spaniard or Indian can perhaps be attributed at least in part to conditions on the island during the 1530s. As noted, the conquest of Mexico and subsequent exodus to the mainland left Spanish settlements depopulated; Spanish colonists were and remained outnumbered by Cuban Indians for more than half a century. At the same time, aboriginal Cubans saw an opportunity to regain control of their communities in certain regions. As was not uncommon for the Spanish Caribbean generally, Spanish towns during this period were more often outnumbered than predominant in the colony, and when immigration did revive the colonial population, it would be heavily concentrated in the western regions, leaving eastern Cuba relatively untouched.⁷² At the same time, as Knight pointed out, there were Spanish towns and "Spanish" towns: the latter more cultural than ethnic or phenotypical.⁷³ [44]

The *empadronamiento*, or male registration records for Cuba, shed some important light on the population question in the late sixteenth century. Perhaps more importantly, these records are also essential in light of the discussion above on the dwindling Spanish colonial population vis-à-vis indigenous population, that is, concerning the composition of urban populations and identities of individuals indicated as *vecinos* (resident citizens, household heads). As noted earlier, recorded estimates of the remaining Spanish colonial population during the exodus to Mexico were based on the number of *vecinos*. Yet by no means does this always indicate Spanish *vecinos*. In 1570, for example, the *empadronamiento* indicated that there were between 235 and 542 *vecinos* in Cuba, the lower number representing Spanish males in towns, the higher number, the total of Spanish and Indian males. In other words, of 542 *vecinos*; more than half of these, at least 307, were hispanicized Indians. Based on these figures, Cuba had a population density of one *vecino* per 480 square kilometers, or, assuming the *vecino* to represent the male head of household (not always true) and a household equaling five members, Cuba's population density amounted to barely 1 per 100 square kilometers.⁷⁴ In other words, by the end of the sixteenth century, after three generations of colonialism, Cuba remained still sparsely populated by Spanish colonists. [45]

Official reports prepared by visiting clergy provide an additional and important source of evidence that sheds more light on this vital issue. In 1570, a report was submitted by Bishop Juan del Castillo who visited numerous towns throughout Cuba. The *visita*, or report, contains details on the populations and conditions of more than ten towns. The conclusion reached is that in almost every case, Spaniards were outnumbered by indigenous Cubans. Furthermore, "the large number of married—and therefore converted—Indians within the jurisdiction of the Spaniards indicates that not only were the natives far from being annihilated but also that Spanish control of the island was restricted to

small scattered settlements of largely non-Spanish populations.”⁷⁵ Three towns—Los Caneyes, Trinidad, Guanabacoa—were entirely inhabited by Indians, while at least two other towns had indigenous majorities. The only two that were entirely Spanish were Havana and Santiago, which accounted for a minority of *vecinos*. That is, less than 50 percent of the population living within the official limits of the state were of Spanish descent.⁷⁶ [46]

Yet these large Indian populations are not represented in the official record, in officially administered centers. What of indigenous population numbers outside these official limits, outside the official record? In light of the available historical evidence, it may be reasonably inferred that the number of Indians outside these Spanish-controlled (if even this term is appropriate) centers was considerably greater and their extinction nowhere near as immediate as generally assumed; therefore, in need of serious reassessment. [47]

In spite of the above evidence, the historiography effectively abandons serious consideration of indigenous peoples in Cuba for the period after the sixteenth century (or Indians or mestizos generally) in favor of a substantially narrowed focus on the African slave trade and slavery. In the Caribbean and especially in Cuba, this is what the history of race, culture, and intercultural relations becomes so thoroughly grounded in (until very recently, for some parts of the Caribbean). In fact, the available fragmentary evidence is enough to urge further, more serious study of the relationship between empire and indigenous peoples in the region. This is suggested, to begin with, in an early seventeenth century report submitted to the monarch by Governor of Cuba, Don Pedro de Valdes who lamented the existence of the many “*gente bárbara*,” particularly the “*indios*,” who continued to occupy the colony.⁷⁷ At the same time, as will be seen below, such *gente* became, once again, members of communities which, in turn, became important contributors to the stability and defense of the Spanish realm. [48]

