

Literature Review: The Taíno — Connecting Erased Histories and Contemporary Ethnographies

Ken Chitwood

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Introduction

They are the people who first encountered Columbus. Their culture flourished in the centuries immediately preceding this ominous engagement with European explorers, conquerors, & colonizers. They were eradicated in a cruel combination of warfare, slavery, suicide, and disease. Today, they are extinct. They are the Taíno people of the Caribbean. Their narrative is one of movement and migration, one of cultural efflorescence and precipitous decline, of stunning stonework and a complex politico-religious hierarchy that was at once patriarchal *and* matrilineal. Though they are, effectively, no longer in existence, the Taíno influence and relevance for understanding the Caribbean (not to mention their role in the broader context of the Americas) cannot be overlooked. Building on the pioneering research of Ricardo Alegría and Irving Rouse and relying on primary documents from Spanish interlocutors such as Bartolomé de las Casas and Fr. Ramón Pané, archaeologists, anthropologists, ethnohistorians and art historians over the last twenty years have begun to shine more light on who the Taíno were, what they believed, how they lived, and what their enduring effect on the Caribbean and Latin America is.

The following is a literature review of three books on the Taíno which focused on their political, social, and religious life. This review is concerned primarily with identifying features of these works' significance for the ethnographic study of the Caribbean today. The three books under review are Irving Rouse's *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*, William F. Keegan's *Taíno Indian Myth and Practice: The Arrival of the Stranger King*, and the collection *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean* edited by Fatima Bercht, Estrellita Brodsky, John Alan Farmer, and Dicey Taylor for El Museo del Barrio. The essay will proceed by presenting a brief synopsis and commentary on each book's individual contents before putting the texts in conversation on specific themes such as methodology, migration and cultural encounter, and the relevance of the study for contemporary ethnographic work. First, an overview of the books under review.

Book Synopses

The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus by Irving Rouse¹

Irving Rouse is a relative giant in the small field of Taíno research. Every book, essay, or article on the Taíno will feature a reference to Rouse and his work. While his insights and theses are often contested, his excavations, interpretations, and arguments must be considered and confronted if any novel thesis is to be put forth concerning the Taíno and their culture. His standard text is this book under review. In it Rouse sets forth, in broad strokes, the history of the Taíno people and their distinctive ethnohistorical features. Written for the Quincentenary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus, Rouse brought together fifty-five years of his own, and his students', research on the Taíno of the Antilles. It is a rousing synthesis of the state of the field up until the 1990s and provides an interesting overview of the archaeological shifts in the pre-Taíno and Taíno cultures according to migration patterns and epochs of "peopling" the Caribbean. As opposed to explaining the emergence of the Taíno through a theory of cultural diffusion, conquest, acculturation, assimilation, or parallel development Rouse attempts to follow the migratory flows of people from what is now Venezuela and Trinidad & Tobago through, and within, the Caribbean archipelago. Arguing that the "Taínos have not received the recognition they deserve for their role in the events relating to the conquest of the Americas"² Rouse presents an overview of Taíno ethnohistory and movement attempting to not only situate them in the Caribbean, but also differentiate them from their primary rivals at the time of Columbus' arrival — the so-called "Island Caribs." His review is not only helpful for archaeological specialists, but also a wider readership in that it (re)presents the Taíno as a people on the move, from the coasts and river deltas of the northeastern South American continent (and perhaps some from Mesoamerica, Florida, and the Guianas) who were able to establish a sophisticated language, complex political system, and religio-political complex of myth and material culture in contradistinction to other peoples in the Caribbean.

Despite its seminal nature, the work is not without its weaknesses. Notably, as it concerns the state of the "ethnic groups" present at the arrival of Columbus. In providing the historical backstory of the Taíno, Rouse eventually runs up against the fifteenth-century and neglects to reflect substantively on the social, economic, and political institutions of the culture

¹ New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992.

² Rouse, 23.

that Columbus encountered. Furthermore, while his treatment of the Taíno as a single “ethnic group” contributes to an appreciation of them as a culture worth studying in the wider field of Latin American and Caribbean studies, he misapplies this notion to the so-called “Island Caribs” and provides only a cursory treatment of this other significant people who were present at the moment of contact between Europe and the Americas. This might very well be because he critically sees the primitivist over-emphasis on the “Island Caribs” as the prime reason why the Taínos are under-appreciated. This latter fault is negligible and the former is one that provided a rich field of further research and writing by subsequent researchers. Relevant to this review, the next two works built on Rouse’s solid foundation here and were able to describe the Taíno culture of the fifteenth-century in more vivid detail. Without Rouse’s groundbreaking work, this ensuing research would not be to the point it is, and much is owed to Rouse in this field of study.

