

“Obvious Indian” — Missionaries, Anthropologists, and the “Wild Indians” of Cuba: Representations of the Amerindian Presence in Cuba

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Abstract. This article examines Amerindian identity and the trope of extinction through the prism of anthropological and other representations of indigenous peoples, with a particular focus on observations of peoples labeled as “Indian” or “aboriginal” in Cuba during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the nineteenth century, indigenous peoples assumed a privileged position as subjects of scientific study, but as peoples undergoing or having undergone biological and cultural decline, if not disappearance, especially in Cuba, where indigenous Taíno were (are) considered long extinct. This diminution was facilitated by anthropological paradigms, historiography, and the ideology of race. Though indigenous studies have recently advanced toward a richer, more complex and nuanced understanding of these issues, necessarily facilitated by indigenous participants, holdovers from the old theories of blood quantum and cultural essentialism endure. Paradoxically, however, representations of indigenous peoples based in these persistent paradigms, however obsolete, provide important evidence for the persistence of indigenous peoples and communities in places like Cuba.

By the mid-twentieth century, many people believed the Indians of Cuba to be extinct. Others, however, like Cuban scholar Felipe Pichardo Moya, believed that the Island Arawak, also known as Arawak-Taíno or Indians of Cuba, survived in more than just the cultural and linguistic legacy of Cuba. In a 1945 address to the Cuban Academy of History, Pichardo Moya took “sharp issue with the widely accepted opinion that the Cuban natives were practically exterminated in the century after the conquest,” and harangued his colleagues for their fixation with a nationalistic history that ignored evidence of an “Indian” past.¹ Some believed that Amerindian communities of “half-breeds—almost as pure breeds,” as British botanist and explorer

Sir Harry Johnston of the Royal Geographical Society put it in 1908, continued to exist, especially in eastern Cuba. Various observers in Cuba, from missionaries and anthropologists to military officials and foreign travelers, made similar observations about Amerindians in Cuba during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²

At the same time, the historiography of the area rested on the premise of the so-called extinction of Arawak peoples in Cuba by the seventeenth century. Typical of this history was the conclusion of Louis A. Pérez who, in his seminal work, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, described the “exploitation and ultimate extinction” of indigenous peoples in Cuba.³ More recently, 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.”⁴

The histories of indigenous peoples like the Mashpee, Pequot, Powhatans, and Narragansett and, to a lesser extent, the Métis, to name a few, suggest otherwise. Arthur Ray’s characterization, for example, of historical Métis communities as formerly “invisible” (until recently) and his description of the historical reasons for this “invisibility”—discrimination; antagonistic, assimilationist government policies; the need to survive—suggest some significant parallels with the experiences of indigenous peoples in Cuba. In this context, my analysis of the late colonial and national periods in Cuba has revealed the following: there is historical evidence that suggests the existence of Amerindian peoples in Cuba in the modern period on at least two levels—individuals who claim indigenous (specifically Arawak-Taíno) ancestry and considerable Amerindian populations in organized communities, predominantly in the eastern regions of Cuba, both mestizos and “pure bloods,” living and apparently intermarrying in isolated areas. A third category is that of Amerindian peoples who have migrated, voluntarily and involuntarily, from other parts of the Americas and become incorporated into the population.

The chronological focus for this study is the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the end of the eighteenth century, the interest in science “roused a corresponding interest in the study of man,” and in the Americas, indigenous peoples became “the privileged object of ethnological scrutiny.”⁵ These were centuries by which indigenous peoples had long been presumed “disappearing races”; some indigenous peoples, like those of Cuba and the Caribbean were, by the nineteenth century, believed to have been long extinct. The evidence for indigenous persistence, which includes a collection of recorded encounters (primary and secondary), observations, directed studies, and even interviews and oral histories, is both problematic and full of potential. It is problematic because, among other things, “Indians” or “aboriginals” is often as good a description as one gets from

available evidence. Indigenous Cuban ancestry is less clear, let alone the extent to which the peoples described are actually of Amerindian descent at all. Yet, to the extent that exceedingly little is known about these or other Amerindian groups who, voluntarily and involuntarily, migrated to Cuba from the Circum-Caribbean over the last half-millennium, some of whom formed enduring communities, herein lies the potential. Furthermore, these observers' subjects also described or identified themselves and/or family members as Indian.

Anthropology, Race, and Identity

Much of the evidence examined here is colored by ethnocentric and social Darwinist worldviews common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Anthropologists, archaeologists, and missionaries who worked in Cuba possessed ideas and methods now obsolete (and even offensive). Early anthropology, for example, perceived "race" as a series of distinct categories or types, and assumed that race was based purely on visual cues. In anthropological constructions of "Indian," the notion of "Indian blood" became a "culturally standardized figure of speech, a folk metaphor for biological ancestry," the old European paradigm "that something called *race* inherently determines the identities and characteristics of individuals and groups."⁶

European ideas about racial determinants of individual and group identity that became rooted in North America also eventually influenced Amerindian understandings of identity. Historically, the idea of biological determination of identity was foreign to indigenous communities, whose members were less interested in skin color as an identifier than in language and other learned aspects such as culturally appropriate behavior, social affiliation, and loyalty. These identifiers together are a reflection of the willingness of indigenous peoples to accept, adopt, and assimilate outsiders as individuals or as groups.⁷ As James A. Clifton argues, "modern Indians" who later absorbed Euro-American culture and knowledge also tended toward adopting biological or "blood quantum" theories to determine individual and group identity.⁸

Many theories of racial identity that accepted such biological notions of native identity were based on primordality, which, in turn, determined authenticity: communities of indigenous people who did not "look" native or behave like natives were dismissed as being white, black, or mulatto.⁹ Identity as determined through culture, therefore, is also problematic, especially as understood by anthropologists who theorized an "essentialist," one-to-one relationship between genetic inheritance and the transmission of tradition. As J. Anthony Paredes notes, "culture as a *particular* social

repertoire of ways of doing things, ways of talking, ways of thinking can easily be seen by insiders and outsiders alike as a set of essential characteristics upon which people's existence over time depends."¹⁰ With the work of Eric Wolf, Jonathan Friedman, and others, culture is no longer considered a given, but something in a state of "constant construction and negotiation among and between social actors, even if not fully under their volition. Culture becomes, then, as much the *product* of identity formation and maintenance *processes* as a *determinant* of identity status for a people."¹¹

As Alexandra Harmon explains, "Indian" connotes a sense of self with "hundreds of formulations" at the community or group level and "millions of formulations" at the level of the individual. Identity therefore becomes "an overarching social category variously defined," one that has been diverse, multifaceted, and elastic, changing over time. In turn, indigenous groups or communities "owe their elasticity to the multivalent and contingent nature of their members' social affiliations."¹² The strength of individual and group identity will also vary through space and time. Paredes cites examples (and more follow below) of groups who "clung to a rustic way of life much like their non-Indian rural neighbours, though here and there might be some humble detail of habit or custom traceable to indigenous roots. Despite near cultural identity with their neighbours, these groups retained a distinct identity as 'Indian', albeit often a strongly devalued one."¹³ Such potentially "layered" identities suggest implications for notions of "racial purity" and/or authenticity, along with historical understandings of transculturation, where such processes represent more subtle, nuanced forms of change, interculturalization,¹⁴ and identity formation or transformation.

Our understanding of the complex processes shaping Amerindian identities have been aided by the integration of Amerindian perspectives: "Indians' self-definitions are the outgrowth of complicated dialectics. Indianness has been defined and redefined in continual give-and-take between outsiders' ascriptions and insiders' self-representations, between government policy and actual practice, between national or international forces and local conditions, between the adverse and the beneficial consequences of being Indian, and between Indians with differing self-conceptions."¹⁵ The influence of outsiders, their ascriptions, and their conceptions of Amerindian identity on collective and individual self-conceptions alike has probably been most evident in the context of government policies and laws, although, here too, anthropology and other academic disciplines have played a role. In this context, Amerindian self-identification will also depend on a "counterpoise of its shifting advantages and disadvantages," of benefits material (employment, land rights, education) and nonmaterial (community, self-government) versus suffering (discrimination, genocide).¹⁶