Particularly relevant in this context, for example, was Spanish reorganization of the empire in the Caribbean by the seventeenth century toward a policy of strategic withdrawal from peripheral areas (including smaller Caribbean islands), concentrating on the protection and shipment of bullion and precious metals from the mainland, and therefore fortifying strategic ports like Havana and Santiago de Cuba. Havana underwent a modest growth in commerce, and western Cuba became a focus of imperial interest. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while Spanish settlements recovered, *pueblos indios* or Indian towns, endured and evolved, and new ones were founded. By this time, however, it appears that a new trend had emerged in the founding of *pueblos indios*. [49]

Although under or within the general framework of colonial Spanish administrative oversight, some Indian towns were, nevertheless, founded not by ecclesiastical or state authorities but through the initiative of Indians themselves. At least one example of this is the village of Jiguaní in eastern Cuba.⁷⁸ Jiguaní came into being through the initiative of “*el Indio*” Miguel Rodríguez who, with the support of the Catholic Church, was able to have the *pueblo* or village formally established in 1700. Rodríguez endeavored to gather into Jiguaní “all of the Indians of the Bayamo region,” descendants of those *indígenas* who had survived the conquest and colonization of early colonial Cuba.⁷⁹ Members of the

indigenous population of Jiguaní also composed its *cabildo* or governing council, representatives responsible for administering the affairs of the *pueblo*⁸⁰ Furthermore, in Indian towns like Bayamo and Jiguaní, indigenous peoples in Cuba appear to have played an increasing role not only in the government of their own communities, but also directly and indirectly in the defense of the realm. [50] and the surrounding district over which it had jurisdiction.

As Spain's American empire continued to develop, Cuba's geographical position made it a center of increasing strategic importance for ships plying the route between the Americas and Europe. Fortifications like that of El Morro constructed at Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and other port cities became essential defensive measures against the encroachments of rival European powers and their "semi-official bands of privateers."⁸¹⁸² In eighteenth-century Cuba, although some of this Amerindian labor came in the form of prisoners shipped from the internal provinces of New Spain, there is also evidence that suggests that at least some of the Indians who provided service for the defense of the Antillean pearl were indigenous Cubans residing in the *pueblos indios*.⁸³ [51] Along with Havana's rising naval importance came a growing demand for labor to build the fortifications and residences, and provision its inhabitants. Although it remains unclear to what extent Indians were subject to the same kinds of labor exactions as their counterparts in the mainland during this period, it is clear that they did provide services as laborers in the construction of fortifications, and were paid a wage and/or received certain rations.

Amerindians in Cuba contributed to the defense of the empire not only as laborers but more directly through the performance of military duties. The compiled listings for the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries entitled the "Register of vecinos, bachelors, Indians, transients and free blacks..." (eg. of Havana and Baracoa) indicate the names and profiles of men deemed eligible for military service. In the register for Havana and Baracoa, next to Spanish or Spanish-Creoles (168), Indian males represent the second largest group (84 or nearly 30 percent), while mestizos and mulattos came in third at 22 percent.⁸⁴ The historiography, however, makes scant reference to the important fact that Indians did participate as members of defense forces arrayed against other imperial intruders (England, France) as armed sentinels, as members of specialized infantry battalions and in indigenous militias. [52]

One of the standard references on the military and civil society in Cuba is Allan Kuethe's *Cuba, 1735-1815: Crown, Military and Society*. Kuethe addresses the important issue of the militias that formed the first lines of defense against French and especially British invasion attempts before the establishment of a professionalized military force. Yet there is virtually no mention of Amerindian participation.⁸⁵ Kuethe argues that the effectiveness of the Cuban militia was limited until the Spanish Crown moved to reform Cuba's defenses after the British occupation in the early 1760s. Prior to this, he notes that, though generally poorly organized and militarily ineffective, there were a few occasions during which the militias did fight well.⁸⁶ In the process of Spain's "disciplining" reforms in Cuba, Spanish recruiters formed white and African-American infantry battalions. Indians, as Kuethe importantly but all too briefly pointed out, were also recruited and

officially incorporated into the ranks of the white militias. Chronic labor shortages, the paucity of able-bodied Spanish men, and the illegality of recruiting those deemed wards of the state and legal minors into the white battalions, resulted in the official—if deceptive—declaration of Indian recruits as “white” in colonial government records. The Indians of Bayamo, for example, were recruited and listed in the official record in this manner.⁸⁷ [53]