Taíno Indian Myth and Practice: The Arrival of the Stranger King by William F. Keegan³

Approaching the Taíno from a post-modern and Bahamian archaeological perspective, Keegan offers a unique view of Caribbean prehistory. His excursus on the figure of Caonabó, — a *cacique* from Hispaniola captured by the Spanish following an unsuccessful rebellion in 1495 — reconfigures the layout of Taíno political culture at the time of Columbus’ arrival. However, to posit this book as simply an overview of one character’s story would be unfair. Caonabó is but one player in the larger “non-fiction novel”⁴ that Keegan attempts to explicate. Keegan addresses not only the wider context of Caribbean archaeology, but the entire way that cultural narratives are constructed, presented, and understood. Keegan’s main points are two-fold: first, that any attempt to study culture needs to do so in its totality — cultural beliefs, material culture, ritual actions, and incorporating observers’ own beliefs — and second, to “create a narrative of the initial encounters between the Spanish and native peoples of Hispaniola with specific reference to Caonabó” and the attendant mythologically informed Taíno worldview concerning a “stranger king.”⁵ Akin to the myths of Quetzalcoatl among the Mexica who encountered Cortés,⁶ the “stranger king” myth is applied to the encounter with Columbus, but more than that Keegan applies the myth to Caonabó as a prime-chief among the Tainó at the time of contact and *also* to

³ Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007.

⁴ Keegan, 15-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶ See David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition*, (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 2000).

the researcher as he arrives from North America to dig around Caribbean ethnohistory. From the perspective of archaeology, Keegan's expertise is probably best weighed in his extensive treatment of the Lucayan site of MC-6, which he posits as the origin of the famed Caonabó. However, for general readership the latter part of the book that explicitly explores this site and its context will feel like fighting through weeds in an effort to appreciate the forest. Keegan's thesis regarding Caonabó, Taíno mythology, and the arrival of the Spanish is provocative, but perhaps too speculative to be determinative for the field. Even so, it is a valuable addition to the study of the Taíno and specifically shines light on the significant cosmological parallels running between and through *cacique* (chief), village, island, and cosmos in the Taíno worldview. Others have done a better job of presenting an overview of this topic and it is to their work we now turn.

Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean edited by Fatima Bercht, Estrellita Brodsky, John Alan Farmer, and Dicey Taylor for El Museo del Barrio⁷

Produced for New York's El Museo del Barrio's exhibition on Taíno art and culture from 1997-1998, this work comprehensively gathers the best scholarship on the Caribbean people's material culture, political life, social existence, and significantly, their religious perspectives and practices. Here, the interested reader will find an unparalleled account of a people many assume has been lost to history. The book is replete with full page and detailed color pictures of Taíno artifacts, which are central to the book's contents. However, it is more than a coffee table book. The authors of the essays included represent some of the foremost researchers on the Caribbean and the Taíno. Specifically, it includes Ricardo E. Alegría's essay "An Introduction to Taino Culture and History," which is arguably the single best summary of the Taíno people's way of life. Other essays included cover the Caribbean context, explore the daily life, political and social order, creation myths, cosmology and worship, and highlights of the material culture of the Taíno. The work weaves together essays touching on broad, contextual, topics and specific explorations of particular artifacts (e.g. "The Beaded *Zemi* in the Pigorini Museum," "Taíno Stone Collars, Elbow Stones, and Three-Pointers," or "the Taíno Duho") and themes (e.g. "The Bat and the Owl: Nocturnal Images of Death") to great effect, presenting a picture of Taíno culture that is simultaneously exhaustive and yet detailed enough to provide platforms for further research.

What it lacks in the way of cohesive argument it makes up for in the sheer breadth of coverage from multiple authors with different perspectives. What the reader walks away with is an all-embracing, yet sufficiently detailed, apperception of Taíno culture leading up to the

⁷ New York: The Moccacelli Press, 1997.

encounter with Columbus. This is particularly important when viewed in the context of the other works reviewed here. Where Rouse falls short in giving readers an impression of the specifics of Taíno culture, specifically that which met Columbus on the shores of Caribbean islands in the fifteenth-century, and Keegan's focus is too microscopic to be generally applicable, this book offers both diminutive detail and the general condition of Taíno culture pre-Columbus, with additional insights into the contact period and the continuing influence of Taíno art and culture on the contemporary scene.