Our historical understanding of this dynamic is relatively new. Until recently, this understanding, to the extent that it was dominated by enduring European or Euro-American ethnocentric assumptions and their accompanying paradigms, was largely based on a pervasive belief in the decline and extinction (early or eventual, depending on the group) of indigenous peoples and their cultures. In turn, the historiography that formed the basis for this understanding was itself arguably the product of uncritical reliance on the early chronicles of European colonizers along with archival records. The problems associated with such an approach, historically speaking, have only recently been appreciated by scholars. Though beyond the scope of this essay, these include the following: that colonial documents can be contradictory, written for specific purposes and audiences, selective, and not impartial; the documentary record is incomplete, a function of the processes of decay, disorganization, and neglect; and, both early chronicles and later travel writings and field observations contain the assumptions and biases of the writers and their own cultural milieus (for example, the industrial revolution, Charles Darwin, and social Darwinism).¹⁷ The consequence of this for the study of indigenous peoples in the Americas has been a tendency toward defining Amerindian identity in terms of the static dichotomies of racial “purity” and “mixed-blood,” where “change or transculturation is tantamount to loss.”¹⁸

There are, therefore, several categories or levels of representation of the Amerindian presence in Cuba, ranging, arguably, from the least significant to most substantial (because substantiated). On the weaker end of the evidentiary spectrum we have fragmentary evidence based on hearsay, through evidence based on dated and debatable anthropological methods of observation and “measurement.” On the other end we have more substantive evidence based on oral histories and verbal responses recorded by some of the same social scientists. Some of the most compelling evidence comes from the subjects themselves, through self-identification or self-representation as Indian. As is common in historical study, therefore, the weight of the evidence varies, but the cumulative effect, at minimum, raises questions about and provides clues to the origins and historical evolution of these peoples and their experiences on the largest island of the Caribbean.

Representations of Amerindians in Late Colonial Cuba: Between “Virtual” and “Total” Extinction

Some of the earliest observations on Amerindians in Cuba in the nineteenth century were based on European and North American notions of progress, civilization, and barbarism, founded, in turn, on the Enlightenment, evo-

lutionary theories pre- and post-Darwin, and an incipient anthropology.¹⁹ Common among these “narratives of disappearance” was the belief in the extinction—eventual, virtual, or complete—of indigenous peoples.²⁰ One of the earliest such observers was David Turnbull, British consul to Cuba and a zealous abolitionist. Turnbull traveled throughout Cuba in the 1830s, publishing his account in an 1840 publication, *Travels in the West: Cuba, with Notices of Porto Rico and Slave Trade*. Turnbull’s main interest was in the colony’s African population, but he made observations on the island’s earliest inhabitants: “The Spanish writers, while admitting the fact that the indigenous inhabitants had gradually disappeared, ascribe it rather to their voluntary emigration to Yucatan and the Floridas. . . . The places where they longest lingered were the towns of Guanabacoa, Caney and Jiguaní, where those who are curious in such matters [claim] still to see among the inhabitants some traces of their Indian origin.”²¹

Author Maturin M. Ballou journeyed through Cuba in the 1880s. On the existence of Taíno peoples in Cuba, his observations are also among the more skeptical. When in eastern Cuba, just northwest of Santiago de Cuba, Ballou remarked:

It seems that there is an Indian village near the copper mines, whose people are represented to be the only living descendants of the aborigines . . . whom Columbus found here on first landing. Probably this people are peculiar in their language, and isolation may have caused them to differ in some respects from the inhabitants of the valley and plains, but four centuries must have destroyed every trace of the early inhabitants of Cuba. Having been from the very outset enslaved and brutally treated by the Spaniards, it is believed that as early as the year of our Lord 1700 they had utterly disappeared, and some historians say no trace was to be found of the native race one century after the settlement of the island by the Europeans.²²

Among the earliest and more authoritative observers, Miguel Rodríguez Ferrer is recognized as the first, albeit amateur, archaeologist to make a substantive discovery in the field. His is also among the earliest claims regarding surviving descendants of indigenous Cubans, or Arawak-Taíno. In 1848, while traveling across the island and conducting research on the flora and fauna, Rodríguez found “various Indian families living in a remote territory” in the valley of San Andrés, at the foot of the Sierra Maestra mountains.²³

In 1881, Spaniard Nicolás Fort y Roldán compiled a philological work entitled *Cuba Indígena* and claimed to have encountered surviving descendants of Cuban Indians in the villages of El Caney and Yateras near Guan-

tanamo, among other sites.²⁴ In Yateras, Fort y Roldan commented: “Some individuals of the almost extinct race *lucaya* could still be found.”²⁵ Fort y Roldan’s encounters were corroborated in the succeeding decades by other observers.

In the 1890s, author and photographer José de Olivares journeyed through Cuba, recording the various regions and peoples he encountered. The product of his travels, a two-volume collection entitled *Our Islands and Their Peoples*, includes photographs and written descriptions of “El Cobre Indians.” According to Olivares, “In the vicinity of El Cobre, near Santiago, there are still some remnants of the ancient aboriginal inhabitants of the island, mixed more or less with Spanish and negro blood. . . . They trace their lineage back to the people who occupied the island when Columbus made his discovery, and are the last remnants of that interesting and sorely persecuted race.”²⁶ Under a photograph with the caption “Descendants of El Cobre Indians,” Olivares reiterates, “These people are the descendants of the original inhabitants of Cuba, but they are now almost extinct, and have intermarried until but little of the Indian blood remains in their veins. They lead a nomadic, gypsy life, constantly travelling, from place to place within a radius of twenty miles of El Cobre.”²⁷

Anthropologist Carlos de la Torre of the University of Havana undertook archaeological work in 1890 in eastern Cuba near El Caney, mindful that the area was “still reputed to include descendants of the Cuban aborigines.”²⁸ When visiting El Caney, de la Torre was “disappointed” to find only “an old man, José Almendares, and a family named Montoya, relatives of his, whose families could be traced in the local parish records back to the year 1690.”²⁹ According to de la Torre, “most Indian of all,” were the inhabitants of Yara and Majayara, near Baracoa, areas visited later by other similarly interested parties.

Observers like those above shared assumptions about the outcome of colonialism and imperialism for indigenous peoples: that of extinction, total or virtual. Where it was not complete, “traces” of Amerindian blood are reported, whether skeptically, as in the cases of Turnbull and Ballou, or more credulously by observers like Olivares. Both Olivares and Fort y Roldan described their subjects as the “last remnants” of an “almost extinct race.” At best, these were considered the “defeated relics” of Spanish conquest and colonization, something that North Americans, socialized to triumphal histories of both Columbus and their own “Indian wars” in an environment molded by the industrial revolution and notions of progress and civilization, could understand as readily as Europeans.³⁰ Reinforced by evolving notions of race—superior and inferior—ideas concerning indigenous cultures, history, and modernity became tied to conclusions of dimin-

ishment, as was summarized by Henry David Thoreau: “The fact is, the history of the white man is a history of improvement, and that of the red man a history of fixed habits of stagnation.”³¹ De la Torre’s characterization of one of his subjects as more “Indian” than others is representative of the rationale of dilution that was symptomatic of both extinction tropes and incipient anthropological theory. The conviction that Amerindians could not survive the “heroic saga of civilization” motivated proto-anthropologists.³²

Latin American intellectuals, many of them members of the post-independence governing elite, adapted European “scientific” racism to their own racially mixed countries, arguing that the naturally stronger “white” genes would ultimately prevail, and envisaged “a future in which blackness and Indianness are not only absorbed but also *erased* from the national panorama, giving rise to a *whitened* mestizo nation.”³³ In Cuba in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “the social construction of race was intimately tied to questions of sovereignty and economic development”; in turn, independence and liberty were closely associated with racial whitening through *mestizaje* (racial mixing) and immigration.³⁴ Paradoxically, Cuban nationalism has historically been founded on the anti-racist ideology of José Martí: Cubanness meant transcending race in favor of a “Cuban” identity. At the same time, the insistence on a national Cuban identity superseding any racial differences was also used to deny and “suffocate” racial or ethnic distinctions for the sake of national unity.³⁵ This had substantial implications both for African-Cubans and for a smaller, yet significant population of Amerindians in Cuba: both had experienced systematic discrimination and oppression under Spanish colonialism; yet both possessed substantial and varied abilities (and opportunities) for adaptation and survival.

One of the most famous observers of Amerindians in Cuba was the great poet and Cuban liberation fighter, José Martí. In the midst of the Cuban war for independence in 1895, Martí, then in the Yateras district of eastern Cuba, noted the active participation of “los Indios de Garrido,” indigenous people who reportedly were deployed by the Spanish as scouts and trackers in the war effort; Martí further commented on a servant woman whom he described as “un Indio cobriza.”³⁶ In his war correspondence with Martí, insurgent general Antonio Maceo also commented on the “Indios” and their effectiveness against the *mambises* (guerrilla fighters); some were eventually persuaded to join the *insurrectos*.³⁷ In the aftermath of the war and during the U.S. military occupation, the indigenous people, like many Cubans, became displaced and dispersed.

