

Dear Latin American History Workshop,

The paper I present to you is a slightly revised version of the seminar paper that I submitted last year. I have been encouraged to submit it to you in its entirety. I am interested in turning this paper into an article (or given the length, possibly two articles). As such, I am particularly interested in the ways in which this paper can be broken up and reorganized into coherent pieces, what sections should be elaborated, and what sections should be condensed.

I realize that it is very long, and it covers many different topics. It would be great if you could read the whole paper. Realistically, I know it may not be possible. I have attached a table of contents for you to choose the parts that are most interesting to you. In addition, I ask that you focus on a selected “core” of the paper to give you a sense of each section.

I historicize the Neo-Taíno Movement utilizing secondary sources primarily in the first third of the paper, roughly from pages 6-23. The majority of my analysis of my primary sources occurs in the latter two-thirds of the paper, roughly from pages 24-42 and 55-69. I more directly engage with the current academic debates within the sections *Contesting Taíno Identity* and *Genetic Research and the Discourse of “Taíno Blood”*, roughly from pages 42-55.

**Core of paper:** Introduction and Outline, page 1-5; The Annihilation of the Indigenous Population, 6-11; The Red Power Movement and Its Influence on the Neo-Taíno Movement, 20-23; Survey of Taíno Organizations, 24-31; Taíno Culture and Spirituality, 31-39, 42-48; Biology, 50-52; Activism, 55-67; Conclusion, 69-70.

Thank you for reading my paper, and I look forward to discussing it with you next week.

Best,  
Ramaesh

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Challenging Extinction and Survival:  
Understanding and Historicizing the Neo-Taíno Movement Among Puerto Ricans

**Introduction**

Dressed in white and wearing colorful feathered headdresses, Taíno elders and organization representatives gathered together in preparation for their protest. On July 25, 2005, representatives of three indigenous Taíno organizations – The United Confederation of Taíno People, El Consejo General de Taínos Borincanos, and Caney Quinto Mundo – began occupying the Caguana Ceremonial Center in the central municipality of Utuado, Puerto Rico. Built around 1270 A.D., Caguana is the largest Taíno ceremonial site in the Caribbean. Because of its historical and archeological significance, it became a National Historic Landmark in 1993 and is charged to the care of the U.S. National Park Service administered by El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP). Contemporary Taíno organizations believe, however, that these institutions are not taking the necessary precautions to preserve and respect the integrity and sacredness of the site, and that Taínos have the right to unconditionally access sacred sites like Caguana for prayer.

Among the demands of the occupation were “an executive order by the First Executive [Governor] of Puerto Rico, the Hon. Anibal Acevedo Vila to fulfill the constitutional, civil, human and international rights of the Taíno People;” “constitutional reform to recognize our inherent rights as an Indigenous Nation;” and “the immediate return of ancestral remains and funerary objects so that they can be reinterred in their resting places within the womb of Mother

Earth.”<sup>1</sup> Steadfast in their goals despite the lack of response from the Governor, one protestor stated that “the fact that the Governor’s Office has not officially responded to the petitioners who have been engaged in a hunger strike for over a week should make it clear to the world that the Taíno and our concerns are being completely ignored.”<sup>2</sup> Another added that “in denying the people he was elected to serve access to his offices, the Governor and his administration have demonstrated to the world their inhumanity and feelings toward Indigenous Peoples.”<sup>3</sup>

After a period of seventeen days – marked by a hunger strike by seven Taíno protestors, the ICP’s refusal to negotiate until the protestors vacated the premises, and blocking access to water, electricity, and bathrooms – the protestors were finally arrested by a heavily armed police unit and SWAT team. All charges related to the occupation were eventually dropped, and the Taínos saw the occupation as “a victory for all Taíno People as we have raised the issue of Taíno rights, as well as the desecration of sacred sites, ancestral remains, and sacred artifacts to an unprecedented level here in Borikén... We had regular coverage in local papers and our leaders were interviewed on radio and television throughout the occupation.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite the occurrence of this elaborate protest by self-identified Taínos, Taínos are not supposed to “exist.” While it is widely acknowledged that Puerto Ricans have an indigenous past, this identity has traditionally existed in symbolic and historical forms. The dominant history and historiography of Puerto Rico, as well as of the Caribbean islands<sup>5</sup> as a whole, has

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<sup>1</sup> “Borikén Taíno Reclaim Caguana Ceremonial Center,” *Voice of the Taíno People Online*, July 25, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Atilhuibancex, Representative of the United Confederation of Taíno People, quoted in “Judge Orders Arrest of Indigenous Taíno Protesters at PR Sacred Ceremonial Grounds,” *Voice of the Taíno People Online*, August 3, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Naniki Reyes Ocasio, Founder of the Caney Quinto Mundo, quoted in “Judge Orders Arrest of Indigenous Taíno Protesters at PR Sacred Ceremonial Grounds,” *Voice of the Taíno People Online*, August 3, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> “Occupation Ends in Arrests but Taíno Claim Victory in Borikén,” *Voice of the Taíno People Online*, August 13, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> I deliberately make the distinction between the Caribbean islands and the circum-Caribbean coastal regions of the mainland, where indigenous communities have historically existed in countries like Guyana, Suriname, Venezuela, Honduras, etc. The exceptions in the islands include the known Carib communities on

always emphasized the annihilation of the indigenous population within the first half-century of Spanish colonialism to the point of extinction. However, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Puerto Ricans<sup>6</sup> have made steps to revive and reconstruct an indigenous identity, claiming that Taínos did not become extinct. Instead, “[a]ll of those people who came to Boriken after Columbus...became part of our genealogy, our Taíno narrative.”<sup>7</sup> The emergence and growth of numerous Taíno organizations has developed into a transnational movement<sup>8</sup> centered around the efforts of primarily diasporic Puerto Ricans.

I argue that the emergence of self-identified Taínos and Taíno organizations are both challenging the dominant history and historiography of the Caribbean and are redefining what it means to be Puerto Rican. It should be made clear that at the time of writing, the Neo-Taíno Movement continues to be a fringe movement. Most Puerto Ricans do not identify as Taíno, and many openly mock those emphasizing their Taíno identity. Thus, there are limitations to analyzing the Neo-Taíno Movement as a social movement. Nevertheless, my arguments do not depend on the number of people who identify as Taíno. Instead, I focus on the ways in which these identifications specifically challenge issues of an essentialist Puerto Rican identity.

The official and unofficial responses to the Caguana protest are representative of political, academic, and popular perceptions of the Taíno movement as a whole. Alan González Cancel, Mayor of Utuado, supported the protest and acknowledged the efforts of Puerto Rican

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Dominica and St. Vincent. For accounts of indigenous survival and revival in the Caribbean region including the islands, see Maximilian C. Forte (ed.), *Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean: Amerindian Survival and Revival* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006).

<sup>6</sup> While Puerto Ricans are not exclusively identifying as Taíno, they are the most visible and seem to constitute the majority of Taíno tribes and organizations. I will make references to Dominican and Cuban Taínos throughout this paper, but my analysis will focus on Puerto Rican Taínos.

<sup>7</sup> Roberto Múcaro Borrero, quoted in Cristina Veran, “Born Puerto Rican, born (again) Taino? A resurgence of indigenous identity among Puerto Ricans has sparked debates over the island’s tri-racial history,” in *Colorlines Magazine*, September 22, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> This movement has been called the Neo-Taíno Movement, the Taíno Revivalist Movement, and The Taíno Restoration Movement, among other names. Throughout this paper, I will refer to this movement as the Neo-Taíno Movement.

Taíno organizations. He recognized that “[e]l pueblo de Utuado ‘Utoao’ [sic] y el Centro Ceremonial Indígena de Caguana era y sigue siendo el corazón espiritual y santuario de ‘Borikén’ y del Caribe” and proclaimed July 25 as El Día del Grito Indígena Taíno de Caguana en el Pueblo de Utuado “Utuao” [sic].<sup>9</sup> Taíno organizations have received many similar declarations of unofficial support from local, national, and international officials and organizations in Puerto Rico and the United States.<sup>10</sup> However, this unofficial recognition has had few significant ramifications outside of the increased visibility of Taíno organizations.

Much more prominent are the views held by one scholar who frames this event as follows: “[Naniki] Reyes Ocasio and some of her followers went on a hunger strike” in protest, dressed in “alleged Taíno paraphernalia, including feathered headdresses,” and “broke into the state-run Caguana Indigenous Cultural Center.”<sup>11</sup> Dr. Teresa Tió, Director of El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, responded to these events by stating:

Les reconocemos el derecho a asociarse y a practicar todo tipo de ritual y ceremonia que deseen...Pues si entre los ‘yorubas’ es aceptada la poligamia, ello no podría tolerarse en Puerto Rico. Como tampoco se les permitiría la práctica del canibalismo ni el sacrificio de los enemigos capturados en combates...[E]stos llamados ‘taínos’ mantienen una actitud de supremacía sobre los demás puertorriqueños. Se consideran ser los únicos ‘boricuas’ auténticos. Quieren que se les concedan privilegios y prerrogativas que se les negarían a todos los demás. Asumen una actitud de rechazo y confrontación hacia quienes, con válidas razones, no les reconocen sus alegaciones de ‘herencia taína ancestral’...[N]o podemos, ni debemos reconocerles lo que no son, ni dar legitimidad a un reclamo que no tiene fundamento.<sup>12</sup>

Taínos are critiqued and attacked regarding issues of race, identification, authenticity, history, anthropology, and language. The academic literature on the Neo-Taíno Movement reflects this dominant discourse of authenticating or illegitimizing Taínos. The purpose of my project is to

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<sup>9</sup> Proclama, Oficina del Alcalde, Gobierno Municipal, Utuado, Puerto Rico, 5 de agosto de 2005.

<sup>10</sup> These will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

<sup>11</sup> Gabriel Haslip-Viera, “The Taíno Identity Movement Among Caribbean Latinas/os in the United States,” in *A Companion to Latina/o Studies*, eds. Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, 2007), 421.