Here then, at the end of the first section, we have begun to put these texts in conversation. The remainder of the paper will continue this dialogue and focus on issues of sources and methodology and issues that are relevant for the contemporary study of the Caribbean and the Americas as a whole.

Artifacts, Archaeology, and Ethnography: Research Methodology & the Taíno

The study of the Taíno is still, largely, an archaeologist's game. With that said, there is a burgeoning recognition that to truly apperceive the Taíno and their enduring significance it is increasingly salient to engage in interdisciplinary study that incorporates not only the work of archaeologists' usual partners (art historians, geographers, geologists, etc.), but also ethnographers, semiologists, and cultural and religious anthropologists. The goal is to provide a more textured ethnohistory of the Taíno, as much as possible, and also to understand what endures of the Taíno, if anything at all.

Over three generations of research on the Taíno, starting with Rouse and Alegría, the field itself is still emerging. There is much further study to be done. Thus, there is an increasing recognition from researchers on the Taíno that an interdisciplinary approach is necessary and advantageous.⁸ Yet, there are various forms this interdisciplinary work has taken in the works outlined above. Rouse could be said to be the most traditional of the archaeological archaeologists. While relying on geographers, linguists, art historians, and ethnohistorians to a degree, his primary method was to study the material artifacts of the Antillean people to come to his conclusions.⁹ While this does not inherently undermine his conclusions, this approach does limit his findings.

⁸ Bercht (ed.) et. al., 6.

⁹ Rouse, xi-xii. Also, the tone of his acquiescence to ethnohistorical input is almost melancholic as if referring to the work of ethnohistorians is to be avoided if at all possible (Cf. 136-137).

More encouraging for those interested in a holistic picture of Taíno prehistory are the efforts of others who are combining modern study with ethnohistorical work. Notably, Peter G. Roe drew on the work of Alegría and Rouse who demonstrated the Amazonian-Orinocan origins of the Taíno and their predecessors to combine research on modern Amazonian societies & previous archaeological works to shine light on the nature and scope of Taíno shamanism.¹⁰ This novel approach, problematized appropriately by the author, brought fresh insights to Taíno artwork depicting shamans (*behiques*) and also Taíno culture and mythology as a whole. The key for the interpretation of seemingly contradictory skinny shamans depicted erect phalli lie in the “New World thought, in which life and death form a spiritual continuum” and “decay presages death and rebirth.”¹¹ Roe arrived at this conclusion by deftly merging a meticulous study of Taíno material culture (sculpture, carvings, etc.) and present day ethnography of shamanic systems in the Amazon among the Arawak people. Even so, he qualified his work and said that while “mainland ethnography provides a useful mirror of ancient Taíno shamanism, there are several reasons to employ this form of direct historical analogy carefully”¹² including issues of scope, differences in ecology and geographical location, concerns of social scale, and historical change and cultural adaptations and amalgamation. Still, his adroit application of traditional material interpretation and ethnohistorical analysis made for a sound conclusion and further insight into Taíno shamanism when merged with contemporary ethnography.

Of course, this brings up a critique of the books as a whole. How much can one know of a people’s prehistory? Is an ethnohistory even possible, especially given the relatively scant remains of a once flourishing culture that is now “no more?” This is partly the starting point for the investigation of William F. Keegan in his book, the most recent of the three being reviewed in this essay.¹³ Arising out of a critique, and overview, of his own archaeological discipline and its postmodern “New Archaeological” turn, Keegan goes on to address the importance of setting a peoples’ ethnohistory into a “dynamic cultural field.”¹⁴ This process involves a shift in hermeneutics. Not only does the archaeologist study the material remains to provide sweeping

¹⁰ Peter G. Roe, “Just Wasting Away: Taíno Shamanism and Concepts of Fertility,” in Bercht, (ed.) et. al.: 124-157.

¹¹ Ibid., 124.

¹² Ibid., 156.

¹³ Published in 2007.