For a slightly clearer understanding of the significance of the indigenous role in the defense of the Spanish realm in Cuba, one has to refer back to Wright’s 1916 work on early Cuba (and a precious few other Cuban works). As Wright notes, Indians served as sentinels who stood watch for French and British invaders in the late sixteenth century. Indians also numbered among the Spanish, mestizo and mulatto volunteers who formed the militias in Cuban towns and settlements.⁸⁸ As María Elena Díaz notes in her recent and masterful work on the African slaves of El Cobre, Cuba was the one territory in the Spanish empire where militias of color became most prevalent in the defense network of the crown. Relative to other European empires, Native Americans were rarely used in the defense system of the Spanish empire. Cuba, however, was an exception. In Cuba, the Indians of a number of communities formed and supported their own militia companies by the eighteenth century, and probably earlier. Examples include the villages of Bayamo, El Caney and Jiguaní. The Indian militias of El Caney had, in fact, been entrusted with the watch and defense of the coastal post of Juraguá since at least the seventeenth century.⁸⁹ [54]

Militia companies were part and parcel of the obligations of all colonial communities to the Spanish empire, obligations to be met in return for certain privileges granted by the crown. Indigenous communities like Jiguaní, as part of this arrangement and as subjects of the dominion, were expected to reciprocate like any other colonial town. In exchange, therefore, for corporate land grants, usufruct rights to land, and a considerable degree of autonomy via the maintenance of a *cabildo* or town council of community representatives, Indians also fulfilled their obligations to the crown. These included, for example, mail delivery, providing labor for public works and the construction of fortifications (eg. El Morro), and (sometimes informally) militia service in defense of the realm.⁹⁰ Yet, service for the imperial government did not always guarantee the protection of the autonomy of Indian towns from encroaching Spanish settlement. Jiguaní was typical. [55]

Born of the struggles of Cuba’s aboriginal peoples to survive against land-hungry Spanish *vecinos*, Jiguaní’s *indígenas* continued the struggle in their efforts to maintain the integrity of their *pueblo*. Before the end of the eighteenth century, however, the “*indios naturales*” of Jiguaní found their lands encroached upon and themselves under a legal attack spawned by the Spanish *vecinos* of the Bayamo district, who coveted the lands within the jurisdiction of the *pueblo* and disputed the integrity of the village and boundaries.⁹¹ Rodríguez appears to have anticipated such a contingency and had secured documentation that legally established the *pueblo* and clearly marked out the jurisdictional boundaries.⁹² It was, it seems, his and other representatives’ legal and political foresight that ensured the necessary ammunition against *vecino* attacks. [56]

In the late eighteenth century, while the *geofagos* [literally “earth eaters”] appeared resolute in expanding their estates, the determination and resolution of the *indígenas* of the pueblo of Jiguaní to defend their lands is born out in the myriad petitions, testimonies, and other instruments in their legal and political array deployed in a struggle that stretched out over several decades until the beginning of the nineteenth century. In addition to military duties to the Spanish Crown, therefore, the officers of Indian militia companies like that of Jiguaní also represented and defended their communities through petitioning the crown or in litigation concerning community boundaries.⁹³ According to the Dossier of Land Claims of Jiguaní, for example, the community had sent representatives as early as 1702 and also in 1727, 1782 and 1784-1785 to litigate community boundaries and to defend against any encroachments therein.⁹⁴ [57]

Notably, subordinate groups like the Indians of Jiguaní had had recourse to the regional royal courts or *audiencias* since the beginning of Spanish colonization. Scholars are generally agreed that, at least in the early colonial period, the *audiencias* functioned fairly impartially, and indigenous claimants could and did prevail in their litigation. Indians continued to rely on and resort to these courts for the resolution of land disputes for several centuries, as is evident in the actions of communities like those of the Jiguaní Indians, who traveled to the Santo Domingo *audiencia* at least three times during the 18th century, during which the court heard the residents’ grievances.⁹⁵ By the nineteenth century, however, imperial reforms and colonial independence struggles in the continents heralded a new epoch. [58]