<sup>12</sup> *El Nuevo Día*, “No hallan foro los ‘indígenas’,” 30 de Julio de 2005.

move beyond this discourse in order to historicize, document, and critically analyze the Neo-Taíno Movement and its broader historical significance.

### Outline of Paper

First, I present the dominant narrative of the “extinction” of the Caribbean indigenous population and the ways in which this narrative has been used illegitimate the Neo-Taíno Movement. I also discuss how this narrative is being challenged by Taíno organizations and revisionist scholars who are redefining *mestizaje* as the site of Taíno survival. I then historicize the movement and argue that the re-identification of a Taíno identity and the emergence of a transnational movement could only have occurred among diasporic Puerto Ricans in the post-Civil Rights Era. Next, I offer a survey of the various Taíno organizations, tribes, and confederations that have emerged since the 1970s. I analyze the ways Taíno culture and spirituality are being reconstructed and revived, how this identification is redefining the *jíbaro*<sup>13</sup> and thus challenging the essence of Puerto Rican identity, and the ways that the Neo-Taíno Movement is being critiqued by various cultural and biological arguments. In particular, I challenge the dominant argument that Taíno identification is a means by which Puerto Ricans are denying their “true” African heritage. Whether or not one believes in the legitimacy or authenticity of these people or organizations, Taínos are challenging governments, international organizations, scholars, and “regular” people to engage in issues of history, memory, and identity. Finally, I discuss the growing political activism of the Neo-Taíno Movement within national and international forums in order to discuss implications regarding claims to land, issues of sovereignty, and challenges to the colonial status of Puerto Rico.

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<sup>13</sup> The Puerto Rican *jíbaro* is a white-*mestizo* peasant farmer from the interior mountains of Puerto Rico. The symbol of the *jíbaro* has been appropriated by various constituents to become the symbol of Puerto Ricanness, to the exclusion of Afro-Puerto Ricans. The development of the identification and romanticization of the *jíbaro* will be discussed later in this paper.

## **Historical Context and the “Extinction” of Taínos**

### *The Annihilation of the Indigenous Population of the Caribbean*

As already stated, the history and historiography of Puerto Rico emphasizes the extinction of the indigenous population within the first half-century of Spanish colonialism. A representative description is given by Irving Rouse, a prominent archeologist of the pre-Columbian Taínos:

The study of [the] human origins [of Taínos]...is done not only by ethnohistorians...but also by physical anthropologists, archeologists, and linguists...Ethnologists, who study contemporary cultures and societies, cannot also participate because the Taínos are extinct.<sup>14</sup>

The Taíno people...were still evolving when Columbus arrived, but soon succumbed to the effects of overwork, malnutrition, epidemics of introduced diseases, rebellion, emigration, and outmarriage. By 1542 they had ceased to exist as a separate population group.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, despite this clear articulation of the “extinction” of Taínos, Rouse himself later acknowledges the existence of persons identifying as Taíno and concludes:

Even though the Taínos themselves are extinct, persons claiming Taíno ancestry have survived in all three of the Spanish-speaking countries: the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba.<sup>16</sup>

Parts of [Taíno] biological, cultural, and linguistic heritages have...survived in the former Spanish colonies or have been revived there during the present century.<sup>17</sup>

These quotes suggest two things. First, while the dominant historiography of the Caribbean islands emphasize the “extinction” of the indigenous population, the definition of “extinction” is generally essentialized, implying that “pure” Taínos became “extinct” while allowing for the hybridization of Taíno culture and the racial mixture of Taíno genes through a *mestizo* population. Second, Rouse’s acknowledgment of contemporary Caribbean people

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<sup>14</sup> Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise & Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 169.



claiming an indigenous ancestry in his *archeological* study published in 1992 alludes to the relative visibility of self-identified Taínos in this time period. While the narrative of “extinction” has been used to discredit those claiming a Taíno identity, the Neo-Taíno Movement has challenged this dominant narrative by directly and indirectly serving as an impetus for revisionist scholarship which argues for the biological and cultural survival of Taínos.

The indigenous people of the Bahamian Archipelago and the Greater Antilles were “not only the first Native Peoples of the Western Hemisphere to come in contact with Europeans in 1492 but...were also the first people to be called ‘Indians’...”<sup>18</sup> Greeting Columbus with the word “Taíno” as a sign of peace, the Spanish subsequently named these indigenous peoples “Taíno.” Prior to European contact, the Taínos referred to themselves by their island of origin: those from those from Puerto Rico were Borikén;<sup>19</sup> those from Hispaniola were Kiskeya; and those from Cuba were Cubanakán.<sup>20</sup>

The indigenous population of Puerto Rico at the time of contact is estimated at no more than 50,000.<sup>21</sup> The census of 1530 reported an indigenous population between 1,162<sup>22</sup> and 1,537.<sup>23</sup> As a result of this rapid population decline coupled with the need for labor, the Spanish

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<sup>18</sup> This point is emphasized by Taíno organizations like the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP) who use this language to affirm a legitimate and historically continuous indigenous identity. For example, see UCTP Report, Indigenous Thematic Planning Conference for WSIS Tunisia, World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and Global Forum on Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society, Ottawa, Canada, March 17-18, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Borikén is the indigenous name of Puerto Rico. There are many variations of Borikén, including Boriken, Boriquén, Boriquen, Borinquén, and Borinquen. I will refer to Puerto Rico by one of these names as they appear in Taíno documents.

<sup>20</sup> The Taíno were descendent of Arawak peoples who migrated over thousands of years from the Yucatan Peninsula, through the northeastern coast of South America, and through the chain of Caribbean islands. Historically, the Taínos have been differentiated from the Carib peoples of the Lesser Antilles, who have been depicted as “warlike.”

<sup>21</sup> Gabriel Haslip-Viera, “The Politics of Taíno Revivalism: The Insignificance of Amerindian MTDNA in the Population History of Puerto Ricans. A Comment on Recent Research” in *Centro Journal*, Spring, año/vol. XVIII, número 001 (2006), 262.

<sup>22</sup> Salvador Brau, *La colonización de Puerto Rico: desde el descubrimiento de la Isla hasta la reversión a la corona español de los privilegios de Colón* (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1969), 71.

<sup>23</sup> Karen Anderson-Córdova, “Hispaniola and Puerto Rico: Indian Acculturation and Heterogeneity, 1492-1550” (Ph.D. Dissertation: Yale University, 1990), 208.

began importing an estimated 34,000 indigenous slaves from the Lesser Antilles and circum-Caribbean mainland to both Puerto Rico and Hispaniola between 1509 and 1544.<sup>24</sup> After the 1530 census, the category of “*indio*” disappeared until 1765. This census of 1765 reported an indigenous population of 5,037. The notion of the “extinction” of the Taínos became widespread as a result of the final disappearance of the “*indio*” category in 1787, which counted 2,302 Indians.<sup>25</sup>

Most scholars work from the assumption of an “extinct” indigenous population.<sup>26</sup> Others have asserted the reliability of the historical record, especially in response to present-day claims to Taíno survival. For example, Haslip-Viera states that

[T]here is no evidence that large numbers of Amerindians were able to establish independent communities in isolation of the Spaniards. The Spaniards were fully capable of scouring the islands in search of Indians to enslave or employ in the gold mining enterprises and plantations... The historical evidence shows that impoverished Spaniards and Africans also fled or migrated into the interior regions of the islands, and as a result, what emerged over the centuries is what is seen at the present time – mixed populations of mostly African and European background with minor vestiges of the indigenous.<sup>27</sup>

It is evident that Haslip-Viera and other scholars accept an essentialized notion of the “extinction” of “pure” Taínos that is synonymous with their absorption into the general *mestizo* population.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 266-268.

<sup>25</sup> This information is cited most often from the various works of Salvador Brau. For example, see Salvador Brau, *La colonización de Puerto Rico*, 469. Gabriel Haslip-Viera has recently compiled a table which includes an “Indian” population of 2,853 in 1795 people and 2,312 in 1797. See Haslip-Viera, “The Politics of Taíno Revivalism,” Table 2, 265 or Haslip-Viera, “The Taíno Identity Movement,” Table 37.1, 420.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Alleyne states about the Caribbean as a whole: “It is very well known that the indigenous peoples fared very badly... In a matter of decades their numbers were so drastically reduced in the Greater Antilles that they ceased very early to constitute groups that could preserve and transmit their ethnicity through generations.” See Mervyn C. Alleyne, *The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002), 85.

<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Haslip-Viera, “Amerindian mtDNA does not matter: A reply to Jorge Estevez and the privileging of Taíno identity in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean,” in *Centro Journal*, Vol. 20 Issue 2 (Fall2008), 231. Haslip-Viera has been the most outspoken scholar in challenging the historical and biological legitimacy of Taíno identification.

<sup>28</sup> For example, José Luis González states : “The culture of Puerto Rico has three recognizable sources or historical

As Haslip-Viera himself recognizes, “any conclusion on whether the Taínos survived or became extinct depends on how the term extinction is defined.”<sup>29</sup> It is not surprising, then, that revisionist scholars have begun to reinterpret the historical evidence in order to challenge notions of extinction and argue instead for historical and cultural survival. For example, in an article about the Dominican Republic, Lynne Guitar states that “an 80-90% loss [of the indigenous population] is a significant and horrifying loss. It is so horrifying that it obscures the fact that 10-20% of the Taíno survived.”<sup>30</sup> It became illegal to enslave and overwork the Taíno population after the 1540s. Since the Spanish needed a reliable and exploitable labor force, the Taíno population was strategically minimized in historical documents in order to argue for the importation of African slaves.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, according to 16<sup>th</sup> century census records, at least 40% of Spaniards had Taíno wives or concubines. Kathleen Deagan argues that the Taíno wives of Spanish men were the main passers of culture to their *mestizo* children as a result of gender and class relations in the post-contact period. Thus cultural practices such as food use and preparation, religion, stories, medicine, and dance were passed down through the generations.<sup>32</sup>

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ingredients: first, cultural survivals of the indigenous world, subjugated and promptly wiped out by the Spanish invaders; and second and third, the still living contributions of the once-enslaved black population, and of the essentially white peasantry.” See José Luis González, *Puerto Rico: The Four-Storeyed Country* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, Inc., 1993), 55; Jalil Sued-Badillo is more explicit about the links between Taínos and *mestizos* but still claims the Taínos “disappeared: “As Indians disappeared, they only gave rise to a mestizo descendants who...created an emergent culture strongly rooted in the indigenous tradition. See Jalil Sued-Badillo, “The Theme of the Indigenous in the National Projects of the Hispanic Caribbean,” in *Making Alternative Histories: The Practice of Archeology and History in Non-Western Settings*, eds. Peter R. Schmidt and Thomas C. Patterson (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1995), 38.