Martí wrote extensively on the experiences of indigenous peoples in various parts of the Americas, including the United States. Two points are

particularly relevant to the current study. On one hand, Martí's writings are exceptional in their consistent emphasis on the great value of indigenous peoples and their cultures, and the far-reaching damage done by governments and agencies through institutionalized racism, violence, dispossession, forced relocation, and assimilation. He likened the "unfair and corrupting reservation system" in the United States to a "human cattle ranch," and called for reforms for Amerindians "in accord with their needs and potentialities."³⁸ He was not alone: Helen Hunt Jackson, whom he admired, was in the forefront of philanthropic reform aimed at improving the lot of the Indian through mechanisms like the Lake Mohonk conference, which Martí fully endorsed. The intellectual framework for Lake Mohonk, however, was positivistic and paternalistic, calling for programs like industrial education (by compulsion if necessary) and the break up of communal lands into private property. Though Martí extolled the virtues of Amerindian peoples, it is not always clear that he was extolling the virtues of contemporary Indians versus past or "prehistoric" Indians, which he referred to as culturally "dead" (although he placed full blame on colonialism and the state).³⁹ Ahead of his time in his critique of modernity and indigenous peoples, Martí appears a product of his age when it came to the question of the future of the "defeated race."

Amerindian Identity in the "New Cuba": Race, Culture, and the Ethnographic Present

After the war, U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean, as Peter Hulme noted, provided new opportunities for the development of anthropology, both its professional and amateur exponents.⁴⁰ During the early stages of Cuba's occupation by the United States, members of the military government contributed their observations on the question of Amerindian existence. General Leonard Wood, then military governor of the eastern provinces, encountered "the natives of Baracoa," who, he noted, "are very skillful in manufacturing articles from tortoise shell" — an attribute of Taíno culture.⁴¹ The first U.S. Census of Cuba in 1899 recorded only one "Indian," a Yucatecan woman residing in the Ciénaga de Zapata in western Cuba, but over a thousand "Mexicans." Lieutenant Colonel J. P. Sanger, inspector general and census director, asserted that the census was incomplete, inadequate, and at times inaccurate in its categorizations (people of Chinese origin [and others], for example, were alternately listed as "Coloured" or "White"). He concluded: "There are doubtless remnants of these Indians still in Cuba."⁴² Of Cuba's earliest inhabitants, he contended that "the disappearance of those Indians, the causes of which have been much exaggerated by some

foreign writers, could not have been so complete and rapid as supposed.”⁴³ Yet, the report concluded: “Our want of reliable records . . . makes it impossible for us to estimate the native population of Cuba. Suffice to say that that early race has disappeared, has been absorbed by that other race which early in the sixteenth century attempted the civilization of the world.”⁴⁴

During the occupation and formal independence of Cuba in 1902, in addition to the flood of businessmen entering the country, missionaries, archaeologists, and anthropologists joined the fray, some of them penetrating deep into the rural interior of the island. Cuba, especially, eastern Cuba, was considered underexploited, “virgin soil” by missionaries and scientists. Anthropologists like Daniel Brinton saw Cuba as one of the “promising localities for research”; more pointedly, Otis Mason considered the region “a new and rich field as a relief from the overthruashed straw of our native tribes.”⁴⁵ Scientists like B. E. Fernow of the American Geographical Society and Sir Harry Johnston of the Royal Geographical Society, for example, reported extensively on the flora, fauna, topography, and human population on the island.

In a paper for the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, botanist and geographer Fernow reported with some surprise that “although the island of Cuba was among the first discoveries of Columbus, and active settlement had even by the middle of the sixteenth century been pushed to the extent that by 1553 the Indians had been almost totally extirpated, there remains even today a surprising proportion of the 43,000 square miles of the island practically a terra incognita, unexplored, undescribed, and unmapped, at least in detail.”⁴⁶

The focus of Fernow’s own explorations was the Sierra Maestra mountain region of southeastern Cuba. Fernow described the Sierra Maestra range as virtually impenetrable, and the coastal plain as an area “restricted to narrow bits between bold promontories, reaching rarely more than a mile inland, the slopes rising rapidly, sometimes precipitously, from the sea, attaining 1500 to 2000 feet in two to four miles.”⁴⁷ Yet this rugged mountain range was neither completely inaccessible nor uninhabitable. The lower Sierra Maestra is characterized by lesser altitude and terraced formations or “mesetas,” “squarish in outlines,” covered in forest and grassy clearings, and facing coastward. Here, the botanist found various herbs, citrus fruits, and wild coffee trees, along with a variety of fowl, plentiful populations of black-horned deer and wild boar, and a human settlement. In his description of this undeveloped “solitude,” Fernow observed: “The twenty-eight families of native half-breeds living within these thousand square miles have hardly made an impression on the sea front. Civilization there is none.

Neither school, nor church, nor regular communication appears a necessity for these harmless and childlike, yet quite intelligent folk."⁴⁸

In his 1909 report to the Royal Geographical Society and Institute of British Geographers, Johnston largely concurred with his North American colleague. In his report on the lush flora, varied fauna, and challenging "wild country" surrounding the mountain ranges of eastern Cuba,⁴⁹ Johnston also included detailed descriptions of the island's various inhabitants. He described the fairly diverse mixture of Cuba's population: some 609,000 "Negroes or negroids," 200,000 "pure-blood Spaniards" of recent immigration, a mix of about 20,000 Americans and Europeans, 2,000 Chinese, and approximately 1,200,000 "Spanish-speaking Cubans."⁵⁰ According to Johnston, however, this last and largest group "obviously" contained "a very considerable degree of Amerindian-Arawak intermixture." Johnston asserted further that the indigenous inhabitants of Cuba were more "officially extinct" than factually so: "It is obvious (to me) that their extermination was in no way so complete as Spanish and Anglo-Saxon historians have asserted."⁵¹ The "Amerindian-Arawak," the English geographer contended, "became merged in the Spanish community and henceforth were ranked as Spanish."⁵² Johnston concluded that:

As half-breeds—*almost as pure breeds*—they linger to this day, especially in eastern Cuba. It is, indeed, authoritatively asserted that pure-blood Amerindians remained in the mountains of eastern Cuba down to the early part of the nineteenth century. I have seen "Indian" *reservations of land* [*haciendas comuneras*] which were only broken up and thrown open to general settlement (mainly by Indian half-breeds) by the Spanish government forty years ago.⁵³

In dividing indigenous people whom they encountered into groups of "Indian," "half-breed," and "pure-breed" or "pure-blood," the latent ethnographies undertaken by Johnston and Fernow used distinctions that were, for the most part, "created by colonial categories," ones that would linger well into the twentieth century.⁵⁴ Ironically, Johnston, a proponent of indigenous persistence, still used racial labels that suggested that the degree of "pure" blood determined authenticity or Indianness. At the same time, the isolation of the "pure-blood" Amerindians in the eastern mountains purportedly perpetuated both their purity and primitivism, while the less pure "half-breeds," those who took up farming on allotments derived from communal land, represented indigenous culture's loss and civilization's gain.

As Harmon noted, culture was the analytical paradigm of twentieth-century anthropology. The paradigm, as understood and applied by anthro-

pologists, allied primordiality with the “ethnographic present.” Tradition was defined rigidly and ahistorically, and opposed to modernity and change, an orientation that fostered “a tendency to interpret social change among Indians as loss of culture and loss of culture as loss of group identity.”⁵⁵ Understood in this way, the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean were either relegated to the “dark world of ‘prehistory’”⁵⁶ or pinned with racial or ethnic labels and dismissed as acculturated or Hispanicized, that is, suffering culture and, therefore, identity, loss.

