

TAÍNO: NATIVE HERITAGE AND IDENTITY IN THE CARIBBEAN
at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian
July 28, 2018 to October 2019
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The Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian [NMAI] recently mounted an exhibit on the indigenous heritage of the Caribbean with an emphasis on the Spanish-speaking islands titled “Taíno: Native Heritage and Identity in the Caribbean.” The following comments were included in articles, blogs and other items in the media during the run-up to the exhibit and afterwards.

1. “‘Indigenous Peoples of the Caribbean are still here’ is the foundational message of a new exhibition” (Native News Online, 2018).
2. “For us, it was important to push through the myth of extinction and explore the historical and living legacy of Indigeneity in the Caribbean,” according to Eduardo Díaz, director of the Smithsonian Latino Center” (Native News Online, 2018).
3. “The Taíno exhibit was only the first step.... No exhibition has actually addressed the topic of Native peoples in the Caribbean after 1492 [from a Native American perspective]. [W]e needed it to retell it from the perspective of Native survival and living legacies. In other words, we didn’t want to do just another archaeology show; instead, we wanted to flip the Columbus story on its head and focus on Native legacies after 1492 and the relevance of Native knowledge in the present.” From Ranald Woodaman, curator of the exhibit (Smithsonian, 2018, Remezcla, 2018, Pastor 2018).
4. “Mitochondrial DNA testing has recently confirmed the survival of Taíno bloodlines in the present-day Caribbean” (ArtBlog, 2018).
5. “In increasing numbers, individuals, families, and organizations are affirming their Native ancestry and identifying themselves as Taíno” (Smithsonian 2018).
6. “We’re different groups, but the reality is we’re one group,” [Neo-Taíno Jorge] Estévez told the crowded auditorium This message of solidarity was echoed by Elba Anaco Lugo, who is considered one of the originators of the Taíno movement in Puerto Rico (Pastor 2018).

Many of these kinds of comments have also been articulated in the media and other venues since at least the early 1990s [if not earlier] by persons who claim to be exclusively indigenous or Taíno in the Caribbean with many also claiming direct and exclusive descent or pedigree from the pre-1492 Columbian indigenous of the islands. The claimed assertions normally made by these so-called “Taíno “survivalists,” “revivalists,” or “reclamationists” and their supporters are all too often, exaggerations, distortions, or totally bogus. A number of these survivalists have also been able to encamp themselves as staff persons at the Smithsonian in recent years. These include most notably, the Cuban “Taíno,” José Barreiro (retired as a staff-person from the library at Syracuse University), and the Dominican “Taíno,” Jorge Estévez, an “activist” and “teacher” [*tekina*] who doesn’t seem to have any academic credentials for the job but is familiar with the issues.

There are also others who claim an exclusive indigenous identity and pedigree who hover on the fringes of this group at the Smithsonian. However, it’s also clear that the institutional

influence of the survivalists at the NMAI and their supporters is limited to a significant degree. As a result, they have not been able to control or fully determine the specifics of the current exhibit. This institution also normally focuses on the experiences of indigenous groups in the mainland United States at both centers in New York and Washington, D.C. with only an occasional special exhibit on the indigenous of Mexico, Central America and South America.

The exhibit itself is divided into two parts—a section that focuses on the “Taíno Survivalists” and their claims with an entire room devoted to this subject, and a section by staff from the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, led by noted archaeologist, Corinne Hofman, which focuses on the actual archaeology, genetics, culture and history of the pre-and post-Columbian indigenous of the Caribbean with specific reference to on-going excavation work in the northern coast of the Dominican Republic. This part of the exhibit does not in fact provide a discussion of the issues from a Native American perspective contrary to the claim made by Ranald Woodaman above in #3. It’s also hardly acknowledged if at all in the “Neo-Taíno” spin by the reclamationists on the internet and the media in general. Surprisingly, the Puerto Rican survivalists are given only minimal attention in this exhibit despite their greater numbers and influence in the politics of their movement. The emphasis in both sections of the exhibit is on Dominican Republic and to a lesser degree, on Cuba, which might be the result of the involvement of Jorge Estevez and José Barreiro in the organization of the exhibit with Ranald Woodaman, and not with the Puerto Ricans who are largely relegated to a supporting role [providing example of Neo-Taíno practices, confirming “evidence,” etc.].