¹⁴ Keegan, 13.

stories of ethnohistory (a la Rouse), but must also appreciate the complex, and even chaotic (in the physical-theoretical sense of the term) system which culture indubitably is. Although admitting that “writing about cultures never seems to measure up to what we are trying to achieve....Our work always falls short”¹⁵ Keegan proposed a highly reflexive, interdisciplinary, approach that involves philosophy and physics, fiction and mythic hermeneutics, in an attempt to present not only the history of a people’s artifacts, but a living story of people — mythological characters, historical Taíno people and interacting interlocutors (e.g. Columbus, de las Casas, etc.), contemporary communities, and the researchers themselves included. In the end, Keegan advances his own version of the story, a “reflected reality” in the style of Truman Capote.¹⁶ Such work, although pioneering, has also been critiqued as unnecessarily unorthodox and “speculative” at best.¹⁷ Even so, there is something to be gleaned from Keegan and the others for further study of the Taíno.

Taking all of these approaches together, it seems fruitful to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to studying Taíno culture, even with cautions and censures taken into consideration. Principally, it is my estimation that taking a more traditional archaeological approach to the Taíno tends to lock the culture’s story into the past, not allowing for interpretational lines that appreciate its ability to endure despite war, slavery, and disease. While the “distinct” Taíno material culture has certainly disappeared, only to be unearthed and scrutinized by anthropologists and archaeologists seeking to formulate an accurate prehistory, there is a need to simultaneously appreciate the enduring ethnohistory of the Taíno people and their relevance to the contemporary study of the Caribbean and Latin America (specifically in Amazonian-Orinocan geographies). This is imperative given three stark realities concerning the staying power of Taíno culture: the movement of peoples within, and without, the Caribbean and Latin America; the importance of the global “encounter” of European, Caribbean, and African peoples in the 15th and 16th-centuries and subsequent hybridities that emerged; and the powerful neo-Taíno movement that seeks to acknowledge indigenous inheritance alongside of cultural hybridity. It is to exploring these themes in the above works that this review essay now turns.

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷ Cf. Carl E. Anderson, “Review: William F. Keegan. *Taino Indian Myth and Practice: The Arrival of the Stranger King*.” H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences, (accessed April 4, 2015): <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=32945>.

Migration, Encounter, & Hybridity in the Study of the Taíno

This paper began with a statement affirming two seemingly juxtaposed historical realities: that the Taíno are, effectively, no longer in existence and yet their effect and relevance for understanding the Caribbean (not to mention their role in the broader context of Latin America) cannot be ignored. To better appreciate the tension intrinsic to this two-fold claim a consideration of the themes of migration, encounter, cultural hybridity, and post-colonial imagination must be explored through the lens of the books presently under review.

Although he echoes the ubiquitous motif of Taíno research — that, as a people, their population was decimated and their culture and language extinct — Rouse makes two prominent points worth rumination. Principally, Rouse contends that the Taíno must be appreciated for their role in what he calls the “Columbian exchange” in the “New World.”¹⁸ Second, and related to the former point, that as a people on the move they were well-acquainted with, and perhaps well-adapted for, encounter. As a culture still evolving, and a complex society still emerging, the Taíno unfortunately “succumbed to the effects of overwork, malnutrition, epidemics of introduced diseases, rebellion, emigration, and outmarriage”¹⁹ that met them when Columbus arrived. And yet, the Taíno imparted “a number of biological, cultural, and linguistic traits to the Spaniards, who in turn passed them onto their neighbors...”²⁰ including cassava, tobacco, words like ‘cannibal’ and ‘hurricane,’ and cultural ideas about New World politics — principally the idea of *cacique*.²¹ This process is what Rouse terms “the Columbian exchange.” Picking up on themes of *mestizaje* present in the broader field of Latin American and Caribbean studies, Rouse comments on the confluence of peoples and cultures to say that on the macro level the Taíno race, culture, and language went extinct, but on the micro level that “individual Taíno traits have survived,” and resulted in a distinct cultural conglomeration within which the Taíno play a discrete role.²² The force of this conclusion comes from the build-up of his argument concerning the “peopling” and ensuing “repeoplings” of the Antilles that resulted in the Taíno culture. Tracing the roots and routes of the Casimiroid, Ortoiroid, Saladoid, Ostinoïd, the Taíno and their predecessors and contextual partners from

¹⁸ Rouse, 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 169-171.

²² *Ibid.*, 172.