Typical of this era was archaeologist Stewart Culin who, in the spring of 1901, was summoned to Cuba by the Pennsylvania Steel Company to investigate claims by company geologists who had reportedly “encountered a tribe of wild Indians in the mountains of eastern Cuba.”⁵⁷ Arriving in the town of Guantanamo, he reported, “There were Indians living in the vicinity.”⁵⁸ Aside from “the physical traits of their ancestors,” however, he apparently found nothing to distinguish these “Indians” from other residents, “no tribal organization nor Indian customs,” and “they pursued the same vocations” as the rest of the population.⁵⁹ As examples, Culin noted several *stevedores*, one a “full-blooded Indian” and two others with “Indian features,” all of whom worked on a local steamer and were addressed as “indio.”⁶⁰

Culin proceeded to El Caney but, two independence wars later, held out little hope for any substantial find at El Caney, a central site in the Cuban theater of war twice over (1868–78, 1895–98): “In consequences of the war, many changes had taken place in the population, and whether the Indians remained at El Caney was most uncertain.”⁶¹ Still, Culin encountered “one old Indian living in the village. He proved to be the man whom Dr. [Adolf] Bastian had particularly examined in 1873, and the only one whom he considered to be of pure blood. His name was José Almenares Argüello, commonly known as Almenares.”⁶² Culin described Almenares as “a spare old man with iron gray hair,” who “was very hale and alert for his age, which he told me was 112 years.”⁶³

Significantly, Culin recorded the words of his subject: Almenares volunteered that, of the Indians who once populated El Caney, there remained “only me.”⁶⁴ Almenares identified himself as an *Indio*:

His father, he said, had died at the age of 103. He lived in a little cottage where he was born, that had been in his family for 200 years. In his youth, there were many Indians in El Caney. They were a free people wearing the same dress as their neighbours, and talking Spanish. He knew nothing of the old language, and the only Indian word he could recall was “Bacanao,” the name of a river.⁶⁵

Almenares elaborated on, among other things, the lifestyle and living conditions of the Indians of El Caney, their use of local resources, and sociopolitical organization: "Formerly, only Indians were allowed to live in the town [of El Caney]. They had four mayors, two for the town and two for the country. El Caney was one of the principal Indian towns in the old days, and the arms of the place bore the effigy of an Indian princess."⁶⁶ He added that he had been married twice, but had fathered no children. As to the secret of his longevity, he replied that there was none, only "that he was in the hands of God who had permitted him to live."⁶⁷ Several anthropologists later concluded that Almenares was one of the Cuban descendants of the Arawak.⁶⁸

Later in Santiago, Culin "learned that the Indians who had given rise to the story of a wild tribe were probably those living at Yateras, some miles in the mountains, northeast of the city of Guantánamo."⁶⁹ He found the Yateras Indians living near the coffee plantation "La Sorpresa," reportedly migrants from Santo Domingo in the previous century. The owner, Eugenio Ysalgué, described them as:

lazy and unwilling to work, cultivating only little patches of corn in the mountains for their subsistence. They excelled only in the fearless way they hunted the wild hogs in the mountains, attacking and killing them with the machete. . . . They had forgotten all their old language, and their customs were identical with those of the Cubans living in the country. They had no religion and no form of marriage. They had but one wife, but were not faithful to their partners. Their principal amusement was dancing to the music of the rattle, "guayo," and guitar.⁷⁰

Culin recorded various aspects of the lifeways of the Yateras Indians. He entered a number of bohios or "conical Indian huts," some, he noted, "occupied by the negroes." In addition to noting the austere appearance of the bohios, including the common utensil, a large mortar and double-ended pestle for pounding maize, Culin also recorded, typically, the inhabitants' appearance: "The Indians have black hair, light-brown complexion, and pleasing, regular features. . . . They wore the costumes of the country, many men stripped to the waist and children naked."⁷¹

Culin's observations raise several important issues. The archaeologist's expectations were of a form of indigenous survival pristine and "pre-historic." Culin's disappointment is readily apparent: he found "no tribal organization nor Indian customs," and even those "full-blooded" Indians he encountered "pursued the same vocations" as the rest of the population. Almenares, the "old Indian" interviewed in El Caney, appears to embody for Culin the cultural loss that was equated with acculturation and the con-

comitant “death” of Indian culture, which he typically generalized for all Amerindians (at least those he recognized as such) encountered in Cuba.⁷² The old autochthon’s lack of knowledge of an indigenous language seemed only to confirm Culin’s suspicions. Still, he continued his journey through eastern Cuba, including the area of Yateras, Guantanamo, El Cobre, and Baracoa.

In El Cobre and the Guantanamo region, Culin recorded various stories of Cuban Indians related by foreigners and Cubans alike. In El Cobre, a U.S. engineer insisted that “there were Indians still living there.”⁷³ Led by reports of Indians in the intervening chain of mountain ranges eastward, Culin proceeded to Baracoa, where he received the aid of U.S. Lieutenant John Wright, who confirmed that an Indian village existed a few miles outside Baracoa at Yara, and who assigned a rural guard, “an Indian named Juan Gainsa,” as Culin’s guide. At the settlement, Culin reported meeting numerous Amerindian men and women: “On reaching a house, the guard ordered that all the Indians in the neighborhood should assemble at three o’clock.” Culin partook of some of the local amenities, took photographs, and interviewed the local inhabitants:

One of the washerwomen told me her name was Alaya Reyes. At the home I was told that my guide’s name was Juan Azahares. His father’s name was Francisco Gainsa. From this I inferred that the guard was commonly known by his mother’s family name. His mother was of a marked Indian type. Her grandmother, I was told, was a pure Indian named Gregoria Gilarte Rojas, who died at the age of 127. . . . In general, it appears that descent was chiefly reckoned in the female line, but that the wife went to her husband’s house. At a fourth home I was told that the Indian inhabitants of Partido Yara are comprised in three families, Gainsa, Azahares, and Rojas, who are all intermarried.⁷⁴

Culin recorded about “300 heads of families” in Partido Yara, totaling “600 to 800 people” residing in “75 to 100 houses.”⁷⁵ The people of Yara reportedly continued to use various foods and words of indigenous origin, some, like *casavite* (casava bread), *caínoa* (canoe), and *hamaca* (hammock) of Arawak origin, others, like *chicha* (fermented beverage) and *jocuma* (plant used for making rope), of Circum-Caribbean origin (Panama, Central America).⁷⁶ At Yara, Culin visited more families in their homes, accepted invitations to a local fiesta and to the baptism of Antonio Gainsa, a new member of the community. Culin learned more from area residents and Amerindian guides about “Indian families at Dos Brazos,” the “Indians of Yara,” and of others with “Indian blood,” but “farther removed.”⁷⁷ He also learned of the volatile political conditions of the country, the revi-

val of segregationism, and the politics of color. Culin was informed, for example, that “the race statistics in the census of 1890 [*sic*: 1899] are most misleading, many white men with dark families turning in their children as white.”⁷⁸

Concluding his journey in Havana, Culin met with Cuban scholars like anthropologist Carlos de la Torre. Culin had done important work on the Amerindians of Cuba, but placed little or no value on the individuals, families, and communities that he encountered. Despite a distinct social identity as “Indians” and the retention of some habits and customs traceable to indigenous roots, because they “clung to a rustic way of life that was much like that of their non-Indian neighbors,”⁷⁹ Cuba’s Amerindians did not measure up to the archaeologist’s theoretical (and ahistorical) vision. Culin and his Cuban colleagues were ultimately more interested in indigenous artifacts and remains than in the living descendants encountered. Even here, Cuba’s Indians were found wanting: “I had secured a representative collection of the objects used by the existing Indians of Cuba. Reviewing them carefully, I can see nothing among them that is not equally the property of the Cubans generally. . . . The same is true of the Indian words.”⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Culin’s work remains important for a number of reasons already alluded to, not the least of which is the recording of indigenous testimonies that included self-identification. Culin’s interviews were and are substantial sources of evidence of the identity, survival, and transculturation of Amerindians in Cuba. Despite, in some cases, doing so under apparent duress (being ordered by the rural guard to assemble), local Amerindians cooperated with, disclosed, and even corroborated some of the details of their existence for the archaeologist. Ironically, in spite of this, Culin and others like Jesse W. Fewkes and Mark Raymond Harrington continued their pursuit of “dead Indians” (i.e., remains) and artifacts over that of living descendants deemed “diminished” or “non-Indians.”

One of Fewkes’s most substantial contributions to the field was precisely the recognition of the diversity of indigenous cultures from region to region as well as their adaptability and mobility, including, for example, Tainan travel and exchange across the Florida Straits and residence on some of the sixteen hundred keys that surround Cuba.⁸¹ Like Culin, Fewkes acknowledged El Caney as an Indian town, but appeared uninterested in the question of living descendants there or elsewhere on the island.⁸²

One of the greatest influences in the field of archaeology, Harrington led an expedition through Cuba in 1916, during which he recorded the characteristics of the “country residents” in and around Baracoa and elsewhere. His fieldwork, conducted in 1916 and 1919, was compiled in his “Indian Notes,” the published collection of his field notes for Cuba.