THE “TAÍNO SURVIVALISTS” AND THEIR SECTION OF THE EXHIBIT

The claim that “Indigenous Peoples of the Caribbean are still here” [#1] is problematic to say the least. There are some groups in the Caribbean that can justifiably claim to be “still here,” including the Arima of Trinidad, and the Kalinago of Dominica despite their mixed ethnic background. These groups have an established historical tradition and have been officially recognized as indigenous and tribal on these islands. To some degree, the same can also be said of certain specific families in Eastern Cuba that also have a historical tradition in documents going back to the 19th century if not earlier, and have been granted some unofficial recognition by the Cuban government. However, this ironically also means that Cubans in general cannot freely claim this exclusive identify and pedigree if they are not somehow connected to these families (see Barreiro 2006).

In contrast to what is seen in Dominica, Trinidad and Cuba, the experience of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans is different. There are no verifiable historical traditions in these societies and there have been no identifiable or [more importantly] self-identified indigenous or “Taíno” group or tribes on these islands since the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. The modern Taíno survivalists who first emerge in the 1970s as groups and a political movement [e.g.: the Jaibonicu in New Jersey] cannot link themselves directly to the pre-Columbian Taínos despite references made by the Spaniards to small groups of “*Indios*” who were brought to Puerto Rico in 1695 from Mona Island and other areas and counted as “*Indios*” from 1775-1808 (Sued Badillo 1995: 39, 40, Martínez Cruzado nd). The Taíno survivalists cannot also link themselves to those Puerto Ricans falsely defined as “Indians” by certain U.S. based North American anthropologists and others at the beginning of the 1900s (see Navarro-Rivera 2006), but regardless. These references are almost always cited at face value with great enthusiasm by the Taíno survivalists in their propaganda as proof of continuity at the same time that they also vigorously denounce the same, or other Spanish, European or U.S. “imperialists,” when they make comments or ideas they don’t like, such as the claim that the pre-Columbian indigenous became “extinct” by the end of the 1500s or early 1600s.

There is always an over-the-top, inaccurate and self-serving complaint about the

widespread belief in the “extinction” of the indigenous or the Taíno [#2] which is also supported by the organizers of this exhibit. This belief might still be taught [for example] in the schools in Puerto Rico and supported to a considerable degree by the popular culture—leading to its widespread belief both in Puerto Rico and its Diaspora. This belief is also widespread in Cuba, the Dominican Republic and also in their Diasporas, but many academics and others have not made this claim, starting with the historian, Salvador Brau, at the beginning of the 1900s and continuing up to the present. “Extinction” is denounced by the Taíno Survivalists because of their claim that despite admixture with Africans, European and others after 1492, “Taíno blood” still lives inside the bodies of Caribbean Latinos and this justifies their claim to an exclusive identity and even pedigree despite admixture. However, the issue of “extinction” is not all that simple in actuality because the opposite can also be claimed. “Extinction” as an idea and a reality can be justified because it’s clear that the pre-1492 indigenous ceased to exist as a distinct Native American population unmixed with Spaniards, Africans and Asians from other continents by the late 1500s. The Native American population was mixed but it was only a Native American mix prior to 1492. The result after 1492 was the emergence of an admixed peasant population which reduced the indigenous into a biological and cultural influence and nothing more. This has been the reality since then.

**The results of genetic testing [mitochondrial DNA or mtDNA] have been cited by Taíno Survivalists [#4] with great enthusiasm as a justification for their claim to an exclusive identity and pedigree. These studies have shown [for example] that 61% of Puerto Ricans have “indigenous” mtDNA which might be part Taíno. However, this can just be a trace with much criticism of these studies which are judged to be of limited value for admixed populations because mtDNA is traced through a single female line of ancestry dating back to the 16th century. This means that hundreds, even thousands of women, in an individual’s family tree are not counted depending on the number of generations that are studied—in this case about thirty generations dating back to the middle of the 1500s. Taíno Survivalists also try to ignore any reference to studies done of the single male “Y-chromosome” line of genetic material which shows that only 10-16% of Puerto Ricans have this kind of indigenous DNA in contrast to the 61% for female mtDNA (González 2003).

There are also other problems that focus on the limitations of genetic testing as noted in a number of recent articles in the news media, but a more reliable type of testing which looks at the entire genome of Caribbean Latinos is also minimized, dismissed, or ignored as irrelevant to any discussion by most Taíno survivalists because for these particular individuals, culture is all of a sudden seen as most important as opposed to genetics in the construction of their identity if not their pedigree. Nevertheless, “genome-wide,” “autosomal” or “admixture mapping tests” consistently demonstrate that Caribbean Latinos are genetically mixed. For example, Puerto Ricans on average have 64-73% European, 14-21% African, and only 13-15% [or lower] indigenous DNA. Dominicans and Cubans are also generally comparable with 52% European, 40% Black African, and 8% Native American DNA for Dominicans and 72% European, 20% African and 8% Native American DNA for Cubans (Via et al. 2011, Gravel et al. 2013, Marcheco Teruel et al. 2014, Montinaro et al. 2015).