<sup>29</sup> Haslip-Viera, “The Politics of Taíno Revivalism,” 267.

<sup>30</sup> Lynne Guitar, Pedro Ferbel-Azcarate, and Jorge Estevez, “*Ocama-Daca Taíno* (Hear Me, I Am Taíno): Taíno Survival on Hispaniola, Focusing on the Dominican Republic,” in *Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean: Amerindian Survival and Revival*, ed. Maximilian C. Forte (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006), 48.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Kathleen Deagan, “Reconsidering Taíno Social Dynamics after Spanish Conquest: Gender and Class in Culture Contact Studies” in *American Antiquity*, vol. 69, no. 4 (Oct. 2004), 597-626.

Present-day Taínos like Cacike Pedro Guankeyu Torres of the Jatibonicu Taíno Tribal Nation (JTTN) believe that the myth of “extinction” is so salient because it justifies the usurpation of Taíno tribal homelands. “If you do not have an indigenous people around who can legally lay claim to the land, then the legal owners become the sons of conquering ones...I believe that [Europeans] will do everything in their power to stop us and to make us look like fools in the eyes of the general public...”<sup>33</sup> Taínos have also questioned the validity of using various historical sources to show “extinction.” Jorge Estevez, a Taíno activist, questions the use of census material:

...I feel that today, in the age of computers, we cannot get an accurate census count. In the Dominican Republic there is no accurate number of illegal Haitians living in the country. Why? The Haitians for obvious reasons do not want to be counted. The same can be said of illegal Dominicans living in Puerto Rico. How many are there? There are only estimates, but no one knows for sure...It seems highly unlikely that, 450 to 500 years ago, when our ancestors were fleeing and hiding for their lives, few of them would have wanted to be counted. For the Spanish it would have been nearly impossible to count people who were living in the most remote areas of the island...In the past it was easier to have material goods delivered from outside the island than from its interior!”<sup>34</sup>

While statements like that of Estevez are not historically grounded, and while much more empirical research needs to be done to further support the claims made by scholars like Guitar and Deagan, the questions that are raised as a result of this revisionist scholarship coupled with the emergence of the Neo-Taíno Movement are seriously challenging long established historical “facts” of Taíno “extinction.” To be clear, the “extinction” of the indigenous people of the Caribbean islands continues to be the dominant narrative and historical evidence continues to be used to discredit the present-day identifications of Taínos. Nevertheless, these challenges have served as an impetus for historical debate and revisionist scholarship that has challenged this

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<sup>33</sup> Cacike Pedro Guankeyu Torres, quoted in an interview by Richard L. Vázquez, “The Taíno Survival,” *LasCulturas.com*, 2001. Available at < <http://www.lasculturas.com/articles/14-culture-a-identity/22-the-taino-survival>>.

<sup>34</sup> Jorge Estevez, “Amerindian mtDNA in Puerto Rico: When does DNA matter?,” in *Centro Journal*, Vol. 20 Issue 2 (Fall2008), 224.

dominant narrative in order to show the historical and cultural survival of the Taínos by redefining terms like “extinction.” Thus, while the predominance of *mestizaje* in Puerto Rico equates with the “extinction” of “pure” Taínos to some scholars, others see *mestizaje* as the place of cultural and biological survival.

### *Race and Mestizaje in Puerto Rico*

Contemporary Puerto Rican identity is founded on the ideology of the “three roots” – the myth of the harmonious blending of its indigenous (Taíno) “first root,” Spanish “second root,” and African “third root” into a supposedly homogenous *mestizo* identity. This social construction has historically emphasized the historical, cultural, and ideological significance of its Hispanic heritage as is exemplified through the ideology of *blanqueamiento*, or “whitening” of the population. Thus ideologies of *mestizaje* often occur at the expense of its African ancestry based on constructions of race and racism developed under Spanish and American colonialism. The indigenous “first root” has occupied an intermediary space embodying the continued construction of the “noble savage” – not quite Spanish but differentiated from the “barbaric” African slaves.<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not Taínos biologically or culturally “survived” until the present, Taínos became “extinct” within the imaginary of the Puerto Rican elite and intelligentsia of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the development of Taíno archeology to display Puerto Rico’s “extinct” indigenous past.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, white *criollo* elites of the mid to late nineteenth century

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<sup>35</sup> For the constructions of race and ideologies of *blanqueamiento* in Puerto Rico, see Arlene Dávila, *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), especially chapters 5 and 10.

<sup>36</sup> Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation*, chapter 11; Arlene Dávila, “Local/Diasporic Taínos,” *Towards a Cultural Politics of Memory, Reality and Imagery*, in *Taíno Revival: Critical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Identity and Cultural Politics* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2001), 37.

appropriated the symbol of the Taíno to symbolically differentiate themselves from Spanish *peninsulares* in order to gain greater political autonomy.<sup>37</sup> After Puerto Rico became a U.S. colony in 1898, Puerto Ricans emphasized their Hispanic culture through the idealized symbol of the *jibaro* – the rural white-*mestizo* peasant farmer – to affirm a Puerto Rican culture that was distinct from American culture.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the symbol of the Taíno as an “extinct” but romanticized entity continued to reappear throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the quest of the “1930s generation” literary production to explore Puerto Rican identity; the 1950s cultural policies of the Pro-Commonwealth government and the use of the Taíno as a medium between Spanish and African heritage to create a harmonious racial past; and the 1970s anthropology, social science and political use of the Taíno image to simultaneously represent a legacy of passivity and compliance as well as a symbol of independence.<sup>39</sup>

Most significant was the institutionalization of the ideology of the “three roots” in the 1950s. In response to the rapid industrialization of Puerto Rico by U.S. companies under “Operation Bootstrap” in 1948 and the change of Puerto Rico’s colonial status to a Free Associated State in 1952, Puerto Rican Governor Luis Muñoz Marín initiated “Operation Serenity” in order to affirm and preserve the cultural integrity of Puerto Rico. Essentially, while Puerto Ricans accepted limited political autonomy, it was important to maintain “true” Puerto Rican culture. The crucial component of “Operation Serenity” was the creation of El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP) in 1955 under the direction of anthropologist Ricardo Alegría, who became the founder and architect of modern national Puerto Rican culture. In Alegría’s words, the ICP “...was created with the purpose of studying, preserving, and popularizing the various

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<sup>37</sup> Dávila, “Local/Diasporic Taínos,” 37.

<sup>38</sup> Lillian Guerra, *Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico: The Struggle for Self, Community, and Nation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

<sup>39</sup> Dávila, “Local/Diasporic Taínos,” 37-38; Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation*, 263-266.

manifestations of our national culture.”<sup>40</sup> Through the ICP, the myth of *mestizaje* was institutionalized, the Hispanic heritage of Puerto Ricans exemplified by the *jíbaro* was idealized,<sup>41</sup> the symbol of the *jíbaro* was strengthened as the essence of the Puerto Rican nation, the Taíno was romanticized and folklorized through museums and festivals throughout the island, and the African was acknowledged but marginalized.<sup>42</sup>

Thus while there has been a general acknowledgement in Puerto Rico of Taíno ancestors and indigenous contributions to Puerto Rican culture, the dominant discourse of *mestizaje* as constructed and articulated by the ICP combined with ideologies of *blanqueamiento* diminished the likelihood of people identifying solely as Taíno in Puerto Rico. While Taíno self-identification has arguably existed in Puerto Rico to some extent, a movement of people identifying as Taíno and establishing organizations would not have occurred within this context. Thus it was in the Puerto Rican diaspora that the Neo-Taíno Movement had its genesis.

### **The Transition from a Historic to an Embodied Identity**

#### *Puerto Rican Displacement and Migration to the U.S.*

According to the 2000 U.S. census, 3,406,178 Puerto Ricans lived in the United States and 3,623,392 lived in Puerto Rico.<sup>43</sup> Because of the sheer magnitude of the diaspora, scholars

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<sup>40</sup> Ricardo Alegría, *Ball Courts and Ceremonial Plazas in the West Indies* (New Haven: Yale University, 1983), ix.

<sup>41</sup> Arlene Dávila describes the *jíbaro* as follows: “The rural peasant (*jíbaro*) is represented as the embodiment of all three ancestral heritages in a single Puerto Rican culture. Yet the *jíbaro* is usually portrayed as a white male whose main influence comes from his Spanish predecessors although he has a tinge of Indian heritage. An African contribution to the *jíbaro* is never acknowledged or emphasized, as neither is a female gender identity.” See Dávila, *Sponsored Identities*, 71-72.

<sup>42</sup> Dávila, *Sponsored Identities*, chapter 2; Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation*, chapter 5.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *2000 Census of Population and Housing*, Table DP-1, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics, Puerto Rico. Available at <<http://factfinder.census.gov/>>.

have observed “how the geographic displacement of Puerto Ricans, whether forced or voluntary, has come to define Puerto Ricans’ social and political identity.”<sup>44</sup>

While the evolution of a physical and ideological *mestizo* population is common among the three Hispanic Caribbean islands, Puerto Rico has had the unique experience of direct American colonialism since 1898 combined with U.S. citizenship since 1917. Prior to 1898, Puerto Rico was a primarily rural country dominated by *jibaros* – white-*mestizo* independent peasants who lived in the central mountain region. It is generally acknowledged that the *jibaro* identity developed as a result of the mixing of the remnants of the indigenous population, escaped slaves from the coastal sugar plantations, and Spanish settlers. Quintero Rivera has called the developments in Puerto Rico a “counter-plantation” culture, as the majority of society lived away from the few urban centers and outside of the plantation system. “For this rural world, the city represented the State: it represented that which one had to retreat from.”<sup>45</sup>

U.S. colonialism beginning in 1898 led to rapid capitalist development and drastically changed Puerto Rico’s rural society. U.S. capitalist endeavors led to the proletarianization and urbanization of the Puerto Rican work force. Displaced rural workers migrated first to urban centers in Puerto Rico in order to find jobs and subsequently to urban centers across the U.S.<sup>46</sup> By 1980, 70% of Puerto Rico’s population lived in urban areas.<sup>47</sup> As a result of U.S. citizenship, overpopulation debates, contract labor programs, and the formation of transnational networks,<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gina Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Angel Quintero Rivera, “The Rural-Urban Dichotomy in the Formation of Puerto Rico’s Cultural Identity,” in *New West Indian Guide*, No. 3/4, (1987), 130.