Ultimately, eventually, and ironically, but also consistent historically, early in the nineteenth century, though imperial Spain had earlier decreed the *audiencias* into existence and facilitated the establishment of autonomous Indian towns, by the end of the eighteenth century, institutions like the *audiencias* were proving less impartial, and therefore less judicious, providing the *vecinos* with greater means with which to acquire more land. The Bourbon dynasty introduced a more heavily centralized imperial administration, later accompanied by wars of independence, which reverberated in the Caribbean. Faced with the need to reinforce the loyalty of its Antillean pearl, Spain stepped up reforms. By 1820, this translated into a movement away from political autonomy and economic diversity, and more concerted (and unprecedented) support for larger landed interests like the sugar planters. Again, though this had greater impact in western than eastern Cuba, the effects were eventually felt throughout the island colony. [59]

In Cuba, the office of the Protector of Indians was abolished in 1820; by 1844 the *Pueblos Indios* were abolished by the Crown altogether. According to the statements of a number of outspoken Spanish *vecinos* at that time, little remained of the town’s indigenous population, many had either intermarried with *criollo* (Creole) Cubans or departed, presumably in the context of the enduring struggle over land.⁹⁶ This remains unclear and debatable on at least two counts: one, the presumption that *indígenas* who married white residents stopped being *indígenavecinos* with their own vested interests in mind. [60] (beyond legal and statistical labeling); and two, that such statements were made by Spanish

Nevertheless, by the mid-nineteenth century, Indian towns were being officially “hispanicized,” mainstreamed, as it were, into the modern era. It appears that some *pueblos indios* were more immediately affected by the imperial reforms and land pressures than others, especially those near larger towns, estates, and so on. Some, like El Caney, appear to have endured at least until the era of Cuba’s own wars of independence against imperial Spain in the 1860s and thereafter.⁹⁷ At the same time, Cuba’s indigenous populations also became dispersed, a process aided in considerable part by a series of struggles for independence that endured over three decades, and that took their toll on many Cuban population centers, including the remaining *pueblos indios* like El Caney. [61]

As this essay has attempted to demonstrate, the indigenous presence and role in Cuba remained substantial well beyond the first century of Spanish conquest and colonization. The combined factors of a multifaceted indigenous struggle, imperial ambivalence, and colonial conflict go a considerable way toward explaining the resilience and persistence of indigenous peoples in Cuba. At another level, it may also help explain the apparent ambivalence of surviving *indígenas* toward the independence wars of the late nineteenth century: some like Jesus Rabí, of Jiguaní, and those who formed the Hatuey regiment, supported the independence effort; others appear to have served as scouts for the Spanish forces.⁹⁸ At any rate, by the end of Spain’s dominion in Cuba in 1898, a combination of royal fiat and the devastation of the independence wars may have helped ensure the dispersal (again) of Cuba’s remaining indigenous populations, but not necessarily their demise. [61]

Notes

1 Felipe Pichardo Moya, *Caverna, costa y meseta: interpretaciones de arqueología indocubana* (Havana, 1945), pp. 29-30.

2 Felipe Pichardo Moya, *Los indios de Cuba en sus tiempos históricos*, (Habana: Imprenta El Siglo XX, 1945). See also the review by Duvon Corbitt of Pichardo Moya’s essay in the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, May 1946, 26(2): 212-214.

3 L. Antonio Curet, “Descent and Succession in the Protohistoric Chiefdoms of the Greater Antilles,” *Ethnohistory*, Spring 2002, 49(2): 259-260; Massimo Livi-Bacci, “Return to Hispaniola: Reassessing a Demographic Catastrophe,” *Hispanic-American Historical Review*, February 2003, 83(1): 3-4.

4 European chroniclers made many observations on aboriginal seafaring technology—crafts that included canoes and rafts, some with sails. In an entry dated December 3, 1492, Columbus commented on this Taíno technology, spotting “five very large craft that the Indians call canoes,” including one with “seventeen benches.” The Dominican monk Bartolomé de Las Casas observed somewhat later in Cuba that “they walked many roads, they found many villages and very fertile lands and all cultivated, and big rivers, and near one, they found a canoe made of a log ninety-five palms long [about 20 meters] in which they say 150 persons could sail.” Columbus, *Diario*, p. 192, cited in Ramón Dacal Moure

and Manuel Rivero de la Calle, *Art and Archaeology of Pre-Columbian Cuba* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), p. 10. Las Casas, *Historia de Las Indias*, Vol. I, p. 246, cited in Dacal Moure; de la Calle, p.10. The word Taíno was used by the people themselves to mean “good” or “noble” people or “good men and not cannibals.” Social organization also based on matrilineal descent, avunculocal residence. See Kathleen Deagan and José María Cruxent, *Columbus’s Outpost Among the Taínos: Spain and America at Isabela, 1493-1498* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 23-24. Dacal Moure; Rivero de la Calle, *Art and Archaeology of Pre-Columbian Cuba*, pp. 9-10, 20. See also the relevant works of Fernando Ortiz.