Ranald Woodaman is also wrong [#3] when he claims that this exhibition is “only a first step” and that “No exhibition has actually addressed the topic of Native peoples in the Caribbean after 1492.” Woodaman—a supposed expert on the subject—either doesn’t know, doesn’t remember, or doesn’t want to know or remember the major 1997 exhibit at New York’s Museo del Barrio titled “Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean.” This exhibit was larger than the one currently seen at the Smithsonian and it also had a “Taíno Survivalist” component which was noted at the time by *New York Times* reviewer Holland Cotter (Cotter 1997). At one point, there was a panel session organized by anthropologist, Arlene Dávila, that discussed the issue of “Taíno” survival. This panel session became the basis for an edited volume that was published soon after and titled *Taino Revival: Critical Perspectives on Puerto Rican*

Identity and Cultural Politics which the “Taíno survivalists” don’t like despite the inclusion of a chapter by *Kasike* [“Chief”], Roberto Mukaro Borrero, who was invited to contribute to this volume [not forced on the editor as falsely claimed by some Neo-Taínos] and who provides a defense of the survivalist movement along with an outline of Neo-Taíno claims (see Haslip-Viera, ed. 2001). A beautifully produced catalogue of the 1997 exhibit which includes a number of excellent essays was also published at the time and is still available for purchase (see: Taíno 1998, Pastor 2018). Contrary to the claims made by Woodaman, there have been at least three previous “first” steps—the first when the “Taíno survivalists” first emerged as groups in the late 1960s-early 1970s, the second during the 1992 Columbus quincentennial, and the third during the period of the 1997 Taíno exhibit at the Museo del Barrio and the exaggerated claims about Puerto Rican DNA that were made during the same period. These first steps or starts have not had much of an impact on the issue of self-identification as Taíno in Puerto Rico or elsewhere in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean when it comes to the number of persons who have adopted this identity and pedigree.

The actual number of persons identifying as indigenous or Taíno remains quite small in Puerto Rico despite the claim made in [#5]. It is less than 1% as opposed to the 3million or so Puerto Ricans on the island. The numbers are also apparently even smaller in Cuba and also in the Dominican Republic where in this case, it becomes confused with the now officially abolished [2011] ant-Haitian and anti-Black “*Indio*” category that was applied to all non-white Dominicans and first officially established during the Trujillo dictatorship [1930-1961]. There also has to be a recognition that there are quite number of indigenous persons in Puerto Rico [for example] who trace their origins on the United States mainland, Mexico, and Central and South America. These individuals would have to be deducted from the overall numbers for the indigenous in the census. The numbers for identified Taínos in Puerto Rico and its Diaspora on the U.S. mainland are also inflated because of the inclusion children who may change their identity as adults. (see Tables below for the numbers and for some of the indigenous on the island who are not Puerto Rican):

The claim that the Neo-Taínos are “...different groups, but the reality is we’re one group” is far from accurate [#6]. There can be considerable disagreement among these groups on a number of issues [e.g.: the origins of the pre-Columbian language of the indigenous and which one should be studied and adopted]. There also is competition and even conflicts between certain groups or tribes and especially between the “confederations.” There is still a 2011 posting of Elba Anaka Lugo’s Consejo General de Tainos Borincanos that has not been updated in which her organization has disconnected from Roberto Mukaro Borrero’s United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP) over unspecified disagreements (See Lugo, 2011 to present). The late Jatibonicu Kasike, Pedro Guanikeyu Torres, also had on-going conflicts with the UCTP and with Lugo’s Consejo—in her case, over Jatibonicu claims to legitimacy and desire to establish their headquarters on the island instead of in New Jersey (personal communication). These kinds of disagreements and conflicts will probably become worse if official recognition by the U.S. government is seriously considered, which is most improbable because Puerto Rico is a “territory” and not a state [a requirement]. On the language issue see (Feliciano Santos 2017. Also see additional comments below on the tensions and conflicts between various Neo-Taíno groups).