<sup>46</sup> Puerto Ricans initially migrated primarily to New York City, and over time migrated to other urban centers as a result of contract labor programs. See the articles in Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Quintero Rivera, “The Rural-Urban Dichotomy,” 127.

<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of these factors for Puerto Rican migration, see Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex,*



the Puerto Rican population in the United States grew dramatically from fewer than 70,000 in 1940 to 810,000 Puerto Rican migrants and 581,000 mainland-born Puerto Ricans by 1970.<sup>49</sup>

The growing urbanization of Puerto Rico coupled with emigration to the U.S. not only led to the desire to create a Puerto Rican community, but also led to the romanticization and yearning for a return to their rural past. It is within this context that the *jíbaro* developed into the dominant image of Puerto Rican identity within the Puerto Rican Diaspora. It has been argued by many scholars that Puerto Ricans have developed a strong sense of cultural nationalism as a result of their ambiguous political and social relationships with American colonialism. Thus, a national Puerto Rican identity was forged in relation to American colonialism and the migration experience.<sup>50</sup> As a result of their declining political power, the Puerto Rican elite created cultural boundaries between themselves and the U.S. and asserted a Puerto Rican national identity through the appropriation of the image and culture of the *jíbaro*. Through the appropriation of the *jíbaro*, Puerto Rican elites articulated Puerto Rican culture as white and derived from their Spanish heritage.<sup>51</sup> In Puerto Rico, these ideologies were institutionalized by El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña. In the U.S., the conflation of a *jíbaro* identity as Puerto Rican identity has resulted from not only the longing of home from a migrant group, but also the idealization and romanticization of Puerto Rico's rural past.

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*Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story*.

<sup>49</sup> Whalen, "Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora: An Introduction," in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>50</sup> Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation*, chapter 1; Dávila, *Sponsored Identities*.

<sup>51</sup> Lillian Guerra, *Popular Expression*.

*Race, Poverty, and Radicalism: Political and Cultural “Awakening” in the 1960s and 1970s*

Thus by 1970, large and established Puerto Rican communities had already become engrained within the essentialized racial paradigms of the United States which marginalized Puerto Ricans into a subordinate position as an ethnic minority. Puerto Ricans lived primarily in poor but relatively stable ethnic communities as a result of formal networks of contract labor and informal networks of family and friends, developing vibrant musical traditions<sup>52</sup> and cultural institutions which continued to connect diasporic Puerto Ricans to the island.<sup>53</sup> Despite these positive forms of cultural expression, broader American society perceived Puerto Ricans as an ethnic and foreign minority who experienced extreme levels of poverty as a result of their backwardness, laziness, and inferiority. Prominent scholars of the 1960s like Daniel P. Moynihan, Nathan Glazer, and Oscar Lewis argued that Puerto Ricans were both different than Oscar Handlin’s description of European immigrants that preceded them<sup>54</sup> and challenged his belief that aside from race prejudice, Puerto Rican and African American migrants took the place of the immigrants of the past.<sup>55</sup> Instead, Glazer, Moynihan and Lewis argued that Puerto Ricans’ status as an “underclass” of U.S. society continued to persist because of their “culture of poverty.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus one of the goals of the cultural nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s was redefining what it meant to be Puerto Rican against these negative stereotypes of the Puerto Rican

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<sup>52</sup> See Glasser, *My Music Is My Flag*; Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation*, 166-207.

<sup>54</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1951).

<sup>55</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Newcomers: Negroes and Puerto Ricans in a Changing Metropolis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).

<sup>56</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963); Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty – San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1966). For a discussion of these two works, see Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story*, 86-87.

community. By 1970, there was also a substantial second-generation Puerto Rican population which had been born in the United States. This shift in the population provided a shift in Puerto Rican community activism in two ways. First, the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s not only emphasized ties with Puerto Rico,<sup>57</sup> but also fought against U.S. racism and fought for their social positions in U.S. society. Second, as a result of their feelings of displacement because of their mainland-born status, they desired to reclaim their Puerto Rican cultural heritage.

While mainland-born Puerto Ricans sought to reclaim and define their Puerto Rican identity and continued to see themselves as part of a larger Puerto Rican community, island Puerto Ricans began to believe that emigrants were no longer “Puerto Rican” or part of their community because of their loss of the Spanish language and their perceived Americanization.<sup>58</sup> While the third period of Puerto Rican migration<sup>59</sup> has been characterized as a “transnational”<sup>60</sup> and “circular”<sup>61</sup> migration, diasporic Puerto Ricans have been stigmatized as *los de afuera*<sup>62</sup> and as generally separate from the Puerto Rican nation. Thus Puerto Ricans from the island and in the diaspora have different views of the Puerto Rican nation.

These tensions have led one scholar to argue that the reclamation of a Taíno ancestry has resulted from these feelings of displacement. By claiming to be Taíno, and thus making ancestral claims to land, diasporic Taínos are arguing that they are more “Puerto Rican” than those on the island.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the cultural nationalism and community activism of second-

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<sup>57</sup> As Puerto Rican cultural nationalism emphasized in the past.

<sup>58</sup> Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation*, 167.

<sup>59</sup> This third period extends from 1970 to the present.

<sup>60</sup> “Transnational migration” is used “to capture the different ways in which immigrants integrate themselves into their new environment while creating and sustaining ties with the communities from which they came.” See Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> “‘Circular’ migration can be defined operationally as two or more extended round-trips between the Island and the mainland.” See Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation*, 32-33.

<sup>62</sup> Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story*, 95-96.

<sup>63</sup> Miriam Jiménez Román, “The Indians are Coming! The Indians are Coming! The Taíno and Puerto Rican

generation Puerto Ricans in the 1960s and 1970s developed out of the desire to reclaim Puerto Rican culture as well as the island of Puerto Rico itself.

While the majority of Puerto Ricans were not actively mobilized to join cultural and community organizations, this movement had significant impacts for both the Puerto Rican community generally and the Neo-Taíno Movement specifically. Generally speaking, mobilized second-generation Puerto Ricans were affirming their Puerto Rican identity, reclaiming their African and indigenous roots, and fighting for cultural pride through the symbolism of Borikén. As argued by Klor de Alva in relation to both Puerto Rican and Chicano<sup>64</sup> activism in this time period,

Chicanos and Puerto Ricans...creatively constructed and comprehended... new ethnic origins for themselves as a self-conscious maneuver aimed at propagating symbolic forms of separatist nationalism...Puerto Ricans,...concerned to found their nationalist claims on a precolonial past, turned to the Taino inhabitants of the ancient Borinquen...to legitimate their claim to being a nation rather than an “ethnic minority.”<sup>65</sup>

These ideologies were present in most Puerto Rican radical organizations of the 1960s and 1970s, most importantly the Young Lords Organization (YLO).<sup>66</sup> With regard to race and Puerto Rican culture, it was important for the members of the Young Lords to be openly critical of internalized racism and to learn the racial history of Puerto Rico. The YLO hoped to achieve this goal by including it in the organization’s 13-Point Program and Platform:

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Identity,” in *Taíno Revival: Critical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Identity and Cultural Politics*, ed. Gabriel Haslip-Viera (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001), 127.

<sup>64</sup> Chicanos also reclaimed an indigenous past in relation to “Aztlán”, the mythical homeland of the Aztecs.

<sup>65</sup> J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “The Invention of Ethnic Origins and the Negotiation of Latino Identity, 1969-1981,” in *Challenging Fronteras*, 56.

<sup>66</sup> Originally founded in Chicago in 1959, a concurrent branch was established in New York City in 1969 and quickly formed ties with the Black Panther Party. The YLO fought for the independence of Puerto Rico, an end to racism and sexism, control of their social and cultural institutions within the U.S., and the creation of a socialist society. They believed in armed struggle in self-defense, and established numerous community initiatives. See Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, “Puerto Rico en mi Corazón: The Young Lords, Black Power and Puerto Rican Nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972,” in *Centro Journal*, spring, año/vol. XVIII, número 001, (2006); Miguel Melendez, *We Took the Streets: Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords*. (York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003).

7. *We want a true education of our Afro-Indio Culture and Spanish language.* We must learn our long history of fighting against cultural, as well as economic genocide by the Spaniards and not the yanquis. Revolutionary culture, culture of our people, is the only true teaching. Jíbaro Sí, Yanqui no!<sup>67</sup>

In addition to organizations like the Young Lords,<sup>68</sup> a concurrent artistic movement developed and found workshops and exhibition spaces in New York at institutions like El Taller Boricua, El Museo del Barrio, and En Foco, among others. For artists like Marcos Dimas, Nitza Tufiño, Fernando Salicrup, and Jorge Soto, reconstructing a Puerto Rican identity meant reclaiming and representing its Taíno and African elements.<sup>69</sup> Many of these artists incorporated Taíno and African imagery in their work in collaboration with activist groups like the Young Lords.<sup>70</sup> As stated in a reflection by Jorge Soto, "...there existed a cultural void in the Puerto Rican community...El Taller [Boricua] became a forum on culture and the arts...As a gesture of solidarity and unity, we adopted and personalized Taíno images, which became insignias that symbolically linked us with our ancestral root culture."<sup>71</sup>

This radicalized era provided the impetus for the reclamation articulation of a Puerto Rican identity. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that there was no singular view of "Puerto Rican identity," nor was there a unified or singular movement. Different groups of people had different ideas of this identity, as is exemplified by the multiplicity of organizations that Puerto Ricans were joining during this time period in addition to the majority of people who chose not to participate in any organization. Some reclaimed a Puerto Rican identity under

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<sup>67</sup> The Young Lords Party: 13-Point Program and Platform (Revised May 1970), found in Melendez, *We Took the Streets*, 238-241.