5 The sociopolitical organization of the Taíno ranged from two-tiered hierarchies to “paramount chiefdoms.” The term is in fact often translated as chiefdoms. Through the medieval eyes of the Spaniards, *cacicazgos* probably looked very much like feudal kingdoms. Both *caciques* (“chiefs” or community headmen) and *cacicazgos* would become appropriated for the needs of Spanish colonialism, in Hispaniola, site of the first permanent European settlement in the New World (Santo Domingo), and then in Cuba, conquered and settled more than a decade later. The majority of *cacicazgos* were concentrated in eastern Cuba. L. Antonio Curet, “Descent and Succession in the Protohistoric Chiefdoms of the Greater Antilles,” *Ethnohistory*, Spring 2002, p. 2.

6 Probably the most accurate designation for Cuban indigenous groups generally is Taíno. Based on historical and archaeological sources, and with the exception of a minority of peoples forcibly imported into Cuba somewhat later to bolster labor needs, it is probably safest to refer to aboriginal Cubans as at least in part because recent archaeological evidence unearthed by Cuban and Canadian archaeologists strongly suggests that the majority of those characterized as “*indios*” or Indians, at least until sometime in the late eighteenth century, were Taínos. My reference here to “*indios*” or “Indians” is an historical one, and refers primarily to indigenous Cubans (with an understanding that a minority may be from other regions in the Caribbean or circum-Caribbean, though I contend, based on the available archaeological and historical evidence, that, compared to western Cuba, this was a small minority in the eastern region (and overall in Cuba) and that Taíno and their descendants formed the majority—by the nineteenth century, many mestizo/mulatto or trigeño, in the Cuban vernacular.

7 See Irving Rouse, *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 142-143. No gold was found at this point; the Taínos offered cotton instead.

8 Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 35-39.

9 Gabino La Rosa Corzo, *Los palenques del oriente de Cuba*, Havana: Editorial Academia, 1988, pp. 36-37.

10 Louis Pérez, *Cuba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 23-27.

11 I. A. Wright, *The Early History of Cuba, 1492-1586* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1916), p. 39. Wright was among the first to make extensive use of the records of the Archivo General de Indias for the study of colonial Cuba. Her book remains as one of the standard works for the period.

12 See Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdes, *Historia general y natural de las Indias*; also cited in Wright, p. 65.

13 Pérez, *Cuba*, pp. 28-29.

14 Pérez, *Cuba*, pp. 28-29.

15 See Bartolomé de Las Casas, “Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias, colegida por el Obispo Don Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, de la orden de Santo Domingo, año 1552,” in *Obras escogidas de Bartolome de Las Casas: opusculos, cartas y memorials*, Madrid, 1958.

16 Cited in Pérez, *Cuba*, pp. 29-30; Suzanne Austin Alchon, *A Pest in the Land: New World Epidemics in a Global Perspective* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), p. 64.

17 Cited in Pérez, *Cuba*, pp. 29-30; Suzanne Austin Alchon, *A Pest in the Lan*, p. 64.

18 W. George Lovell, “‘Heavy Shadows and Black Night’: Disease and Depopulation in Colonial Spanish America,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 1992, (82)3: 427-429; Linda A. Newson, “Indian Population Patterns in Colonial Spanish America,” *Latin American Research Review* 1985, 20(3): 46. See also David Noble Cook, *Born to Die* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

19 “Archaeology in Cuba,” David M. Pendergast, Elizabeth Graham, Jorge Calera, and Jorge Jardines, <http://www.belizecubadigs.com/cuba.html>, 2002. As noted on the site, excavations were concentrated at Los Buchillones, and were originally based on a collaborative agreement in 1994 between the Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología y Medio Ambiente (CITMA) and the Royal Ontario Museum. Present work at Los Buchillones represents collaboration between CITMA and the Institute of Archaeology, University College London.

20 Knight, *The Caribbean*, p. 42.

21 Knight, *The Caribbean*, p. 34. Note: Cuba was the frontier until the end of conquest on the mainland.

22 Knight, pp. 40-41.

23 Pérez, p. 33.

24 Nicolás Sánchez-Albornoz, *The Population of Latin America: A History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 82.