**PRELIMINARY DATA ON THE NEO-TAÍNOS
AS RECORDED IN THE 2010 CENSUS OF THE UNITED
STATES MAINLAND AND PUERTO RICO**

Taino Alone/US Mainland 8,671 Total <u>-1,553</u> Children 14 years and under 7,118 Total	Taino alone and other/US Mainland 22,964 Total <u>-4,922</u> Children 14 years and under 18,042 Total
Taino Alone/Puerto Rico 3,351 Total <u>-623</u> Children 14 years and under 2,728 Total	Taino alone and other/Puerto Rico 9,399 Total <u>-1,660</u> Children 14 years and under 7,739 Total
Taino Alone/US and Puerto Rico 9,846 Total	Taino alone and other/US and Puerto Rico 25,781 Total
Taino alone/US Households 3,339 Total Households 2,176 (65.2%) Renters 1,163 (34.8%) Owners 1,029 (88.5%) with mortgages 134 (11.5%) with fully owned homes	Taino alone and other/US Households 8,554 Total Households 5,121 60.0% Renters 3,423 40.0% Owners 3,024 88.4% with mortgages 399 (11.6%) with fully owned homes
Taino Alone/Puerto Rican Households 1,370 Total Households 468 (34.2%) Renters 902 (65.8%) Owners 405 (44.9%) with Mortgages 497 (55.1%) with fully owned homes	Taino alone and other/PR Households 3,887 Total Households 1,111 (28.5%) Renters 2,776 (71.5%) Owners 1,443 (52.0%) with Mortgages 1,333 (48.0%) with fully owned homes
Taino Alone/US & PR Households 4,709 Total Households 2,644 (65.2%) Renters 2,065 (34.8%) Owners 1,434 (69.5%) with Mortgages 631 (30.5%) fully owned homes	Taino alone and other/US & PR Households 12,441 Total Households 6,232 (50.2%) Renters 6,199 (49.8%) Owners 4,467 (72.1%) with Mortgages 1,732 (27.9%) fully owned homes

homes free and clear, but on the island, 55.1% of those identified as “Taino alone” and 48% of those identified as “Taino and other” owned their homes free and clear.

(From Haslip-Viera 2014: p.303).

UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU, 2010

Race Reporting for the American Indian and Alaska Native Population by Selected Tribes:

Summary File 1 (as corrected)

Note: These numbers should be deleted from the total number of persons that are said to be indigenous in the 2010 census by the “Taino Survivalists.” There are probably uncounted others.

Subject	Tribe alone [1]	Tribe alone or in combination with one or more other tribes [2]	Tribe alone or in any combination [3]
AMERICAN INDIAN, 1			
Apache	24	24	32
Arapaho	2	2	3
Blackfeet	0	0	4
AMERICAN INDIAN, 2	1,167	1,181	1,496
Cherokee	24	27	58
Cheyenne	1	1	1
Chickasaw	3	6	8

Subject	Tribe alone [1]	Tribe alone or in combination with one or more other tribes [2]	Tribe alone or in any combination [3]
Chippewa	3	3	16
Choctaw	19	22	28
Colville	0	0	1
Comanche	2	2	3
Creek	1	1	2
Delaware	1	1	4
Hopi	2	2	2
Iroquois	7	8	12
Menominee	2	2	2
CANADIAN AND FRENCH AMERICAN	5	5	10
MEXICAN AMERICAN	104	109	214
Navajo	12	12	24
Osage	0	0	2
Paiute	0	0	6
Potawatomi	0	0	3
Pueblo	27	27	83
Puget Sound Salish	0	0	2
Seminole	2	5	5
Shoshone	0	0	1
Sioux	3	4	7
SOUTH AMERICAN	3,557	3,593	9,764
SPANISH AMERICAN	484	510	1,410
Tohono O'Odham	4	5	10
Ute	0	0	1
Yaqui	1	1	2
Yuman	1	1	1
ALASKA NATIVE AND NORTHWEST COAST U.S.			
Alaskan Athabascan	6	7	11
Aleut	8	8	10
Inupiat [6]	0	0	3
Tlingit-Haida	1	2	2
Tsimshian	0	0	1
Yup'ik	7	7	7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census. Summary File 1, Tables PCT1, PCT2, and PCT3.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEIDEN AND ITS SECTION OF THE EXHIBIT.