<sup>68</sup> For discussions related to other Puerto Rican organizations of the 1960s and 1970s, see the various articles in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora* (Eds. Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez)

<sup>69</sup> See Taína B. Caragol-Barreto, "Aesthetics of Exile: The Construction of Nuyorican Identity in the Art of El Taller Boricua," in *Centro Journal*, Fall 2005, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 6-21; Yasmin Ramírez, "Nuyorican Visionary: Jorge Soto and the Evolution of an Afro-Taíno Aesthetic at Taller Boricua," in *Centro Journal*, Fall 2005, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 22-41.

<sup>70</sup> Marcos Dimas, *Taller Alma Boricua: Reflecting on 20 Years of the PR Workshop* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 1990).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

various Puerto Rican organizations such as the Young Lords Organization, while others emphasized an Afro-Puerto Rican identity in the Black Panther Party or an indigenous identity within the Red Power Movement.

### *The Red Power Movement and Its Influence on Neo-Taíno Movement*

This political and cultural activism and the subsequent discourses of multiculturalism allowed the space for U.S.-based Puerto Ricans to learn about and reaffirm their cultural and racial history. The Neo-Taíno Movement emerged from this search for the roots of Puerto Rican identity. While the majority of Puerto Ricans involved in this activism asserted both a reclaimed Taíno and African identity as they related to a Puerto Rican identity, some began to actively highlight their indigenous ancestry and identify as Taíno. While in the minority, some of the current leaders of the Neo-Taíno Movement were active in the indigenous movements of the 1960s and 1970s by working on Native American publications, serving as translators to Central and South American indigenous delegations to the United Nations, or participating in powwows.<sup>72</sup> Despite this minority, the actions, revival, and rhetoric of the Red Power Movement have directly and indirectly influenced the Neo-Taíno Movement.

By the late nineteenth century, most Native American tribes had been “militarily pacified” and forcibly relocated to reservations. Over time, federal Indian policy administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was reconstructed to assimilate Native Americans into American mainstream society through Indian boarding schools, forced English language

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<sup>72</sup> These observations were made by Arlene Dávila in a meeting with Taíno indigenous leaders in relation to a Symposium at El Museo del Barrio titled “Rethinking Taíno: The Cultural Politics of the Use of their Legacy and Imagery.” She also had subsequent interviews with various leaders. While she does not elaborate on the level of involvement of specific people, she does provide a list of the leaders present at the meeting, most of whom continue to be active leaders: José Barreiro; Roberto Mucaro Borrero; Jorge Estevez; Magda Martas; Bobby González; Naniki Reyes Ocasio; and Miguel Sague. See Dávila, “Local/Diasporic Taínos,” 42 and 50.

acquisition, and relocation off reservations into urban areas.<sup>73</sup> As in Puerto Rico during this time period, there was an increasing proletarianization and urbanization of the Native American population, which forced migration from rural reservations to urban centers. By 1970, almost half of the Native American population lived in urban areas, creating a largely urban, English-speaking, bicultural, mixed race, multi-tribal American Indian population.<sup>74</sup> These urban communities led to the development of inter-tribal organizations and the formation of a pan-Indian identity, which laid the foundation for indigenous activism in the 1960s.

It was primarily this urban Indian population that became politicized by the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s and formed their own parallel movement under the banner of “Red Power.” The American Indian Movement (AIM), founded in Minneapolis in 1968, quickly became the most active and visible of the indigenous organizations. While initially focusing on the issues of urban Indians, AIM shifted its activism to the conditions of all Native Americans, including those on reservations. Of particular importance to AIM was the “decolonization” of American Indians through the reclamation and assertion of the sovereignty of indigenous nations based on numerous treaties that had been violated by the U.S. government, exemplified by their cross-country caravan known as the Trail of Broken Treaties in 1972.<sup>75</sup> As stated by Dennis Banks,

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<sup>73</sup> For example, see Carol Devens, “‘If We Get the Girls, We Get the Race’: Missionary Education of Native American Girls,” in *American Nations: Encounters in Indian Country, 1850 to the Present*, eds. Frederick E. Hoxie, Peter C. Mancall, and James H. Merrell (New York: Routledge, 2001), 156-171; Rebecca L. Robins, “Self-Determination and Subordination: The Past, Present, and Future of American Indian Governance,” in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Boston: South End Press, 1992); M. Annette Jaimes, “Federal Indian Identification Policy: A Usurpation of Indigenous Sovereignty in North America,” in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Boston: South End Press, 1992).

<sup>74</sup> Joane Nagel, “American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Politics and the Resurgence of Identity,” in *American Nations: Encounters in Indian Country, 1850 to the Present*, eds. Frederick E. Hoxie, Peter C. Mancall, and James H. Merrell (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>75</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence* (New York: Delta Books, 1974); Ward Churchill, “The Bloody Wake of Alcatraz: Political Repression of the American Indian Movement During the 1970s,” in *American Nations: Encounters in Indian Country, 1850 to the Present*, eds. Frederick E. Hoxie, Peter C. Mancall, and James H. Merrell (New York: Routledge, 2001), 376-377.

one of the founders of AIM, “Only by reestablishing our rights as sovereign nations, including our right to control our own territories and resources, and our right to genuine self-governance can we hope to successfully address the conditions currently experienced by our people.”<sup>76</sup>

Since Native American issues were generally invisible to the larger society, part of the strategy of the Red Power Movement became to grab media attention to increase awareness of indigenous issues. Examples include the occupation of Alcatraz Island on behalf of “Indians of All Tribes,” painting Plymouth Rock red and capturing a replica of the Mayflower on Thanksgiving Day in 1970, and occupying Mount Rushmore on the Fourth of July, 1971. In addition to these media-grabbing tactics, AIM advocated for Native American rights and issues of sovereignty in the international arena of the United Nations through the founding of the International Indian Treaty Council in 1974.<sup>77</sup>

Similar to the cultural nationalism of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, AIM sought to redefine, reinvent, and renew indigenous pride and identity which had been lost through the processes of forced urbanization and resulting racial mixture and assimilation. This included the reclamation and revival of Native American cultural and spiritual traditions. Crucial to this renewal of indigenous identity was the resuscitation of and participation in powwows.<sup>78</sup> Powwows became a pan-tribal venue for Native American secular cultural expression and a means by which AIM asserted an empowering Native American identity.

The efforts of the Red Power Movement in articulating a positive and empowered Native American identity have been cited as a major factor in explaining the tripling of the Native

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<sup>76</sup> Dennis Banks, speech before the United Lutheran Board, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 1971, as quoted in Churchill, “The Bloody Wake of Alcatraz,” 377.

<sup>77</sup> Glenn T. Morris, “International Law and politics: Toward a Right to Self-Determination for Indigenous Peoples,” in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Boston: South End Press, 1992); Robins, “Self-Determination and Subordination,” 106-107.

<sup>78</sup> Clyde Ellis, “‘We Don’t Want Your Rations, We Want This Dance’: The Changing Use of Song and Dance on the Southern Plains,” in *American Nations: Encounters in Indian Country, 1850 to the Present*, eds. Frederick E. Hoxie, Peter C. Mancall, and James H. Merrell (New York: Routledge, 2001), 355-373.



American population between 1960 and 1990.<sup>79</sup> Many who newly identified as Native American were urban and multiracial who reclaimed aspects of culture, spirituality, and overall dignity as an indigenous people. The amount of “indigenous blood” a person had mattered less than having any native blood at all. What was important was one’s self-identification and commitment to reclaiming their ancestral ways. As stated by Russell Means, a prominent AIM leader:

Before AIM, Indians were dispirited, defeated and culturally dissolving. People were ashamed to be Indian...But now you see braids on our young people. There are dozens of Sun Dances every summer. You hear our languages spoken again in places they had almost died out...AIM had a lot to do with bringing that change about. We laid the groundwork for the next stage in regaining our sovereignty and self-determination as nations, and I’m proud to have been a part of that.<sup>80</sup>

Those who have reclaimed and revived a Taíno identity are similar to those who reclaimed and revived a Native American identity in the 1960s and 1970s in many respects. Much of the rhetoric, demands, and cultural practices that were reclaimed and asserted through the Red Power Movement have been adopted by present-day Taíno tribes and organizations. Their actions have included the reclamation of Taíno culture and spirituality; reclaiming Taíno language; involvement in powwows as Native American tribes; attempts to bring attention to Taíno issues through the media; discourses of sovereignty as indigenous people; and advocacy for Taíno rights both on a national and international level through the United Nations.

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<sup>79</sup> The Census of 1960 was the time that people were able to choose their own race. In conjunction with the explanation above, the other main explanation for this increase in Native American identification are the potential material benefits for claiming a Native American identity, including federal spending, land claims, and affirmative action. See Nagel, “American Indian Ethnic Renewal,” 340-341.

<sup>80</sup> Russell Means, statement during a talk at the University of Colorado at Denver, February 1988, quoted in Churchill, “The Bloody Wake of Alcatraz,” 392-393.