South America, Central America, and North America in and throughout the Caribbean, Rouse presents a picture of cultural encounter and exchange that makes for stunning cultural diversity, transculturation, and hybrid forms (all observable in the material culture he utilizes as the primary locus of his investigation).²³ Thus, it can be deduced that the Taíno, as a people owing much to what came before them and what surrounded them, were acclimatized to engagement with other cultures and sub-cultures. Therefore, when the Spanish arrived the subsequent exchange was one in which Taíno culture was able to survive and adapt notwithstanding the agency of the Spanish in this encounter, the role of Africans as they were brought over the Atlantic via the slave trade, and the remarkable level of violence, repression, and exploitation that subsequently led to the decimation of the Taíno people and lifeways.

This theme of encounter and ‘survival via hybridization’ is elaborated upon by Keegan and subsequent authors. In Keegan’s study, at a broad level, there is an appreciation for the “multiple [and chaotic] variables” at work in cultural accumulation and expression.²⁴ Therefore, throughout his analysis, Keegan is able to appreciate the various factors contributing to a hybrid Taíno identity. In particular, he sites the importance of migration to the formation of Taíno (and also Carib) mythology and also this theme’s relevance to the encounter with Columbus. As the people were regularly migratory their mythological apperception of the cosmos was one that involved fluid migration across temporal and otherworldly realms (the “subterranean waters” below, the “earthly plane” between, and the “celestial vault” above)²⁵ that paralleled their maritime movement between islands and mainlands. Columbus’ arrival via sea was thus appropriated and interpreted within this migratory mythological framework according to Keegan and thus it shaped the form and content of the exchange between the two cultures.²⁶ Furthermore, building on the the notion that “what is called Taíno is the product of multiple interacting groups with distinct cultural attributes” based off what he calls the “dominant culture-historical framework” bequeathed by Rouse²⁷ Keegan contends throughout the evolution of Antillean peoples (not to be understood in a progressive manner, by any means) that “confrontation, hybridization, and multidimensional interactions of peoples and cultures from

²³ Cf. 69, 96, 134-135, 159-168, 169ff.

²⁴ Keegan, 7.

²⁵ Bercht,(ed.) et. al., 108.

²⁶ Keegan, 40-44.

²⁷ Ibid., 52-53.

different times, places, and backgrounds” was the norm on mythological, practical, and meta-cultural levels.²⁸ What all of this leads to is a conclusion wherein Keegan casts both Spanish and Taíno (and additionally, and admittedly, the researcher as well) as active agents in the New World encounter of the Americas, Europe, and Africa. While disregarding African agency in this narrative, his account provides a helpful frame through which a “portrait of [Taíno] life in the past”²⁹ and present relevance can be viewed.

These notions of Taíno cultural relevance for present day study in the Caribbean are not isolated to a select cadre of researchers in the field. The appreciation is widespread and is most evident in the extensive edited collection of scholarly research published for the El Museo del Barrio exhibition of Taíno art and culture. Not only did authors in this work note the confluence of cultures that came together to “create a new and unique cultural tradition” pre-contact,³⁰ but they appreciated the enduring legacy of the Taíno as well. Whereas Rouse gave the impression that “the Taíno simply passed on a few physical traits, words, household goods, and customs,” the argument is made that “their cultural legacy is far more pervasive” with modern Caribbean cultures emerging out of the coalescence of Taíno, Carib, European, and African traditions.³¹ While focusing on the heritage of Taíno art and material culture, the authors³² admit that the “complicated process” of transcultural fusion has not been fully studied and there is a real possibility that the complete influence of indigenous cultures on contemporary Caribbean lifeways evades current scholarly recognition.³³ For this work, this vigorous cultural hybridity is typified in the “zemi belt” in the Pigorini Museum.³⁴ In Europe, this beaded belt bearing Taíno imagery and African design elements, testifies to the “Caribbean as a unique area, synthesizing the historical and material contributions of three streams of history, and culture: the island Taíno, the conquering Spanish (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and Catalán), and the African slaves.”³⁵

²⁸ Ibid., 68.

²⁹ Ibid., 195.

³⁰ Bercht, (ed) et. al., 55.

³¹ Ibid., 32.

³² In this case, the esteemed Ricardo E. Alegría himself.

³³ Ibid., 32.

³⁴ Dicey Taylor, Marco Biscione, and Peter G. Roe, “Epilogue: The Beaded Zemi in the Pigorini Museum,” in Bercht, (ed.) et. al.: 158-169.

³⁵ Ibid., 169.