Excavation work in the northern part of the Dominican Republic is the main focus of the exhibit organized by Corinne Hofman and the staff of the University of Leiden which is hardly acknowledged by the Neo-Taínos in their spin in the media. There also are display panels and a video in this section that include comments and statements by interviewed individuals that actually question, contradict, or fail to support the claims of the Taíno Survivalists. These are as follows:

1. “Africans and their descendants, including enslaved and free peoples, are sometimes an ignored part of this legacy.”
2. “Africans endured and resisted slavery *with* [my emphasis] Native peoples.” “They *exchanged* [my emphasis] ideas about religion and healing with each other, and often escaped into remote areas together...connecting the cultures and lives of enslaved Africans and Natives” in the centuries that followed.
3. DNA “studies show a high frequency of relationships between Natives and Europeans—and African descended peoples throughout the early colonial period.”
4. Question asked: -----are there Indians in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere at the present time? The answer “No” according to an individual who was interviewed and asked this question.
5. “Into the 1800s, government documents, censuses, church records, folk traditions, and travel accounts mention small numbers of Native settlements and individuals in places such as San Juan de la Maguana, Bánica, and Boyá in the Dominican Republic, and in mountainous Western Puerto Rico. Individuals who are racially identified as *Indios* appear in the civil documents of both nations into the 1900s. However, these records can be inconsistent and are still being researched and debated.”

The ignored part of the post 1492 Columbian legacy [#1 and 2] includes the adoption and consumption of African plantains and bananas [originally from South Asia], beef cattle, chickens, pigs, goat meat, sugar, rice, pigeon peas [*“gandules”*], chestnuts [*“castañas”*], breadfruit [*“panapen”*], and coffee [starting in the early 18th Century], along with various disease strains and so-on. There are also the tools and other cultural and technological influences that originated in “Old World” continents such as iron and steel knives, *machetes*, and other implements, along with the Spanish language, Christianity, African *Santería*, European *Espiritismo* [“Spiritism”] and *bongos* and *conga* drums in music [dating to the 19th century if not earlier]. A video connected to this part of the exhibit focusing on the production of crafts influenced by the Taínos also happens to show European ceramics which are in the shape and style of Spanish *Botijas*. However, the Taíno survivalists diminish, distort, or totally ignore these important contributions in their verbal rhetoric and writings unless pressed on these issues.

It’s also not true that the pre-Columbian indigenous are not acknowledged or given recognition as an influence on Puerto Ricans in general. There are many official archaeological sites, museum exhibits and writings devoted to the Taíno heritage at that same time that there is only one poorly conceptualized museum devoted to African influences. Most of the references to the African heritage [few in number] are focused on some of the communities in Puerto Rico where they are a significant proportion of the population [e.g.: Loíza, Piñones, Carolina, and Playa de Ponce] along with simplistic popular stereotypes that focus on their art, music and dance (e.g.: the festival in Loíza, Puerto Rican masks, *bomba y plena* music and dance, etc.).

Taíno survivalist have also claimed very emphatically in recent years that Europeans, Africans and others became Taínos because they were allegedly “absorbed” into the indigenous culturally if not biologically. This, of course, is a bogus claim. Europeans, Africans and others are usually seen by the reclamationists as having made little—or more often—no cultural contribution of any importance to the ethnically mixed population that replaced the pre-Columbian Taínos on the islands after the 1500s. However, the contemporary Cuban Taínos are an exception in this regard and freely acknowledge these cultural contributions (see Barreiro 2006).

Many of survivalists are also now claiming that the *Jibaros* [a label applied to the mixed peasantry] are actually indigenous or Taínos. These individuals are also not looking for the contributions of the non-indigenous—nor for example, the similarities and overlaps that exist between the Europeans, Africans [etc.] and the indigenous. For example, “*Bohios*” [simple thatched dwellings] can be seen as African just as much as they can be seen as being indigenous. “*Bohios*” are in fact what are called “universals”—in this case a type of architecture employed by peoples in the tropics around the world—in Africa and Asia—at a certain phase in their early development.

See the two starred section [**] above in the “survivalist” section for comments on DNA studies [which] show “a high frequency of relationships between Natives and Europeans—and African descended peoples throughout the early colonial period” [#3]. What is clear about what results from these studies is that the Taíno survivalists are ethnically mixed with only a small indigenous component in their genomes—13-15% for Puerto Ricans, 8% for Dominicans and 8% for Cubans.

As noted, a video shown in this part of the exhibit is also quite clear on the issue of whether there are “*Indios*” in the Dominican Republic and presumably elsewhere in the Caribbean (see #4 and University of Leiden 2018). The video begins with a focus on three women from a rural village in the northern Dominican Republic who are utilizing what are considered traditional indigenous or Taíno materials and methods in the making of their pottery. At one point, one of the women speculates that there is probably some indigenous element in her background and in those of the two other women, but she claimed no indigenous identity or pedigree. There was also the person who stated very forcefully that there were no “Indians” in the Dominican Republic at the end of the video. However, it should be said that there were also still too many comments or statements on the influences that the indigenous had on Africans, Europeans and others at the expense of the non-indigenous even in this section of the exhibit. But this is probably to be expected from an exhibit that focuses on the indigenous.