## A Survey of Taíno Cultural Organizations and Confederations

When asked about the number of people who were identified as members of the Jatibonicu Taíno Tribal Nation of Borikén and its Tribal Bands in Florida and New Jersey (JTTN), Cacike Pedro Guanikeyu Torres stated:

We maybe number 300, 3000, or 30,000. At this point I can only say that we are an ethnic indigenous people that number in the thousands and that we are still growing as people are still returning back into the Taino family circle or as we Tainos say, “Our people are coming back home.”<sup>81</sup>

With statements like this, it is difficult to ascertain the actual size of the Neo-Taíno Movement. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 13,336 people in Puerto Rico self-identified under the category of “American Indian and Alaskan Native.”<sup>82</sup> Assuming that some of these people identified as Taíno, some Taíno organizations were surprised at this “substantially low” number. The JTTN sent out a press release stating that “[t]his may have been due to a misunderstanding by the people of Puerto Rico to choose the American Indian race category. This was due to misinformation and the confusion of the term American Indian as it related to the American Indians of the United States.”<sup>83</sup> These concerns were raised directly to representatives of the U.S. Census Bureau. Cacike Torres presented the “outrage” of the Taíno people after hearing that Census administrators were discouraging people from choosing the “American Indian” racial category as a result of their belief that Taínos are “extinct,” thus leading to an undercount of Taínos in Puerto Rico.<sup>84</sup>

As a result, efforts have been made by Taíno organizations and confederations to develop and maintain a Tribal Census. According to the “Taíno Census and Inter-Tribal Registry

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<sup>81</sup> Cacike Pedro Guanikeyu Torres, quoted in Vázquez, “The Taíno Survival.”

<sup>82</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *2000 Census of Population and Housing*, Table DP-1, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics, Puerto Rico. Available at (<http://factfinder.census.gov/>).

<sup>83</sup> “US Government Census 2000 and the Taíno Indians of Puerto Rico,” Jatibonicu Press Release, April 8, 2001.

<sup>84</sup> “A Taino Tribal Leader Meets with Heads of U.S. Census,” Report to the Jatibonicu Taíno Tribal Council, April 15, 2000.

Project” coordinated by the United Confederation of Taíno People, there are approximately 1000 officially registered members. This number has increased significantly within the past three years, and registration is expected to grow in the future as a result of the increased visibility of Taíno organizations.<sup>85</sup> Nación Taína de las Antillas has been cited to have approximately 400 core members,<sup>86</sup> and Concilio Taíno Guatu-Ma-cu A Borikén claims to have a membership of around 300 people.<sup>87</sup> While the size and resulting social influence of the movement continues to be up for debate, these numbers allude to the fact that people are identifying as Taíno and that there is some level of active identification within Taíno organizations.

I have identified three overlapping periods of the Neo-Taíno Movement. First, the public emergence of the initial Taíno organizations occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. These organizations developed in or near U.S. urban centers with significant Puerto Rican populations. These older organizations tend to be the largest, as they have often formed sister organizations first in other U.S. cities, and subsequently in Puerto Rico. The second period begins in 1992 and continues through the present. Most Taíno organizations have been established within this period, and most focus their energies on reviving Taíno culture and spirituality. The third period begins in 1998 with the establishment of the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP). Since this time, the Neo-Taíno Movement has made more noticeable attempts toward indigenous activism. Within these two more recent periods, Taíno organizations have utilized the internet not only to disseminate cultural and political information through organization websites, but also

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<sup>85</sup> Personal Conversation with Roberto Múkaro Borrero, President of the United Confederation of Taino People's Office of International Relations and Regional Coordination, February 2, 2009.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Kearns, “Restoration and Outreach: Conversations with La Nación Taína in New York,” reprinted in *Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies (Occasional Papers of the Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink)*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Oct 1999-Oct 2000.

<sup>87</sup> See Concilio Taíno Guatu-Ma-cu A Borikén, <<http://conciliotainopr.org/mission.ingles.htm>>

to maintain transnational communities through social networking sites like the Indigenous Caribbean Network.<sup>88</sup>

The first significant Taíno organization to be established was the Jatibonicu Taíno Tribal Nation (JTTN). The JTTN was founded in New Jersey but publicly emerged on November 18, 1970 in the central mountain region of Orocovis, Puerto Rico. This date was symbolically chosen to coincide with the Taíno “Day of Remembrance,” described as the last day of Taíno freedom before Columbus landed in Puerto Rico in 1493. The JTTN not only claims to be the tribal government of Puerto Rico’s central region of Orocovis, Morovis, Barranquitas and Aibonito, but Cacike Pedro Guanikeyu Torres claims direct descent from Cacike Orocobix, the Taíno chief of this region at the time of Spanish conquest. Except for one brief period in 2001, Cacike Guanikeyu has continuously served in this role as principal Cacike since the tribe’s founding to the present.<sup>89</sup> Since its founding in New Jersey, the JTTN has since established Tribal Bands in Florida and Borikén, and has focused its efforts toward gaining official recognition as the sovereign nation of the Jatibonicu region of Puerto Rico as well as maintaining and reviving Taíno cultural practices.<sup>90</sup>

Similar to that of Jatibonicu in terms of specific ties to land, The Turabo/Aymaco tribe of Puerto Rico is headed by hereditary Cacique Carmen Yuisa Baguamey Colon Delgado of the Caguas region of Puerto Rico. She claims to have documents showing her descent from Baguamey, brother of Cacique Caguax, who was chief of this area at the time on Spanish

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<sup>88</sup> See <[www.indigenouscaribbean.ning.com/](http://www.indigenouscaribbean.ning.com/)>

<sup>89</sup> “My Fairwell [*sic*] Letter to the Taíno People in the Year 2001,” Pedro Guanikeyu Torres, January 1, 2001; “Stepping Back Up As a Cacike and Tribal Elder of My People,” Pedro Guanikeyu Torres, January 22, 2001.

<sup>90</sup> For more information on the JTTN, see <<http://www.taino-tribe.org/jatiboni.html>>.

conquest.<sup>91</sup> While it is unclear as to the date of the official organization of this tribe, it has always been asserted by Puerto Ricans from the island.<sup>92</sup>

The founding of these two tribes are the exceptions and not the rule. While these two organizations emphasize their Taíno identity with regard to specific regions of Puerto Rico and direct descent from Taíno caciques at the time of Spanish conquest, the majority of organizations claim no specific ties to a region of Puerto Rico. Instead, they emphasize Taíno cultural and spiritual practices.

The Caney Indigenous Spiritual Circle (CISC) was founded in 1982 in Pittsburgh and serves as an early example of the establishment of a Taíno organization with the explicit purpose of reviving and practicing Taíno religion and spirituality. Their website provides detailed information of core Taíno religious practices, beliefs, ceremonies, and myths. Since its founding, this spiritual organization has expanded to include chapters in New York City, northwestern New York state, the greater Philadelphia area, Florida, and Boriken.<sup>93</sup> Caney Quinto Mundo – the chapter in Orocovis, Boriken – was founded in 1993 by Naniki Reyes Ocasio,<sup>94</sup> mentioned at the beginning of this paper for participating in the Caguana protest. It is clear that the Neo-Taíno Movement emerged from the political and cultural activism of Puerto Ricans in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. As a result of the transnational and circular

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<sup>91</sup> I have not been able to locate or verify these documents. Déborah Bermán Santana states: “The Turabo/Aymaco leader claims that her family’s land in Puerto Rico is part of the original *cacicazgo*...of Turabo. The daughter of Caguax...married a Spaniard who was then given title to much of her land – which has been maintained as part of the family inheritance ever since. As the Turabo/Aymaco leader’s claim fits well with official genealogical records, the municipality of Caguas recognized her family as descendants of the Taíno rulers of the Turabo *cacicazgo*.” See Déborah Berman Santana, “Indigenous Identity and the Struggle for Independence in Puerto Rico,” in *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*, ed. Joanne Barker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 216.

<sup>92</sup> For more information on the Turabo/Aymaco Tribe, see <<http://www.indio.net/aymaco/>>.

<sup>93</sup> See <<http://caneycircle.owlweb.org/>>.

<sup>94</sup> See <<http://www.prtc.net/~caney/>>.

migration of Puerto Ricans since the 1970s, a subsequent transnational Neo-Taíno Movement has also developed in Puerto Rico, as is shown through the examples of CISC and JTTN.

The majority of Taíno organizations began to develop in the 1980s while the public emergence of most has occurred between 1992-1993 in response to the 500 year anniversary of Columbus' first landing in the Americas and his first landing in Puerto Rico. In fact, a central theme common amongst most groups is their opposition to any celebration relating to Columbus, as they were the first peoples of the Americas to be called "Indian" and be subjected to slavery. Taíno organizations have organized protests<sup>95</sup> and produced informational literature about rejecting Columbus Day.<sup>96</sup> Many have also organized in efforts to revoke to Papal Bull of 1493, which is seen as the foundation of Spanish exploitation and annihilation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.<sup>97</sup> Most of these organizations are also more concerned with reclaiming Taíno culture and spirituality as opposed to claiming direct descent from a particular tribe or region of Puerto Rico.

The 1990s saw a boom in the formation of Taíno organizations as well as attempts to form umbrella organizations to unify disparate Taíno groups. The first of such attempts of unification occurred in 1990 with the establishment of the Asociación Indígena Taína in New

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<sup>95</sup> Various articles in the *Voice of the Taíno People*. For example, "From Coast to Coast, We Say Goodbye Mr. Columbus: Taíno People Speak Out on Columbus Day Celebrations, Colonialism and Genocide," *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 6, Issue 4, October-December 2003.

<sup>96</sup> For example, both the UCTP and the JTTN have information on their websites providing an "alternate" history of Columbus' landing from a Taíno point of view. For example, see "The Historical Roots of a Nation," Chief Petro Guanikeyu Torres, available at <<http://www.manataka.org/page464.html>>; Various articles in *Voice of the Taíno People*. For example, "Editorial: The Truth about Columbus, the Exploiter," *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 6, Issue 2, April-June 2003.

<sup>97</sup> The Papal Bull of 1493 "... 'officially' established Christian dominion. The 'Bull' called for the subjugation of non-Christian peoples (barbarous nations), and their lands... Consequently, tens of millions of natives peoples perished as a result of these actions. This Papal edict has never been revoked and has since become the cornerstone of the colonial policies used against Indigenous Nations and People." See "Delegation to the Vatican," *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 3, Issue 3, July-September 2000.