Harrington recorded a number of significant encounters. In his discussion of the descendants of Indians in Cuba, he observed:

The class of people who, though smallest in numbers, interest us the most [are] the descendants of the original Indians. . . . They are not so rare, either, in the Baracoa district, for one will pass many persons of strongly Indian features in a day's journey in almost any direction. All, however, probably have more or less Spanish blood, although once in a while a type that looks pure may be seen.⁸³

Harrington observed that concentrations of these "types" may be found gathered in settlements and villages distributed in eastern Cuba. "Some settlements," Harrington asserts, "seem to be almost pure Indian; for instance, Yateras settlement, back of Guantanamo."⁸⁴ He added: "Another settlement whose people, although mixed with Spanish and other blood, still contain many individuals who portray the Indian type plainly, is Yara . . . and there are several others in which aboriginal blood predominates. For instance, a little group of huts near Jauco, known as Playa Blanca, near which may be seen, or could be seen in 1915, a cave still used as a residence by people of aboriginal descent."⁸⁵

Of what he termed "Indian survivals," Harrington observed:

These people still make and use a few articles of aboriginal character, while their houses, their methods of agriculture, and, to a large extent, their mode of life, are still quite Indian—statements which are also true, if in a somewhat lesser degree, of many of their pure white and negroid neighbors. Their language, as such, seems to be extinct, but there is an even larger proportion than usual of Taíno Indian words in the local guajiro of country Spanish.⁸⁶

Harrington characterized such folk as "independent and high-spirited, hospitable, even to dividing their last crust with a guest; honorable, trustworthy, courageous, self-respecting, and above all exceedingly bright and quick mentally, in spite of an almost total lack of [formal] education."⁸⁷ Harrington spent much time in eastern Cuba aided by local guides and makes numerous references to encountering or being guided by "Indio," "modern," or "mixed-blood" "descendants of the aboriginal Cubans."⁸⁸

Harrington claimed the qualified survival in Cuba of Amerindian peoples both indigenous (Taíno) and transnational in origin. Paradoxically, he based his conclusions of indigenous persistence on skewed biological and cultural definitions of indigeneity, ignoring "white" and "negroid" residents, and concentrating instead on those of "strongly Indian features" and "traditional" customs and practices. While the ethnologist Franz Boas

had already challenged notions of race and cultural determinism in anthropology, Harrington and his contemporaries in Cuba appeared to continue to rely on essentialist notions of tradition.⁸⁹ At the same time, gradually but increasingly, the participant-observers encountered more active indigenous participants.

The Persistence of Indians and Paradigms

During the 1910s and 1920s in the swamps of Zapata, southwest of Havana, engineers and social scientists converged to chart the region for development, part of a public works program under President José Miguel Gómez. Cuban engineer and archaeologist J. A. Cosculluela possessed an appreciation for the region's history and the ancient indigenous inhabitants of the area's former cacicazgos of Macorix and Hanabana. Not expecting to actually encounter descendants of "the ancients," Cosculluela met numerous people working as cane cutters and laborers: on the Finca Orbea, he encountered "various families in whose countenance was reflected clear Indian traces."⁹⁰ Cosculluela spoke with Epifanio Díaz who apparently "appreciated his background," and "knew the region like the palm of his hand." In his interview with Díaz, or "Pajaro" (the "Bird"), Díaz related knowledge passed down from his grandfather: that he was a descendant of the *cacique* (chief) Anaconte, "who had a pueblo in Hanabana."⁹¹ To Cosculluela, Díaz's grandfather "presented a clearer Indian type than he."⁹² Cosculluela learned further that Díaz "has various brothers in the area," some of whom "live in the Indian way."⁹³ Díaz asserted that his family had lived in the area "since time immemorial," and had "conserved indigenous customs," an assertion that Cosculluela reportedly corroborated in the pueblo's "ancient cemetery."⁹⁴ Though it's unclear whether any further study of the Zapata swamp region's inhabitants was ever undertaken, the subject of surviving Amerindian peoples in Cuba continued to elicit comment.

Una Roberts Lawrence, a Protestant missionary in the 1920s, encountered and worked with many Cubans. She observed, however, that "so complete was their [Amerindians'] extermination that only once in a while is any trace of their blood discovered now on the island."⁹⁵ In the 1930s, archaeologist Sven Loven studied Tainan culture in the Caribbean. Influenced in part by the work of his predecessors, from Bartolome Las Casas to Harrington, Loven concluded: "Today there are no pure Taínos. Mestizos are found in the rural towns of the Oriente plateau."⁹⁶ Cuban scholar Pichardo Moya, however, argued that there was evidence that suggested the survival of "distinct" Amerindian cultures in Cuba through the nineteenth century.⁹⁷

Archaeologist Irving Rouse's important work on Cuba's precolonial cultures brought him to the northeastern region to the Maniabón Hills, in the 1940s. Rouse gave some credence to his predecessors' reports: "As late as 1838, pure blooded Indians, called 'Indios de las orillas,' still lived near Camagüey. In the same period, Guanabacoa was still famous for its pottery-making and for the production of cassava. . . . In 1845, José de la Torre witnessed an Indian dance [*areito*?] attended by over 50 full-blooded natives, at El Caney near Santiago. We hear of Indians at that town and at Jiguaní again in the time of Bachiller y Morales."⁹⁸ Rouse lamented the apparent demise of indigenous peoples in Cuba and the long-standing Indian settlements, and, typically for the era, added: "It is unfortunate for the anthropologist that these towns were not isolated like the Indian reservations in the United States, thus preserving the aboriginal culture for modern study."⁹⁹ Though acknowledging the existence of "some individuals of Indian type," he concluded that most survivals of the culture were to be found in artifacts and remains.¹⁰⁰

Reginald Ruggles Gates, a Canadian anthropologist and geneticist with the Botany Department at King's College, London, followed on the heels of his colleague with the methodology of his discipline's age. By mid-century, anthropological theory had come a considerable distance: the cultural pluralism and relativism of Boas had been superseded by the English school of social anthropology and the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss and augmented by the increasing incorporation of the perspectives of indigenous informants. But the ideas and methods of one age were not easily superseded by those that followed.

In 1952, Gates launched an expedition to study "race-crossing" in Cuba, scouring eastern Cuba for "Indian remnants." Gates began his fieldwork in January, spending the next two months interviewing, measuring, photographing, and taking blood samples of Cubans he encountered.¹⁰¹ With a particular interest in Cubans of "pure" Amerindian and mixed-blood ancestry, Gates concentrated most of his fieldwork on eastern Cuba, studying Cubans believed to be either partly or "purely" of indigenous ancestry.

At the same time, Gates relied on information from various informants like Southern Methodist missionary Evans who had lived in Holguín for numerous years and was reputed to "know the people well." Evans "had also encountered people of Indian descent, pure Indian several generations back."¹⁰² Gates also met José Luís Molina, a Cuban Baptist pastor who offered his knowledge of "still pure Indians in San Andres" who continued to "live in bohios" and "sit around a central fire."¹⁰³ A considerable amount of Gates's information came directly from the people whose facial and other physical features he so painstakingly measured. In Santiago, for example,

Gates was able to conclude that one such family were of “Indian ancestry,” and was also told by family members that relatives from [El] Caney also “say that they have Indian blood.”¹⁰⁴ Gates concluded that the female members “showed it clearly.”¹⁰⁵

In Preston, a mission field and company town in northeastern Cuba, and in Guantanamo in the southeast, Gates studied and recorded the phenotypes of various families. Commenting on individuals he believed “had evident Indian blood,” Gates clearly distinguished between those he designated “pure Indians” and those who were “Indian and Negro,” mixed blood-lines, or “hybrids,” relying on a combination of oral history, eye-witness and secondhand observations, and his own measurements and analyses of his human subjects’ facial features.¹⁰⁶

In late January, aided by two Baptist missionaries, Gates measured and recorded a number of families in Guantanamo and the surrounding area whose members he variously described as “pure Indian,” having “Indian features,” or of varied ancestry inclusive or exclusive of “Indian” blood. In San Andres, he found families whom he confirmed as “pure Indian.”¹⁰⁷ In February, Gates conducted the bulk of his fieldwork in El Caney, Yara, Baracoa, and Caridad de los Indios. In El Caney, he met and recorded a number of families. The fifty-seven-year-old patriarch of one family, Luis Urdaneta, was reportedly quite “Indian.” Urdaneta informed Gates that his grandparents were considered to be, and, therefore, “were called Indians.”¹⁰⁸ Urdaneta’s wife, furthermore, claimed to have known “the last pure Indian [who had] died some 30 years ago,” originally from Caridad de los Indios.¹⁰⁹

Gates trekked to more isolated communities like Yara and Caridad de los Indios.¹¹⁰ Amidst the caves and caverns en route to Yara, Gates wrote: “We met an obvious Indian, with the sides of his forehead much encroached by scalp, like some South American Indians. Got his photo later. He is presumably Taino. Was later given a fragment of Taino pottery . . . from this locality.”¹¹¹