Despite the Neo-Taíno rhetoric that they are independent minded, pro-indigenous, anti-Eurocentrists, and anti-imperialists, they should be seen as “statehooders” in Puerto Rico and supporters of U.S. imperialism when it comes to their specific goals. Aside from demanding that they be granted official recognition and be given other concessions from the U.S. government with regard to land, education policy and other issues, they have been criticized by Puerto Rican archaeologists working on various excavation sites on the island. Two of the important archaeologists doing this kind of work have written the following critique:

The “Taíno survivalists” “replicate a colonial trope...based on models that are exogenous to what is traditionally considered to be our indigenous reality on the island, but they try to adhere internally to the supposed social organization described for the Taíno in order to legitimize their ‘Taínoness’.... (T)heir recent aim to impose their agenda on the island has been a problem, based as it is on the aforementioned colonial tropes. This was particularly evident in the...[2005] invasion of the Caguana ceremonial center in Puerto Rico, where a group of neo-Taíno Indians...called for the enforcement of NAGPRA [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990] in the protection of ‘their’ ancestral land and ceremonial grounds.... The call for the enactment of this law is primarily based on...the colonial control of the U.S. plenary authority...” As a result, they have argued “for the ‘repatriation’ of the bones of native Puerto Ricans and that no more work should be done over any ‘Taíno’ internment without their consent, thus reproducing a colonial structure on the island by imposing another federal regulation over the treatment of our indigenous past”(See Pagán Jiménez and Rodríguez Ramos 2008, along with the Neo-Taíno claims in Barreiro 2005 and UCTP Blogspot 2005).

Of course, these efforts by the Taíno survivalists have no basis in reality for their

implementation or consideration by the U.S. or by the island based governments because Puerto Rico is a “territory” and not a state of the Union. The enforcement of NAGPRA would require a claim by an officially recognized indigenous tribe that they are descendants of the indigenous persons buried at the site. The Taíno survivalists on the island are not officially recognized by the U.S. or the island governments with the U.S. government constituting the final authority on any effort by the island politicians in this regard. They are thus considered “want to be Indians,” and the same is also true of the “want-to-be Indians” on the U.S. mainland. They can therefore make no such claim from a legal standpoint.

A difficulty also exists with the claim about “government documents, censuses, church records,” etc. [#5] in addition to the statement that they “can be inconsistent and are still being researched and debated.” The problem is that they are hardly accessible. To my knowledge, such claimed documents have not been systematically debated by the scholarly community [e.g.: the writings by Oscar Lamourt Valentín and Juan Manuel Delgado’s Ph.D. dissertation which was reluctantly accepted by his academic review committee as admitted in an interview]. They are not easily accessible [and should be] to other persons doing research in ProQuest-University Microfilms and other data sources. Scholars have been told that they have to personally visit the Centro de Estudios Avanzados on the island to have bureaucratic access to Delgado’s dissertation—leading to the question—“why the difficulty?—why the obstruction?, why not on ProQuest. Is there some sort of secret here?” I recently read a comment on the internet, that the writings of persons such as Delgado, Lamourt Valentín, and others like them, should not be seen by established scholars because of probable “misinterpretation.”

OTHER ISSUES:

Overall and to be expected, there is a deliberate positive spin by the Taíno survivalists with regard to their claims and their focus on surviving indigenous influences and traditions in the exhibit in general, but the whole story—especially the dark side of the story—is not told and there is a dark side to the story which is seen in the politics of the Taíno movement. These include the following:

It’s not clear what the Neo-Taíno agenda might be in the Dominican Republic at the present time. However, in 2011, Jorge Estevez with support from Roberto Mukaro Borrero of the Puerto Rican based UCPT, called for the continuation of the official ant-Haitian and anti-black “*Indio*” category in ID cards and other government documents which had been imposed on all Dominicans during the Trujillo dictatorship [1930-1961] and continued in use in the decades that followed and up until 2011. Dominicans were educated and told during these years [some would say “brainwashed] into believing that they were in fact, different categories of “*Indios*” and that only Haitians and certain others could or should be seen as “black.” The categories used included among others, *Indio lavado*, *Indio claro*, *Indio oscuro*, *Indio quemado*, and *Indio canelo* [washed, light, dark, burnt, and cinnamon colored Indian, etc.] (See Sagas 2000, and Estevez, 2011). The *Indio* category was finally abolished in 2011 as a result of legislation and government action in reaction to consistent complaints by the United Nations, the Organization of the American States and other entities that it was racist. However, the controversy over anti-Haitianism and racism in the Dominican Republic continued in a now more virulent manner as a result of court decisions and actions that would disenfranchise and strip the citizenship of Dominicans of Haitian origin and turn them into stateless individuals (see Brookings Institution 2017).