York by Elba Anaca (Anaka) Lugo, Rene Cibanakán Marcano, Naniki Reyes, and others.<sup>98</sup> However this organization quickly dissolved as a result of ideological differences,<sup>99</sup> and formed two separate groups – the Maisiti Yucayeque Taíno and La Nación Taíno de las Antillas.<sup>100</sup> La Nación Taína explicitly states that “[w]e are not an organization, group or club, we are the Restored Nation of the Taíno People.”<sup>101</sup> Nación Taína has grown into one of the largest Taíno transnational entities, primarily focused on the expression of Taíno culture and advocacy on behalf of Taíno people. La Nación Taína also fits with the pattern of the development of the movement. While established and based in New York, La Nación Taína has subsequently gained members and representatives in Borikén, Kiskeya (Dominican Republic), and Kuba (Cuba).

Other cultural and spiritual organizations that have developed in the 1990s and early 2000s include:<sup>102</sup> Cacibajagua Taíno Cultural Society; Presencia Taína; Bohio Atabei (Taíno Women's Circle); Yukayeke Baramaya; NanaTurey's Bohio Bajaku; Biaraku; Yukayeke Guajataka; Ku Karey Spiritual Circle, Inc.; and El Consejo General de Taínos Borincanos (Puerto Rico). According to Jorge Estevez, a Taíno activist from the Dominican Republic, “there are at least 25 Taíno organizations with thousands of members from New York to California and from Florida to Puerto Rico, and the numbers are still growing.”<sup>103</sup>

Most of these organizations have used the internet to increase the visibility of their particular organizations, and the use of the internet as a tool for networking and disseminating information has correlated with the increase in the Taíno self-identification of Puerto Ricans. Scholars have noted the contemporary use of the internet in the construction, articulation, and

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<sup>98</sup> Dávila, “Local/Diasporic,” 34-35.

<sup>99</sup> The nature of these ideological differences is unclear.

<sup>100</sup> Guitar, Ferbel-Azcarate, and Estevez, “*Ocama-Daca Taíno*,” 62.

<sup>101</sup> Nación Taína, <<http://tainonation.info/index.html>>.

<sup>102</sup> All were founded in the U.S. unless otherwise noted. This is by no means a list of all Taíno organizations.

<sup>103</sup> Guitar, Ferbel-Azcarate, and Estevez, “*Ocama-Daca Taíno*,” 62.

advocacy of indigenous groups.<sup>104</sup> As is argued and articulated by Forte, “the online, electronic assertion of ‘survival’, by self-described ‘revivalist’ and ‘restorationist’ groups, occurs precisely because the offline realm places many more constraints on the dissemination of these assertions.”<sup>105</sup> Additionally, Forte discusses how the internet allows people to represent themselves in ways that they wish to be represented, connects displaced peoples across larger spatial areas,<sup>106</sup> and serves as a means for gaining greater visibility for their cause. As such, the internet serves as a critical source to learn how Taínos are organizing, creating cultural and spiritual identities, articulating indigeneity, and advocating for indigenous rights.

Perhaps the most politically significant organization to develop in the 1990s was the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP). Based in New York and founded in 1998, this organization serves as an umbrella for many Taíno organizations. The purpose of the UCTP is “to unite and enlist representatives of Taíno organizations, groups, and societies to protect, defend, and preserve the Taíno cultural heritage and spiritual tradition... The Confederation will endeavor to promote spiritual, cultural, educational, economic, and social activities for the development of contemporary Taíno communities and our future generations.”<sup>107</sup> The UCTP has particularly been active in fighting for the recognition of Taíno people on the local, national, and international levels, especially through its advocacy on behalf of Taíno people at the United Nations.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Kyra Landzelius (ed.), *Native on the Net: Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples in the Virtual Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> Forte, Maximilian. “Amerindian@Caribbean: Internet Indigeneity in the Electronic Generation of Carib and Taino Identities” in *Native on the Net: Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples in the Virtual Age*, ed. Kyra Landzelius (New York: Routledge, 2006), 133.

<sup>106</sup> For example, the internet has connected Taínos in Puerto Rico, the U.S., the Dominican Republic, and Cuba.

<sup>107</sup> UCTP Declaration of January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998.

<sup>108</sup> The advocacy of the UCTP will be elaborated in later sections of the paper.



Like any movement, the Neo-Taíno Movement is by no means a unified body of organizations with a unified purpose. Nor is there a singular view of “Taíno culture” or “Taíno spirituality.” For example, while many organizations view the UCTP as a unifying body, many organizations are not officially members of the organization. Some like to JTTN are direct in challenging the authenticity of other “Taínos” and warn “true” Taínos about those who only identify as “Taíno” to profit from the sale of merchandise with Taíno symbols. For example, the JTTN states that “[s]ome contemporary Taino cultural groups are publicly proclaiming to be of a traditional Taino tribal origin, when in fact they are nothing more than urban city cultural groups. Some barter or are in the business of selling native crafts and others are selling spirituality. Our Jatibonicu Taino Longhouse and its tribal laws strictly prohibit the bartering or selling of any kind of sacred ceremonial objects or Taino spirituality.”<sup>109</sup> While there are never any specific groups that are explicitly and openly challenged, it is clear that not all organizations maintain the same views or cultural values.

### **Analyzing “Extinction”: The Praxis of Culture and Biology**

As I have discussed, the notion of the “extinction” of the indigenous population of the Caribbean has long been established as the dominant historical narrative of the region. Nevertheless, since the 1970s, an increasing number of diasporic Puerto Ricans have looked through the lens of their Taíno “root” to redefine their Puerto Rican identity as Taíno. They have organized into cultural, spiritual, and political organizations and have challenged essentialized notions of “extinction” in order to argue for indigenous “survival.”

This discourse of “extinction” and “survival” has developed along the praxis of culture and biology. Most scholars understand the historical contributions of Taínos to a Spanish-

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<sup>109</sup> “A Taino Tribal Affairs Public Notice,” Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation's Proclamation of September 13, 1998.

speaking Caribbean identity but argue that these contributions should not be equated with distinct cultural continuities and the continuous survival of a separate Taíno community. Thus while there are traces of indigenous culture within Puerto Rican culture, this does not justify the complete denial of the realities of *mestizaje* to privilege an indigenous root. As such, “Taínos” are seen to be reclaiming a romanticized indigenous past that is not based on cultural continuities. They are seen as “wannabee tribes”<sup>110</sup> or just “playing Indian.”<sup>111</sup> Most significantly, many critics cite the reclamation of a Taíno identity as a way to further marginalize the “true” African identity of Puerto Ricans, which is both more culturally and biologically relevant to Puerto Rican identity.

These discussions of cultural survival have been complicated by ongoing biological studies on the genetic makeup of Puerto Ricans, which states that 61 percent of Puerto Ricans have Amerindian mtDNA. These studies have continued to raise more questions than answers. What is the significance of this testing? What does it mean that 61 percent of Puerto Ricans have Amerindian mtDNA? Do these findings actually “prove” the “existence” of Taínos? If we accept that these test results show biological continuity, this does not equate into cultural continuity. Thus, how does biology relate to culture?

Interestingly, different criteria are used to identify “legitimate” claims to indigeneity by different constituents. For scholars, biological continuity has little weight when it is not coupled with cultural continuity. Thus, biological ancestry does not equate with culture, especially when considering the amount of time which has elapsed since the “existence” of a distinct Taíno community. Therefore biology alone cannot legitimately identify an ethnic or cultural group. On the other hand, for the purposes of the U.S. government through the Bureau of Indian Affairs,

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<sup>110</sup> Rayna Green, “The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe,” in *Folklore*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (1988), 30-55.

<sup>111</sup> Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

the retention of culture has nothing to do with a Native American tribe being federally recognized. Instead, indigenous people must have adequate historical documentation showing the continuous existence of the tribe as well as a minimum amount of indigenous blood. Taíno organizations, by contrast, are much more inclusive with welcoming persons into the Taíno community.

In this section, I address these questions by discussing the ways that Taínos have discovered and revived their Taíno culture, the academic debates and critiques surrounding this reclamation, the discourse around ongoing genetic testing, and how all of these discussions relate to each other.

#### *Discovering and Articulating an Indigenous Identity*

Taíno cultural identification has occurred through a process of cultural awakening and realization, reclamation, research, and finally reconstruction and revival of identity. As argued in this essay, the articulation of a Taíno identity could only have occurred within the Puerto Rican diaspora. From the 1970s through the present, a subset of the Diasporic Puerto Rican community has increasingly looked through the lens of their Taíno “root” to redefine their Puerto Rican identity. While the reasons for individual identification have varied, mostly second-generation Puerto Ricans within the Diaspora have longed to learn about and reclaim heritage. Richard Kearns states that he “started hearing about Taínos in Manhattan. They were getting together, demonstrating old ways and telling their own stories...I, like many others, began to feel that it was time to reclaim the truth about our heritage.”<sup>112</sup> José Barreiro, a Cuban Taíno

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<sup>112</sup> Richard Kearns, “Messages from the Taíno Restoration and Truth Reclamation/ We Never Disappeared,” reprinted in *Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies (Occasional Papers of the Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink)*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Oct 1999-Oct 2000.

Professor at Cornell, states that Taínos “looked around and gave ourselves permission to explore the Taíno in our culture, our history and our beings.”<sup>113</sup>

While it is impossible to catalogue everything that could be defined as Taíno “culture,” it is important to present some of these cultural aspects that are often highlighted by Taíno organizations. For example, many underscore the prevalence of Taíno words that continue to be used in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, such as *barbacoa* (barbecue), *huracán* (hurricane), *hamaca* (hammock), and *canoas* (canoes). Additionally, the names of various fruits (e.g. *guyaba*, *guanábana*), animals (e.g. *tiburón*), and places (e.g. *Haiti*, *Mayaguez*) are claimed to be Taíno words.<sup>114</sup> Various cooking methods and ingredients used in making foods such as Jamaican *jerk*,<sup>115</sup> Puerto Rican *pasteles*,<sup>116</sup> and *casaba* (cassava) bread are claimed to be of Taíno origin. Baseball is said to have its origins in a Taíno game called *batu*.<sup>117</sup> As a summary of the most common articulations of Taíno culture:

...[A]n exhibit in Puerto Rico focusing on Taíno material culture and customs... would shed light on *casaba* making, *mabi* preparation, the nets used for catching *jueyes* (crabs), basket weaving (*jabas*), and fishing nets (*nasa*), *pasteles*, endemic medicinal plant use, and the multitude of Taíno customs that have continued to be a part of Puerto Rican culture. But these are rarely mentioned and often overlooked; hence many people on the island are not even aware of just how much Taíno cultural continuity there is.<sup>118</sup>

Initial stages of reclamation sometimes included the racialization of an Indian identity. Essentially, some thought that persons in their family “looked” Indian. There are distinct features believed to be characteristic of Taínos, which include long straight hair, a narrow forehead, elongated eyes, a short nose, high cheekbones, shovel shaped front teeth, lack of body

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Various sources. See, for example, Estevez, “Amerindian mtDNA in Puerto Rico,” Various UCTP Taíno News “Did You Know” Files, available at < <http://taino-facts.blogspot.com> >.