25 Cited in Pérez, p. 33.

26 Pérez, pp. 32-34.

27 Pérez, p. 24.

28 Bartolomé de Las Casas, "Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias, colegida por el Obispo Don Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, de la orden de Santo Domingo, año 1552," in *Obras escogidas de Bartolome de Las Casas: opusculos, cartas y memoriales* (Madrid, 1958), pp. 142-143.

29 Las Casas, "Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias," p. 142.

30 Cited in Wright, p. 48. See also *Santo Domingo en los manuscritos de Juan Muñoz*, Roberto Marte, ed. (Santo Domingo: Ediciones Fundación García Arévalo, 1981).

31 See Bartolome de Las Casas, *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*. Perez, p. 26.

32 See James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

33 Pérez also concludes "extinction," p. 30.

34 "Rei a Almirante, Juezes &," September 27, 1514, in *Santo Domingo en los manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz*, Roberto Marte, ed., p. 122.

35 "Rei a Almirante, Juezes, Oficiales," October 19, 1514, in *Santo Domingo en los manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz*, p. 123.

36 Carl Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 198-205. Also to be considered are problems with colonial records "disappearing," that is, Indians who adopt Spanish clothing, language and/or culture and are thereafter recorded by authorities as "Spanish." While Indians disappear from census in this and other ways, it is all in the name. Censuses in Cuba, for example, did not include mestizos or mulattos or other categories of mixed-blood peoples until the 1580s (See Knight; Guitar). Historical evidence for the process of mestizaje in Cuba, compared for that of the period of African slavery, remains understudied and requires serious examination.

37 Clara Sue Kidwell, "Indian Women as Cultural Mediators," *Ethnohistory* Spring 1992, 39(2): 97.

38 Lynne A. Guitar, "Cultural Genesis: Relationships Among Indians, Africans and Spaniards in Rural Hispaniola, First Half of the Sixteenth Century," Ph.D. Diss., Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, 1998, pp. 422-426.

39 A ritual Taino dance celebrating the deeds of ancestors. Cited in Wright (1916), pp. 188-189.

40 Wright, pp. 186-188.

41 See, for example, Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies*, Herma Brifault, trans. (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 45-47.

42 Carta de Gonzalo de Guzmán a Su Majestad, informando del alzamiento de unos indios en unas isletas de la banda del norte, Santiago de Cuba, March 8, 1529, Patronato, leg. 178, R.12, AGI. See also Wright, p. 93.

43 Cited in Wright, p. 93. See also Las Casas, "Los agravios de los Indios," *Brevisima relación*, pp. 3-5. NB. Wright (1916) and ROM (1999) refer to huts or *bohios* built on piles or stilts over water radiocarbon dated at AD1680; notably, archaeologists are uncertain as to why these were built when such construction was considerably more difficult compared to land dwellings; abandonment is noted as a consideration.

44 *Palenques* are long term, self-sustaining runaway communities, are distinguishable from *rancherías*, which are usually more temporary settlements. See La Rosa Corzo, pp. 40-41.

45 La Rosa Corzo, pp. 40-41.

46 Pérez, p. 33.

47 "Interrogation of Indian Runaways, 1533," *Boletín del ANC*, 41 (1941), pp. 46-53, cited in Parry, J.H., Robert G. Keith; Michael Jimenez, eds., *New Iberian World: A Documentary History of the Discovery and Settlement of Latin America to the Early 17th Century*, New York: Times Books, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 353-356.

[48](#) "Interrogation of Indian Runaways, 1533," *Boletín del ANC*, 41 (1941), pp. 46-53. It should be noted that Indians also accompanied slave hunting parties.

49 "Carta del cabildo de Santiago a S.M.," November 23, 1530, in Colección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y organización de las antiguas posesiones españolas de ultramar, Madrid: Publicado por la Real Academia de la Historia, 1885-1932, Segunda serie., vol. 2, pp. 168-169. Also cited in *Documentos para la historia de Cuba: época colonial, Vol. 1*, Hortensia Pichardo, ed. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1971), p. 96.