The political agendas of the Taíno Survivalists in Puerto Rico tend to be more clearly defined; however as previously noted, there is a fragmentation of the political movement because of the many invented “tribes” or “nations” that are in competition and even conflict with each other. Nevertheless, there is overall agreement, along with major demands that the survivalists be

granted official recognition as a group separate and apart from other Puerto Ricans. There was a statement issued by these groups in 2005 which demanded a “Constitutional reform to recognize our inherent rights as an Indigenous Nation” (UCTP Blogspot 2005). Some of the Neo-Taínos also demanded that they be allowed or be granted their own lands [tantamount to the U.S. type of Indian reservations], that they should control or share control of indigenous excavation sites with the authorities, and that there should be changes to the school curriculums that would reflect the Neo-Taíno view of indigenous history and claims to indigeneity. The United States and island governments responded by rejecting or not responding to these demands for a number of reasons including their view that the Neo-Taínos were merely a fringe group.

The fragmentation of the Taíno survivalists into groups also brought-up the question of which defined tribe, nation or confederation would be granted official recognition. The confederations have not been able to bring the groups together into an effective coalition because of the on-going disagreements and conflicts. More importantly and as already noted, Puerto Rico is an “unincorporated territory of the United States” which means that Indigenous groups on the island cannot be granted official recognition. Official recognition can only be granted in the states of the Union. All Puerto Ricans are considered indigenous on the island according to U.S. law because of Puerto Rico’s territorial status. However, an island politician, Victor Vassallo Anadón, has proposed legislation that would make all Puerto Ricans “Taíno” by definition. This was rejected by Mukaro Borrero of the UCTP (Borrero 2013) for the obvious reason that the “Taíno” label would open-up this island-wide identity to the established economic and political elites for their own exploitation and relegate the Taíno survivalists to minor players, or they would not be able to play at all.

The UCTP and others are also trying to use indigenous advocacy in the United Nations, the Organization of American States and other entities in an effort to change the laws of the United States in such a way that they could apply for official recognition from the federal government. There is also the possibility of state recognition, but again, Puerto Rico is a territory, not a state. Even if allowed, the survivalists would have to get at the end of a very slow moving line of “want-to-be Indians” [there were 226 of these in 2008] applying for official recognition. It takes at least two years for a single petition to be processed because of the limited resources of the [BIA] Bureau of Indian Affairs (see Manataka nd. where Puerto Ricans are not even included in the list). However, Puerto Ricans are listed on another internet site. These include: The Concilio Taíno Guatu-Ma-Cu a Borike, Consejo General de Taínos Boricanos, the Jatibonicu Taíno Tribal Nation of Boriken, Liga Guakia Taína-ke [Our Taíno Land], Maisiti Yukayeke, Naguake Indigenous Base Community, and The Turabo Taíno Indian Nation in Puerto Rico.

On February 4, 2005, there were seven petitions in active status and twelve petitions ready and waiting for active status consideration. Eight of the twelve petitions have been waiting for seven years or more, while the four other petitions were ready and waiting for active consideration since 2003 (see GAO 2005). A number of the officially recognized tribes [573 groups, bands and tribes] are already resistant to these efforts claiming with perhaps some justification, that quite a number of these groups are trying to “game the system” in an environment where the benefits to be accrued from the BIA are unfortunately quite meager already.

PANEL SESSION: see <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/117007277>

Panel sessions were also organized as part of the exhibit. There is currently a video of the introductory September 8, 2018 panel session. See <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/117007277>. The participants were Randal Woodaman and Jorge Estevez (The Smithsonian), Elba Anaka Lugo and Abuela Serita (Paseo Taíno and Consejo General de Taínos Borincanos), and

linguistics anthropologist and university professor, Sherina Feliciano Santos. The panelists discussed the issues with an emphasis on the need for [*rescate*], or the rescue of the Taíno heritage, along with the biographical history of the participants and how they came to identify as “Taíno” with professor Feliciano being the exception.