Indeed, it could be said that in this single belt the entirety of archaeological and anthropological work on the Taíno can be summarized as an appreciation for the material artifacts of a people that give testament to “a truly pluralistic society, in history, customs, and language” that continues to contribute to an intricate and worthwhile Caribbean culture.³⁶

The legacy intimated by these researchers has been recapitulated in the neo-Taíno movement. Keeping in mind the constructed notion of what researchers call the “Taíno” (as a monolithic people created in colonial contact) and the critique that the neo-Taíno movement is an essentialist recreation, or even invention, of cultural and religious traditions based tangentially on historical folkways,³⁷ the aforementioned movement is one clear way in which the Taíno live on. Acknowledging that all histories are constructed (re)presentations of the past, the neo-Taíno movement is an example of not only the imaginative creativity of present day Caribbeans in search of ancient identities in the present post-colonial moment,³⁸ but is also an attestation of the enduring power of the Taíno themselves. The Taíno have taken on an almost mythological character within present-day Caribbean discourse (most notably in Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Cuba) and are a rallying point for facts, rationalizations, and calls for action that (re)situate Caribbean identities in a long-term historical process rather than just contemporary or colonial conceptualizations. In attempting to formulate identity (essentialist or not) in a tri-racial Caribbean amalgam, the Taíno become the imagined and yet historical node around which many (post)modern hybrid, “Taíno,” and/or Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican identities are shaped and formed. Significantly, the role of the researchers and works reviewed above cannot be overlooked. These works, in establishing the migratory, hybrid, and enduring features of Taíno culture, act as buttresses for neo-Taíno argumentation regarding history and transculturative processes before, during, and after colonial encounter.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cf. Gabriel Haslip-Viera, “Introduction. Competing Identities: Taíno Revivalism and other Ethno-racial Identity Movements among Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean Latinos in the United States, 1980-present” in *Taíno Revival: Critical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Identity and Cultural Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001); and “The ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Neo-Taíno’ Movement in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and its Diaspora and the Return of the Old Anglo Neo-Imperialist Scholarship?” *National Institute for Latino Policy* (NiLP) presentation, February 8 2015. These critiques of neo-Taíno sentiments are, one might say, themselves essentialist, conceiving of Puerto Rican culture as either white and black, Latina/o or African, etc.

³⁸ In line with the notion of “imagination” as proposed by Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities*, (New York: Verso Books, 2006) in regards to nationalism and extended by Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Conclusions & Areas for Further Research

This review should make evident four things: first, that the study of the Taíno is still an emerging, and contested field still offering vibrant opportunities for research; second, that Taíno culture endures not only materially in museums and archaeological sites, but as a powerful cultural notion with imaginative and real effect in the contemporary Caribbean; third, that ethnographic study is thus beneficial in understanding *both* Taíno prehistory and present manifestations; and fourth and finally, a solid ethnohistorical perspective is therefore invaluable for contemporary understandings of Caribbean peoples and cultures. From these conclusions, it can further be postulated, relying on the works reviewed above, that the future of Taíno studies is likely to be interdisciplinary and appreciative of the *longue-durée* of hybridity in the Caribbean context.

This review of literature chose to focus on methodology and the Taíno field of study, rather than addressing at length the merits of the presentation of Taíno prehistory and culture as a whole. The paper only touched briefly on the outline of Taíno history and delineation from, and among, other cultures, and did not talk extensively about the specific contours of Taíno politics, social life, economics, or religion. With that said, the contributions of the above works in these areas are momentous. In presenting a picture of how *caciques*, shamans, village commons, and ceremonies formed an inexorable spiral within which the dynamics of myths, politics, and idols (*zemis*) shaped the Taíno culture, these works are indispensable — particularly in the realm of studying material culture and artifacts such as the *duho*, *three-pointers*, and various representations of *zemis* on *cohoba* (an entheogen used by *behiques* and *caciques* in Taíno religious ceremonies) platters, belts, stone collars, stone elbows, pottery, and vomit sticks. However, although the particular shape of Taíno political, cultural, social, and religious life was overlooked, the methodological and thematic review above provides ample space within which further study — on religious, political, economic, or practical themes — can be explored. Nonetheless, as stated from the outset, this literature review was primarily concerned with identifying features of these works' significance for the ethnographic study of the Caribbean today.

To that end, it has made the point that not only are the Taíno relevant to contemporary ethnographic work in the Caribbean (and indeed, in other Latin American contexts such as the Amazon or in the Caribbean diasporas in North America), but an extensive understanding of their ethnohistory is important for appreciating the Ariadne's Thread which the themes of migration, encounter, and hybridity provide in the study of Taíno culture, past and/or present.