50 “Carta del cabildo de Santiago a S.M.,” November 23, 1530, *Colección de documentos inéditos*, Segunda serie, V. 2, pp. 168-169. Also cited in F. Pérez de la Riva, *La habitación rural en Cuba*, La Habana: Contribución del Grupo Guamá, *Antropología* No. 26, 1952, pp. 20-28.

51 “Información hecha en la ciudad de Santiago por el de Rojas, teniente gobernador, autorizada por el escribano G. Díaz de Piñera,” January 12, 1533, *Colección de documentos inéditos*, Segunda serie, V. 2, pp. 307-308. Also cited in *Documentos para la historia de Cuba: época colonial, Vol. 1*, Hortensia Pichardo, ed. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1971), p. 97. See also Wright (1916), pp. 137-140.

52 Cited in Wright, p.136.

53 Cited in Pérez de la Riva, *La habitación rural en Cuba*, La Habana: Contribución del Grupo Guamá, *Antropología* No. 26, 1952, pp. 20-28.

54 Cited in Wright (1916), pp. 140, 187. In 1875-1876, a village of “macuriges” or “macunas” (macorix?) Indians, for example, was uncovered and then captured by Spanish colonial authorities. During interrogation, the caciques apparently revealed that their population, some 60 in number, was the offspring of two men and two women.

55 Pérez de la Riva, *La habitación rural en Cuba*, La Habana: Contribución del Grupo Guamá, *Antropología* No. 26, 1952, pp. 20-28. Although the substantial research and analysis of La Rosa Corzo of fugitive slave communities for the later period has since superseded much of Pérez’s work, serious study of these earlier communities and the process of formation remains to be done.

56 La Rosa Corzo, p. 40.

57 Guitart covers this question for Hispaniola to some extent in her dissertation, “Cultural Genesis.” See also La Rosa Corzo regarding slave hunters’ diaries as sources.

58 This is the subject matter of another paper in progress. Meanwhile, see Stewart Culin, “The Indians of Cuba,” *Bulletin of the Free Museum of Science and Art*, 1902, vol. 3, pp. 185-226, R.R. Gates, “Studies in Race Crossing: Indian Remnants in Eastern Cuba,” *Genetica*, 1954, pp. 65-87, and J.A. Cosculluela, *Cuatro Años en la cienaga Zapata* (Havana: E.C.A.G., 1965), pp. 167-169.

59 See cited works of Knight, Wright and Pichardo Moya.

60 Importantly, some of the later Amerindian immigrants to Cuba included Taíno relatives from Santo Domingo. See, for example, Culin, “The Indians of Cuba.” On the subject of Amerindian movements and migrations to Cuba, see the overviews by John Worth, “A History of Southeastern Indians in Cuba, 1513-1823,” unpublished paper presented at the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, St. Louis Missouri, October 2004, and Jason M. Yaremko, “Indians and Emperors: Imperial Geopolitics and

Amerindian Migrations from North America to Cuba,” unpublished paper presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the American Society for Ethnohistory, “Centering Lives in Border Spaces,” Santa Fe, New Mexico, November 2005. For evidence suggesting the indigenous membership of *pueblos indios* or Indian towns in the 18th century, see Hortensia Pichardo, *Los orígenes de Jiguaní* (Havana, 1966). Also see “Los Indios del pueblo de Jiguaní,” 1777-1806, Santo Domingo, legajos 1617-1622, Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Seville, Spain.

61 Sherry Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 20-21; Pichardo, *Los orígenes de Jiguaní*, pp. 12-13.

62 In the case of Guanabacoa, this is suggested in Worth, “A History of Southeastern Indians in Cuba, 1513-1823.”

63 Culin, “The Indians of Cuba,” pp. 195-197.

64 “Rei a Almirante, Juezes, Oficiales,” Valbuena, October 19, 1514, in *Santo Domingo en los manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz*, Roberto Marte, ed. (Santo Domingo: Ediciones Fundación García Arévalo, 1981), pp. 122-124. The eastern region is also where most Taíno cacicazgos were concentrated.

65 Wright, p. 140.

66 Wright, pp. 144-145.

67 Cited in Wright, p. 142.

68 Cited in Wright, pp. 143-144.

69 Cited in Wright, p. 146.

70 “Manuel de Rojas, gobernador de Cuba ...libertad de Indios,” 1533, AGI, Patronato, leg. 177, N.1, R.15; “Manuel de Rojas, gobernador Cuba: autogobierno de los indios,” 1534, AGI, Patronato, leg. 177, N.1, R.17.