Gates reported encountering “several Indian families . . . of course now much mixed with Negro, white and even Chinese.” In Yara, Gates observed “Indian descent people.” He measured, recorded, and photographed numerous families; a number of them described and identified themselves and family members as Indian. Several of these families were the progeny of one local patriarch: Theophilo Rodríguez Fuentes, a seventy-eight-year-old veteran of the War of Independence and a father of seven sons by two wives. Gates described Rodríguez similarly as “not Negroid” but an “obvious Indian,” whose sons shared “Indian features.”¹¹² Gates also recorded the “mainly Indian features” of several women, among them Antonia Creme

and Amalia Gainsa and their relatives. A genealogical chart sketched by Gates suggests that his description of Gainsa as “pure Indian” was based at least in part on information provided by them in interviews.¹¹³

Two days later, Gates made another difficult trek to the mountainous district of Caridad de los Indios, where he measured and photographed more Amerindians, concluding: “The Indian characteristics are unmistakable. Even the disposition is quiet Indian. The[y] are being absorbed into [the] population. None is pure Indian, *but they say they were 2 generations ago* [italics added].”¹¹⁴

In Caridad, Gates variously identified members of numerous families as “obvious Indians,” “pure Indian,” and of “obvious Indian ancestry.”¹¹⁵ The predominant family names were those of Ramírez, Rojas, and Ramírez Rojas.¹¹⁶ In one such household, Gates concluded: “All this family look Indian.”¹¹⁷ Other families, he observed, “were mixed mainly with Spanish, but retained the straight black hair of Indians, and rather uniform features,” and made a living primarily “as wood cutters and cultivators.”¹¹⁸ Gates learned that there were “many other Indian families in Yateras District” (visited earlier by Culin),¹¹⁹ but chose to return to Santiago, apparently satisfied with the fieldwork he had conducted in Caridad de lo Indios, which he considered “a great success, as regards Indians in Caridad farm and forest area. They were all delighted to be measured and I took 4 photos of families.”¹²⁰

The remainder of Gates’s Cuban sojourn proved somewhat anticlimactic. He conducted some fieldwork in Jamaica (Cuba), “but drew a blank. [We] enquired of police who said at first that there was no ‘Indian’ in this . . . village. Then they remembered the wife of one man [who] was ‘Indian.’ Saw the husband, who said [his] wife was Indian, but was away. That [ended] the matter.”¹²¹

Some of the methodologies of the social scientists who descended on Cuba in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are now highly debatable; others, like the use of interviews and testimonies and the record of self-identification, possess considerable potential for a deeper understanding of indigenous cultures. Gates was more directly interested in indigenous survivals than his predecessors Culin, Harrington, or Rouse and conducted his fieldwork in the wake of a war that both epitomized and discredited racist ideologies like social Darwinism. Yet the terms and methodological framework employed by Gates, and more than a few of his contemporaries, suggest a kind of paradigmatic stasis or stagnation more commonly associated with the indigenous cultures that they studied. On the one hand, the anthropologists continued to rely on the measurement and recording of skin pigment, bone structure, and other physical features

as determinants of an essentialized notion of race. They also took blood samples, employing genetics, a relatively new branch of science, in the service of reaffirming old paradigms. When classifying the people he met as either “pure” or “diluted,” biology was the principal determinant for Gates; in his analysis, the social and cultural appear peripheral. By the same token, the emphasis on biological ancestry and equation of “precontact” or “pre-historic” cultural practices with “traditional,” and therefore “legitimate,” Indian culture continued to predominate.

This was primarily because, until at least the mid-twentieth century, anthropologists like Gates and Rouse stressed the Indian past as the paramount narrative, “presented as a time of stable cultures strongly contrasted with a maladapted, disorganized present.”¹²² Accordingly, acculturation inevitably courted biological and cultural disintegration and loss. Cross-cultural contact and assimilation, defined as a unilateral imposition of foreign political, linguistic, and cultural forces, could not allow a “serious future,” if any, for Indians.¹²³ Both in national history and the historiography, Amerindian people eventually “simply vanish from the master narrative.”¹²⁴

On the other hand, anthropology did allow for an increasing number of Amerindian voices to be heard. Some anthropologists employed the interview, a method that transformed the subject into informant, with the potential for substantiation and deepening of knowledge of Amerindian peoples in Cuba. In the cases of those who employed this instrument when they encountered Amerindians—Culin, Cosculluela, and Gates—these became historical moments in which Amerindians in Cuba identified themselves, their families, and even acquaintances as “Indian.” The self-identification, knowledge, and lifeways of José Almenares, Alaya Reyes, the Gainsa family, and others represent crucial case studies in the transculturation of Amerindian peoples in Cuba, as well as a vitally important counterargument to the trope of extinction.

Indigenous self-perception and self-identification changed over time; Amerindians did or did not identify themselves as Indians for a number of reasons in different historical contexts. The available evidence for this process in the Cuban context, especially for the earlier period, is very fragmentary and suggestive, in large part a function of the interviewers’ biases and objectives. When approached by the social scientists, Amerindians identified themselves as “Indian.” Paradoxically, while self-identification confirmed the Amerindian presence in Cuba, it sometimes did so in the same qualifying terms employed by anthropology (and government), with the same distinctions between “pure” Indians and those who were not, but once were, “generations ago.”¹²⁵ Like other indigenous peoples, long victims of

colonial categorization, Amerindian peoples in Cuba appeared to have become socialized to the primacy of blood quantum, a European conception that has endured.¹²⁶ At the same time, however, despite the insistence of observers like Culin and others that numerous of their subjects apparently possessed “no tribal organization nor Indian customs,” and “pursued the same vocations” as most other Cubans, those examined still identified themselves, and were identified by others, as Indian. Biological ancestry remained an important determinant, though probably not the only one, for Amerindians in Cuba. Yet the “complicated dialectics” of Amerindian self-definition, dynamic and adaptive, remained peripheral to the interests and understanding of the observers of this period.

The encounters and exchanges between Amerindians and anthropologists did not end with Gates’s fieldwork. A decade later, Cuban anthropologist Manuel Rivero de la Calle of the University of Havana led an expedition with Czechoslovakian anthropologist Milan Pospisil and other Soviet scientists into the eastern regions of Cuba. One of few Cuban scholars to pursue the question of indigenous survival, Rivero de la Calle worked among several communities of Amerindian peoples. Some were identified as Yucatecan Maya located primarily in western Cuba; others, like Caridad de los Indios, in the more isolated eastern regions, he asserted were “the present-day descendants of our indigenous peoples.”¹²⁷ Several decades later, Cuban scholars have still only begun to take a more active interest in the postcontact history of Amerindian peoples in the Caribbean in general and Cuba in particular. Most recently, Cuban archaeologists worked with international colleagues like those at the Royal Ontario Museum and have conducted some groundbreaking (literally and figuratively) fieldwork that will undoubtedly raise more questions about the endurance of the indigenous Taíno in Cuba.¹²⁸ Gradually, but increasingly, this work is being conducted with the active cooperation of, and under the terms of, indigenous peoples themselves.

Conclusions: Rethinking Amerindian Identity and the Trope of Extinction

Importantly, during the second half of the twentieth century, conditions in Cuba had changed dramatically as the country underwent a social revolution, one that put particular emphasis on agrarian reforms and therefore penetrated the countryside. Amerindians encountered during this period continued to identify as “Indian,” but under significantly different circumstances. As Clifton and others have noted, self-declaration is the result of many influences, choices, and incentives. Arguably, to self-identify as

“Indian” in the throes of revolutionary change represents a search for a familiar and meaningful identity in a rapidly changing world.¹²⁹ Somewhat more evidence is available for the late twentieth century, primarily from indigenous peoples themselves, evidence that suggests that Amerindians in Cuba possessed both a richer understanding and more “casual” or nuanced sense of their Indian identity.¹³⁰ As the Taíno cacique Panchito Ramírez of Caridad de los Indios explained to José Barreiro, “my people are Indian; they always were.”¹³¹ This self-understanding, although still partially based in biological ancestry, is more strongly and perhaps decisively manifested in a rich blend of traditional indigenous economies and cultural practices, and in adaptation. Ramírez and his kin based their native identities on ancient bonds and modern adaptations. They considered themselves “native people” for whom it was possible and natural to share in the old ceremonies, practice traditional medicines, sing the old songs, and dance the *areíto*¹³² and also be farmers, patriots, and revolutionaries. They were no less “Indian” for it. This self-understanding is based—has always been based—on a more complex, holistic understanding of cultural endurance, adaptation, and integration, not cultural death.