Problematic comments articulated by the participants in this panel session were as follows:

1. Eduardo Díaz, director of the Smithsonian Latino Center claimed at the beginning of the panel session that there was a growing interest in the Latino legacy and people who identify as Taíno; however, the numbers do not support this assertion. The figures provided by the census and other sources bounce back-and-forth depending on how people are counted and identified by “race” or ethnicity. An estimated 13,336 or 0.4% of Puerto Ricans were said to have identified as “indigenous” in the year 2000 census. However, the most recent 2011-2016 ACS survey provided a figure of only 7,831 who identified as “indigenous.” Corrected and somewhat speculative figures for the 2010 census [e.g.: children under 14 not included] showed that 9,848 Puerto Ricans self-identified as Taíno on both the island and mainland (also see earlier pages on in this review on this issue along with U.S. Census 2006-2008, 2016, and Haslip Viera 2014).

2. There were also the usual complaints about “extinction,” the need for “Neo-Taíno” participation in the protection and excavation of archaeological sites, the complaint that the excavation sites are being destroyed (also by the archaeologists?), and the demand that indigenous remains be left undisturbed in these sites unless studies are approved by a connected indigenous tribe claiming descent of those buried. Presumably, this would mean one of the “Neo-Taíno” tribes or the “Taíno survivalists” as a collective [NAGPRA was not mentioned] (also see earlier comments on this issue in this review).

3. The issue of oral traditions was also raised. Professor Feliciano Santos and Elba Anaka Lugo called for a greater scrutiny of these traditions but without mentioning their limitations. Oral traditions need to be connected and corroborated with other evidence—historical and otherwise—in order to be taken seriously. They should never be accepted at face value by themselves without question and without skepticism which is the usual Neo-Taíno response. Anthropologist Peter Metcalf summarizes these problems and how they might be overcome in his book *They Lie, We Lie: Getting on with Anthropology* (2002).

4. Elba Anaka Lugo uses the problematic “Jibaros Boricua Taíno” label to define the alleged indigenous in Puerto Rico. This label and other variations conflate and emphasizes the “Taíno” and erases the African, Spanish and other contributions to the biological and cultural background of the “*Jibaro*” which is usually defined and equated historically with the hybrid rural peasantry in Puerto Rico in various and at times contradictory ways. The “*Jibaro*” label, its origins and how it’s been applied has been thoroughly investigated by historian, Francisco Scarano among others (see Scarano 1996. Also discussed in Curet 2015).

5. Estevez and Elba Anaka Lugo again emphasize Neo-Taíno unity despite minor or major disagreements and even conflicts among the various groups (see earlier comments in this review on this issue).

6. Sherina Feliciano Santos noted (during the question and answer period) that the recovery of the Taíno language is very difficult because there is very little available evidence. She also notes that the grammar and syntax are difficult to recover and that the current debate among Taíno revivalists revolves around whether South American Arawak or Yucatec Maya are the major influences. However, recent research by archaeologists strongly suggests that both languages

were probably influential along with others from other parts of Central America—most notably, from the Isthmus of Panama (see Rodriguez Ramos 2011).

7. Estevez admits that *Gallego* and other Spanish accents (etc.) are influential in the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic where most of the Dominican indigenous are supposed to be located. This comment is of course, an admission of the cultural diversity that prevails in the Cibao and across the Spanish-speaking Caribbean in general and problematizes the historical and linguistic claims to indigenous exclusivity.

8. Estevez notes that *Salsa* [a popular Latino/a music that originated in New York] has been influential in the construction of Neo-Taíno music [there is no reconstruction here in reality], but as usual, Estevez along with other Neo-Taínos fail to mention the much more important African and Spanish/European influences that prevail within *Salsa*. Again, we are dealing with erasure, and in the absence of any real evidence. Abuela Serita also asserts that Taíno music is and was the “language of nature” [*el idioma de la naturaleza*] – the sounds of birds, trees rustling, the *coqui*, etc.

9. Again, there is the claim that “Taíno” survival movement is not “anti-Black,” but it can certainly be seen that way because of the consistent and deliberate erasure of the African and “Black” from Neo-Taíno rhetoric. I have also seen racist anti-black statements made by a number of Neo-Taínos on the internet and can provide examples. At one point, Professor Feliciano Santos made reference to the anti-blackness problem in the Dominican Republic which has become worse in recent years. She inquires as to why these two groups should be mutually exclusive? Estevez was also asked about African influences but he ignored the question by just outlining the indigenous influences. Estevez also made the utterly absurd claim that all Puerto Ricans are culturally Taino regardless of how much they know or don’t know, and whether they know it or not—again erasing the much more important African, Spanish and other influences, which by the way, should also include the major influences of contemporary U.S. and global popular culture (also see earlier comments in this review).

Overall, it has to be said again that this exhibit was contradictory, with one part that showcased the Taíno survivalists and their claims and the other part that did not [that of the University of Leiden]. This being the case despite the publicity on online journals, blogs and an official press release by the NMAI.

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