71 Cited in Wright, pp. 148-157. See also the following legajos: “Capacidad de los Indios para autogobernarse: Cuba,” 1531, AGI, Patronato, legajo 177, N.1, R.12; “Gobernador y repartidor de Indios en Cuba: Manuel de Rojas,” 1532, AGI, Patronato, leg. 177, N.1, R.13; “Manuel de Rojas, gobernador de Cuba ...libertad de Indios,” 1533, AGI, Patronato, leg. 177, N.1, R.15; “Manuel de Rojas, gobernador Cuba: autogobierno de los indios,” 1534, AGI, Patronato, leg. 177, N.1, R.17.

72 Knight, p. 42.

73 Knight, pp. 42-43.

- 74 Cited in Knight, pp. 42-43. Cuba's Spanish male population was slightly more than Puerto Rico, less than Hispaniola; population density was lowest of the three.
- 75 Juan del Castillo, Obispo de Cuba: visita pastoral, 1570, Patronato, legajo 177, N. 1, R. 24, AGI. Also cited in Knight.
- 76 Juan del Castillo, Obispo de Cuba: visita pastoral, 1570, Patronato, legajo 177, N. 1, R. 24, AGI
- 77 "Carta a S. magestad del Gobernador D. Pedro de Valdes," 1604, reproduced in *Documentos para la historia de Cuba: epoca colonial, Vol. 1*, Hortensia Pichardo, ed. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1971), p. 144.
- 78 Hortensia Pichardo, *Los origenes de Jiguaní* (Havana, 1966), pp. 11-14. Alternate spellings in colonial records include Giguaní and Xiguaní.
- 79 Pichardo, *Los origenes de Jiguaní*, pp. 6-12.
- 80 Pichardo, *Los origenes de Jiguaní*, pp. 12-17.
- 81 Knight, pp. 44-49.
- 82 Knight, pp. 44-49; Maria Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000, p. 243.
- 83 See, for example, the correspondence and testimonies in "Los Indios del pueblo de Giguaní," 1777-1806, Santo Domingo, legajos 1617 and 1618, AGI. This is also suggested in some of the recent work of John E. Worth; see, for example, Worth, "A History of Southeastern Indians in Cuba, 1513-1823," p. 9.
- 84 Cited in Knight, p. 45.
- 85 Allan Kuethe, *Cuba, 1735-1815: Crown, Military and Society* (Knoxville, 1986). See also Rafael Fermoselle, J. Franco, and Guiteras also.
- 86 Kuethe, *Cuba, 1735-1815: Crown, Military and Society*, pp. 10-20.
- 87 Cited in Kuethe, p. 41; source fn37, p. 38.
- 88 Wright (1916), pp. 347-355.
- 89 María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre*, p.91. See also Marrero papers. As Díaz also notes, the stories of longstanding Indian communities like Jiguaní still have yet to be told.

90 Díaz, pp. 150, 242-243, 378n8. There is some discrepancy between the brief references of Kuethe and Díaz. More research is needed to clarify whether there was a coexistence of official and unofficial (ie., “white”) Indian militia companies, or Indian sentinels and Indian (“white”) companies, or a combination with differing functions.

91 See, for example, “Testimonio del expediente promovido por los indios naturales del Pueblode Xiguaní sobre vejaciones y usurpación que padecen en sus personas y terrenos,” October 14, 1785, Santo Domingo, leg. 1618, r. 1, n. 1.

92 Pichardo, *Los orígenes de Jiguaní*, pp. 12-17.

93 See “Indios del pueblo de Jiguaní,” 1793, AGI, Santo Domingo, legajos 1617-1622. Also in Díaz, chapter 11, fn49, p. 300.

94 “Indios del pueblo de Jiguaní,” 1793, AGI, Santo Domingo, legajos 1617-1622; legajo 1617 also cited in Díaz, p. 408n49. See also Marrero, vol. VI, pp. 149-150, 168.

95 Ibid.

96 Cited in Pichardo, *Los orígenes de Jiguaní*, pp. 24-28.

97 See, for example, the testimony of José Almenares Argüello cited in Culin, “The Indians of Cuba,” pp. 191-192.

98 José Barreiro, “Beyond the Myth of Extinction: The Hatuey Regiment.” *KACIKE: The Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology*, 2004.
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