Though, as Brightman notes, it may appear easy to write off “the anthropology of acculturation” of the earlier period as “infected by teleological modernization theory,” some of its views on culture and adaptation mirrored indigenous understandings and more recent scholarship. Cuban scholars Felipe Pichardo Moya and, with some qualification, Fernando Ortiz, were critical of both Cuban and North American scholarship. Some of the latter research, if in a minority, did challenge the predominant paradigms. As anthropologist Paul Radin argued:

It is unwarranted to argue that, because we can demonstrate the presence of European artifacts or influences, we are necessarily dealing with cultures that are in process of deterioration or that it can no longer be regarded as aboriginal in any sense of the term. These cultures have no more lost their aboriginal character because of European influence than, for instance, the Mississauga Indians of southeastern Ontario lost their aboriginal character because they were so markedly influenced by the Iroquois.¹³³

Though the scholarship on Amerindian culture and history has progressed substantially in the last several decades, understandings of indigenous identity and, therefore, of the Amerindian presence in places like Cuba, remain, to some extent, under the influence of old paradigms and enduring political need. In Cuba, this ambivalent stance is manifested by, on one hand, the assertion of the state and many Cuban archaeologists that,

because of the history of *mestizaje*, “there are no absolutely legitimate Indians left in our country.”¹³⁴ On the other hand, the same state has allowed the development and running of a series of annual conferences in eastern Cuba entitled “The Indigenous Legacies of the Caribbean,” organized by U.S. and Cuban institutions and facilitated by “Cuba’s small but active native population.”¹³⁵

In his published findings of 1954, Gates observed: “It has been frequently stated that the Indians of Cuba were exterminated by AD 1600, but this is not strictly true.”¹³⁶ The evidence is, as noted, perhaps most compelling where self-identification occurs, but ought also to be corroborated and reinforced by fieldwork conducted, to begin with, in documentary records contained in Cuba’s former “Indian towns” and parishes, among other repositories in the country. This is important work that, as Maria Elena Díaz and others have pointed out, has yet to be done. The events noted here and those that have occurred in the last several decades may reinforce the need to critically re-examine old paradigms about identity, extinction, and transculturation. On the presence of Amerindians in Cuba, the evidence strongly suggests that *mestizo* and other descendants of the Taíno (and/or other Amerindian peoples) survived in significant numbers and under various conditions on the island through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whether as “Indios” in *pueblos indios*, as individuals in cities and towns, or together in vibrant, if “invisible” (until recently), rural communities like Yateras .

Evidence like that presented in this study is demonstrative of both the problems and potential for the study of indigenous peoples. It is problematic in its racialistic, ethnocentric assumptions and simplistic conceptualization and understanding of Amerindian individuals and communities in Cuba (and generally) as effectively culturally skewed and static. These understandings, in turn, augmented the discourse and subsequent historiography of the extinction of “primitive races,” Cuba being one case study. Ironically and paradoxically, these old ideas and methodologies, even as they are gradually outpaced (if not yet completely replaced) by newer, cooperative, more empathic approaches respectful of indigenous cultures and communities and their struggles, resourcefulness, and dynamism, provide an important lesson both in the multifaceted and rich means by which Amerindians adapted to perpetuate themselves (as they always had) and the more recent evolution of a more substantive understanding of those life-ways.

Notes

My thanks to colleagues and reviewers and to the staffs of the archives of the Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Brooklyn Museum, and King's College London for all their help, including permission from the latter institution to quote from the Reginald Ruggles Gates papers.

- 1 Felipe Pichardo Moya, *Los indios de Cuba en sus tiempos históricos* (Havana, Cuba, 1945), 8–9; Duvon Corbitt, review of *Los indios de Cuba en sus tiempos históricos*, by Felipe Pichardo Moya, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 26 (May 1946): 212–14.
- 2 The present study is the outcome of my earlier research on missions and culture in Cuba and is also influenced by an important 1989 study by Cuban-American scholar José Barreiro on surviving Arawak-Taino descendants in Cuba. José Barreiro, “Indians in Cuba,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 1989, 13(3): 56–60.
- 3 Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (Oxford, 1995), 30.
- 4 L. Antonio Curet, “Descent and Succession in the Protohistoric Chiefdoms of the Greater Antilles,” *Ethnohistory* 49 (Spring 2002): 259–60; Massimo Livi-Bacci, “Return to Hispaniola: Reassessing a Demographic Catastrophe,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83 (February 2003): 3–4.
- 5 Robert E. Bieder, “The Representations of Indian Bodies in Nineteenth-Century American Anthropology,” *American Indian Quarterly* 20 (Spring 1996): 165.
- 6 James A. Clifton, “Alternate Identities and Cultural Frontiers,” in *Being and Becoming Indian*, ed. James A. Clifton (Chicago, 1992), 10–11.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Bonita Lawrence, “Real” *Indians and Others* (Vancouver, BC, 2004), 5.
- 10 J. Anthony Paredes, “Paradoxes of Modernism and Indianness in the Southeast,” *American Indian Quarterly* 19 (Summer 1995): 346–47.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Alexandra Harmon, “Wanted: More Histories of Indian Identity,” in *A Companion to American Indian History*, ed. Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (London, 2004), 254–55.
- 13 Paredes, “Paradoxes,” 344–45.
- 14 This is a term coined by Matthew Restall. See Matthew Restall and Susan Kellogg, eds., *Dead Giveaways: Indigenous Testaments of Colonial Mesoamerica and the Andes* (Salt Lake City, UT, 1998).
- 15 Harmon, “Indian Identity,” 255.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 257–58.
- 17 See Maximilian Forte, “Extinction: The Historical Trope of Anti-Indigeneity in the Caribbean” (paper presented at Atlantic History: Soundings, 10th Anniversary Conference of the Atlantic History Seminar, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 10–13 August 2005), 2–3.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 See Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca, NY, 2003).
- 20 Jean M. O’Brien, “‘Vanishing’ Indians in Nineteenth-Century New England:

- Local Historians' Erasure of Still-Present Indian Peoples," in *New Perspectives on Native North America: Cultures, Histories, and Representations*, ed. Sergei A. Kan and Pauline Turner Strong (Lincoln, NE, 2006), 416.
- 21 David Turnbull, *Travels in the West: Cuba, with Notices of Porto Rico and the Slave Trade* (London, 1840), 233–34.
- 22 Maturin M. Ballou, *Due South, or Cuba Past and Present* (Boston, 1891), 36–37.
- 23 Miguel Rodríguez Ferrer, *Naturaleza y civilización de la grandiosa isla de Cuba*, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1878), 455. See also Pichardo Moya, *Los indios de Cuba*, 36–37.
- 24 Cited in Mark Harrington, *Cuba before Columbus: Indian Notes and Monographs* (New York, 1921), 132.
- 25 The Lucayans represent one group out of the larger Arawak-Taíno linguistic and cultural family, the first peoples to meet Columbus, be captured by him, and guide him through the Caribbean. Nicolas Fort y Roldan, *Cuba Indígena* (Madrid, 1881), 94–95.
- 26 José de Olivares, *Our Islands and Their People*, vol. 1 (New York, 1899), 208.
- 27 Olivares, *Our Islands*, 239. In an important study on the royal slaves in El Cobre, María Elena Díaz argues that African and Creole slaves resident in El Cobre were later mistaken for indigenous peoples by a number of observers. Díaz acknowledges that El Cobre was once the seat of a Arawak or Taíno *cacicazgo* (chiefdom) that predated the settlement, but concludes that, by the eighteenth century, this was no longer the case. The accounts by Ballou and Olivares, notwithstanding the reference to "El Cobre Indians," refer to the vicinity of El Cobre. At the same time, Díaz concedes that she did not conduct an ethnohistorical analysis.
- 28 Cited in Harrington, *Cuba before Columbus*, 57.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Peter Hulme, "'The Silent Language of the Face': The Perception of Indigenous Difference in Travel Writing about the Caribbean," in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (London, 2007), 86.
- 31 Cited in O'Brien, "'Vanishing' Indians," 420.
- 32 Harmon, "Indian Identity," 250.
- 33 Avi Chomsky, "Barbados or Canada? Race, Immigration, and Nation in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80 (2000): 422.
- 34 Ibid., 420, 426.
- 35 Ibid., 417–20. See also Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902–1940* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004).
- 36 Pedro Garrido Romero led the Spanish volunteers in the Yateras region. José Martí, *Diario de la campana* (Havana, Cuba, 1941).
- 37 Martí, *Diario de la campana*; José Barreiro, "Beyond the Myth of Extinction: The Hatuey Regiment," *KACIKE: The Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology* 2004, www.kacike.org/Barreiro.html.
- 38 José Martí, "The Indians in the United States," in *Inside the Monster*, by José Martí, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York, 1975), 218–23. See also José Barreiro, "The Indian in Martí: American Indian Thinking and Issues in the Writing of the Cuban Apostle," *Americas Review* 22 (Spring–Summer 1994): 148–69.
- 39 Martí, "The Indians in the United States," 219.

- 40 Hulme, "The Silent Language of the Face," 87–88.
- 41 General Leonard Wood, *Special Report on Insular Affairs of the Provinces of Santiago de Cuba and Puerto Principe, Cuba, 1899* (Washington, DC, 1900), 56.
- 42 United States, *Census of Cuba, 1899* (Washington, DC, 1900), 67.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 727.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 Hulme, "The Silent Language of the Face," 88–89.
- 46 B. E. Fernow, "The High Sierra Maestra," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 39, no. 5 (1907): 257.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 259–61.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 268.
- 49 See Sir Harry Johnston, "The Scenery of Cuba, Hispaniola (Haiti), and Jamaica," *Geographical Journal* 33 (June 1909): 629–66.
- 50 Johnston, "The Scenery of Cuba," 640.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 Lawrence, "Real" Indians, 88.
- 55 Harmon, "Indian Identity," 250.
- 56 Hulme, "The Silent Language of the Face," 89.
- 57 Stewart Culin, "The Indians of Cuba," *Bulletin of the Free Museum of Science and Art of the University of Pennsylvania* 3, no. 4 (May 1902): 185.
- 58 Culin, "Indians," 189.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 *Ibid.*, 190–91. In Santiago de Cuba, Culin learned about earlier investigations by (among others) the German archaeologist Adolf Bastian, who came to eastern Cuba in 1873, during the Ten Years' War. Determined to cross insurgent lines in order to reach El Caney, "where it was reported a number of Indians were living," Bastian prepared to go in heavily armed, until convinced of a more peaceable approach. With the help of his guides, Bastian found the "Indian settlement . . . made a number of measurements," and then investigated a cave which "an Indian woman described . . . to have been formerly an Indian habitation." *Ibid.*, 190–91.
- 61 Culin, "Indians," 189.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 190–92. Culin refers to the pueblo as the "El Caney reservation," and makes brief reference to "circles" of land leased by the government, likely the *haciendas comuneras* later abolished by the colonial government. See Stewart Culin, "Central American and Cuban Expedition (1901)," field notes, May 1901, file 42, Stewart Culin Papers, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Archives, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as UPMAA).
- 63 Culin, "Indians," 190–92.
- 64 Culin, "Central American and Cuban Expedition (1901)."
- 65 Quoted in Culin, "Indians," 191–92. See also Culin, "Central American and Cuban Expedition (1901)."
- 66 Culin, "Indians," 192.
- 67 *Ibid.*
- 68 See photos in Culin, "Indians," 190–92, 221; Irving Rouse, *Archaeology of the Maniabon Hills, Cuba* (New Haven, CT, 1942), 29, 30–31; and Reginald

- Ruggles Gates, "Studies in Race Crossing: Indian Remnants in Eastern Cuba," *Genetica* 27 (1954): 70, 87–89.
- 69 Culin, "Indians," 192–93.
- 70 Cited in *ibid.*, 194–97. See also Culin, "Central American and Cuban Expedition (1901)."
- 71 Culin, "Indians," 195.
- 72 Robert Brightman, "Culture and Culture Theory in Native North America," in *New Perspectives on Native North America: Cultures, Histories, and Representations*, ed. Sergei A. Kan and Pauline Turner Strong (Lincoln, NE, 2006), 373–76; Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins* (New York, 1969), 81–82. See also Hulme, "The Silent Language of the Face," 90.
- 73 Culin, "Indians," 199.
- 74 Culin, "Central American and Cuban Expedition (1901)"; Culin, "Indians," 203–6.
- 75 Culin, "Central American and Cuban Expedition (1901)."
- 76 *Ibid.*
- 77 Culin, "Indians," 206–9.
- 78 Cited in *ibid.*, 209, 212–13.
- 79 Paredes, "Paradoxes," 345.
- 80 Culin, "Indians," 219.
- 81 Jesse W. Fewkes, "Prehistoric Culture of Cuba," *American Anthropologist* 6 (October–December 1904): 585–98.
- 82 Jesse W. Fewkes, "Cacimbas of the Isle of Pines (Cuba)," in "Anthropology at the Washington Meeting for 1911," *Science* 35 (26 April 1912): 668–69.
- 83 Harrington, *Cuba before Columbus*, 166–67.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 167.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 167–68.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 168–69.
- 87 *Ibid.*
- 88 *Ibid.*, 19, 21–22, 225, 247.
- 89 Paredes, "Paradoxes," 346–47.
- 90 J. A. Cosculluela, *Cuatro años en la cienaga Zapata* (Havana, Cuba, 1965), 168.
- 91 *Ibid.*
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 *Ibid.* Cosculluela added that Díaz's wife "presents the very characteristic Yucatecan type," features also apparently evident in their children.
- 94 *Ibid.*, pp. 168–69.
- 95 Una Roberts Lawrence, *Cuba for Christ* (Richmond, VA, 1926), 38.
- 96 Sven Loven, *Origins of the Tainan Culture, West Indies* (Gothenburg, Sweden, 1935), 499.
- 97 Felipe Pichardo Moya, *Caverna, costa, y meseta: Interpretaciones de arqueología indocubana* (Havana, Cuba, 1945), 18.
- 98 Rouse, *Archaeology*, 29, 30–31.
- 99 *Ibid.*, 30.
- 100 *Ibid.*
- 101 See Reginald Ruggles Gates, Notes and Diary, Cuba 1952, Gates 11/14, Reginald Ruggles Gates Papers, King's College London Archives, London, UK.
- 102 Gates, Notes and Diary, 18 January 1952.

- 103 Gates, Notes and Diary, 26–27 January 1952.
- 104 Gates, Notes and Diary, 20 January 1952.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 See Gates, Notes and Diary, 20–28 January 1952.
- 107 Gates, Notes and Diary, 28–29 January 1952.
- 108 Gates, Notes and Diary, 3 February 1952.
- 109 Ibid. Culin concluded that a “search in the village of El Caney would no doubt disclose a number of other ‘Indian’ families,” but appears not to have pursued the matter. Gates, “Studies in Race Crossing,” 87.
- 110 Gates, Notes and Diary, 19 and 20 February 1952.
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 Gates, Notes and Diary, 20–21 February 1952.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Gates, Notes and Diary, 22 February 1952.
- 115 Gates, Notes and Diary, 23 February 1952.
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 Ibid.
- 118 Reginald Ruggles Gates, “Indian Remnants in Eastern Cuba,” in *Proceedings of the 30th International Congress of Americanists* (1952). Abstract (Cambridge, 1953), 248.
- 119 Gates, Notes and Diary, 23 February 1952.
- 120 Gates, Notes and Diary, 24–29 February 1952.
- 121 Gates, Notes and Diary, 24–29[?] February 1952.
- 122 Clifton, “Alternate Identities,” 3.
- 123 Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS, 2004), 99.
- 124 Ibid., 225, 229–35.
- 125 See, for example, Gates, Notes and Diary, 22 February 1952 and Gates, “Studies in Race Crossing,” 87.
- 126 Clifton, “Alternate Identities,” 11–14.
- 127 See Manuel Rivero de la Calle, *Las culturas aborígenes de Cuba* (Havana, Cuba, 1966).
- 128 See Mark Pendergast, Elizabeth Graham, Jorge Calvera, and Juan Jardines, “Archaeology in Cuba,” *Archaeology in Belize and the Caribbean*, 2002, www.belizecubadigs.com/cuba.html.
- 129 Clifton, “Alternate Identities,” 21.
- 130 José Barreiro, “Indians in Cuba,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1989): 56–60. See also José Barreiro, *Panchito, cacique de Montaña: Testimonio guajirotáino de Francisco Ramírez Rojas* (Santiago de Cuba, 2001) and Hulme, “‘The Silent Language of the Face,’” 95.
- 131 Barreiro, *Panchito*, 36–37.
- 132 The *areito* is a traditional Taíno dance in tribute to their ancestors.
- 133 Quoted in Brightman, “Culture and Culture Theory,” 374.
- 134 Quoted in Hulme, “‘The Silent Language of the Face,’” 94.
- 135 Ibid.; Mar Pérez, e-mail message, “Cuba: Indigenous Knowledge of the Caribbean: Tour-Conference announcement, 13–20 December 1999,” archived at World History Archives, www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/41/313.html.
- 136 Gates, “Race Crossing,” 65.