<sup>115</sup> UCTP “Did You Know Files”, January 6, 2007.

<sup>116</sup> “Pasteles Are Taíno,” *Voice of the Taíno People Online*, December 13, 2008.

<sup>117</sup> UCTP Taíno News “Did You Know” Files,” July 2, 2007.

<sup>118</sup> Jorge Estevez, “Amerindian mtDNA in Puerto Rico: When does DNA matter?,” 224.

hair, and copper skin tone.<sup>119</sup> For example, Richard Kearns noticed that his “abuelo...looked ‘Indian’ and so did his [grandfather’s] sisters, [and Kearns’s] tías,...who were all born in this century. And then there’s the matter of the many Indian-looking people of Puerto Rican descent on the island and up here in North America.”<sup>120</sup>

Others began participating in powwows and other Native American cultural events.

While Kacike Rene Cibanakán Marcano of Nación Taína states that his mother always told him of his Taíno heritage, his cultural awakening occurred during a powwow:

In 1988, I went one day to the McBurney YMCA...to take my daughter Teresita to see the Ballet Folklorico of Mexico...While there I could hear some drumming in the distance, it was an intertribal powwow...I went to see that and stopped to talk with an Mexican Indian lady and as I was speaking with her, one of the dancers approached me. The dancer, a Kiowa Comanche, asked me "What tribe do you belong to?" and I said "I am Taino" and he asked "Why are you there as a spectator? You should be here with us." After that, I started dancing at powwows and getting more involved with Native American events generally...<sup>121</sup>

Most claiming to be Taíno were either Puerto Rican migrants who came to the U.S. when they were young, or second generation Puerto Ricans who were born in the U.S. They began viewing their personal history, family history, traditions, and the stories of their grandparents from this new knowledge of Taíno cultural and religious traditions. Joanna Soto Aviles’s family practiced some form of Taíno spirituality when they first migrated to Brooklyn, gathering “every couple of months around the times of the new and full moons” in the name of Yukiya, a Taíno deity. She was “told not to talk about it” because they would just be seen as “crazy.” Over time, her family stopped participating in these rituals, but Joanna has attempted to revive these traditions among her family.<sup>122</sup> Luis Lukibuel Ramos offers a similar story, who has attempted to revive the traditions of his great-grandparents who raised him, despite the denial of Taíno

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<sup>119</sup> Dávila, “Local/Diasporic Taínos,” 34; Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, 269.

<sup>120</sup> Kearns, “Messages from the Taíno Restoration.”

<sup>121</sup> Kearns, “Restoration and Outreach.”

<sup>122</sup> Richard Kearns, “The Return of the Taínos/Our Own ‘Lost Tribes’,” reprinted in *Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies (Occasional Papers of the Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink)*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Oct 1999-Oct 2000.

blood by his parents.<sup>123</sup> For Angelica Vargas, her “mother and grandmothers taught us how to make casaba bread from the Yuca, and taught us all about medicinal plants, when and how to plant them, and when to pick them...My mother cooked on an open fire, on three stone slabs. And it was during these times that she would tell us of our family history and make us proud to be of Indian descent...”<sup>124</sup>

As such, many self-identified Taínos claim that the culture of their families and the stories told by their elders were always Taíno. Most of these stories and traditions were rarely recognized or realized as such until they learned about Taíno culture. Thus, there will always be an undercount of the true number of Taínos, because rural cultural traditions continue to exist without being specified as “Taíno.” Thus these desires to reclaim a Taíno identity have been coupled with the need to learn about and research Taíno history, culture, and spirituality. As stated by Jorge Estevez, a Taíno activist, “...We’ve been told for so long that we don’t exist that it’s harder for us to prove who we are...”<sup>125</sup> “We have a lot of customs and traditions that we didn’t know where they came from and after doing years of research, many of us are finding out...that it means we are Taíno.”<sup>126</sup> Many of the current leaders of Taíno organizations have had to go through this process of realization, reclamation, and research. Kacike Cibanakán states that he “...sat down to research [and] investigate, how did our ancestors look? And then we began to change the way we dressed...”<sup>127</sup> Members of Nación Taína began to “gather

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<sup>123</sup> Luis Lukibuel Ramos, New York, “Personal Testimonies of Contemporary Caribbean Aboriginal Descendants,” *Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink*, available at < <http://www.centrelink.org/TestimonyA.html>>.

<sup>124</sup> Angelica Vargas, “Personal Testimonies of Contemporary Caribbean Aboriginal Descendants,” *Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink*, available at < <http://www.centrelink.org/TestimonyA.html>>.

<sup>125</sup> Kearns, “Messages from the Taíno Restoration.”

<sup>126</sup> Kearns, “The Return of the Taínos.”

<sup>127</sup> Kearns, “Restoration and Outreach.”

bimonthly to discuss traditions handed down in some families, to conduct research on Taíno history, language and customs...”<sup>128</sup>

As a result of this research, these cultural and spiritual practices are often identified as the culture and spirituality of the *jíbaro* – the poor peasant farmer from the countryside. As noted by Barreiro, “No one refers to the lunar planting or the herbal healing or other activities and beliefs as being Taíno. They call it ‘guajiro’ in Cuba or ‘jíbaro’ in Puerto Rico... These farmers plant yucca – a main staple of the Taino diet for centuries – and other vegetables using the same methods of cultivation handed down from the Taino ancestors. In Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic however, the news media refers only to ‘campesinos’...but almost never to the indigenous root”<sup>129</sup> Some Taíno groups make explicit links between Jíbaro culture and Taíno culture. Nación Taína conflates the migration and culture of thousands of *jíbaros* to the U.S. with the migration and culture of Taínos.<sup>130</sup> Kacike Cibanakán more explicitly states that “Jíbaro culture was influenced by Taínos in the dancing, instruments, [and other] customs...”<sup>131</sup> Cacike Pedro Guankeyu Torres of the JTTN has stated since 1970 that “[t]oday we have a 500 year old mestizo Taino heritage that is better now known or popularly known by the name of the Jibaro mountain people.”<sup>132</sup>

The *jíbaro* has been the most important symbol of Puerto Rican cultural and national identity both in Puerto Rico and the Diaspora. But through the process of reclaiming an indigenous identity, Taínos have redefined the very essence of *jíbaro* culture as Taíno. While discussions of the Neo-Taíno Movement as a social movement have their limitations because of

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<sup>128</sup> Kearns, “Messages from the Taíno Restoration.”

<sup>129</sup> Richard Kearns, “Messages from the Taíno Restoration.”

<sup>130</sup> “A Prophecy, and the Resurgence of a Nation,” *Official Taíno Nation News*, May 23, 2005.

<sup>131</sup> Richard Kearns, “Messages from the Taíno Restoration.”

<sup>132</sup> “A Letter to the Puerto Rican People, A Vision for the Year 2000,” Cacike Pedro Quanikeyu Torres, November 24, 1970.

their relative marginality among Puerto Ricans, the emergence of Taíno organizations are challenging notions of “extinction” and redefining what it means to be Puerto Rican. This is particularly significant when contextualized within the relative weakness of Puerto Rican political nationalism and the historical significance of cultural nationalism.

### *Recreating Taíno Culture and Spirituality*

Instead of highlighting the racial and cultural blending of the “three roots,” the majority of Taíno organizations have focused on recovering and reviving Taíno culture and spirituality. Some organizations take a broad approach to cultural recovery. La Nación Taína founded Wanakán, which serves as a cultural center in New York whose mission is “to promote the history and the richness of the Taíno culture...and to reclaim, restore and preserve the Taíno Peoples heritage and natural language.”<sup>133</sup> Wanakán provides monthly “cultural recovery classes” for children and adults. The mission of Concilio Taíno Guatu-Ma-cu A Borikén, based in Puerto Rico, is to “...increase public knowledge of the Taíno people through education, and by keeping history alive through areytos (ceremonial dances) and estampas (reenactments) of the life of our ancestors. We promote Puerto Rican Taíno image, our history, way of life, customs, language, ceremonies, music, songs and craftwork.”<sup>134</sup> Other organizations are more specific in their focus of recreating culture. Cacibajagua, based in New York, “is dedicated to the promotion of the music, song, dance, stories and art of the Indigenous Taino People of the Caribbean.”<sup>135</sup> Wakia Arawaka Taína, based in Puerto Rico, is a Taíno dance troupe.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> See Wanakán, Nación Taína, < [http://nacion\\_taina.tripod.com/id5.html](http://nacion_taina.tripod.com/id5.html) >.

<sup>134</sup> See Concilio Taíno Guatu-Ma-cu A Borikén, <<http://conciliotainopr.org/mission.ingles.htm>>.

<sup>135</sup> See <<http://tainoculture.blogspot.com/>>.

<sup>136</sup> See <<http://wakiarawakataina.4t.com/index.html>>.



In the early 2000's, the *Voice of the Taíno People* – the newsletter of the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP) – began including 15 “Taíno words and phrases translated in English and Spanish, which your family can practice.”<sup>137</sup> This newsletter included various informational articles which allowed people to gain awareness of Taíno culture and spirituality, including articles like “The Medicinal Use of Cacao,”<sup>138</sup> “The Taíno Kanoa,”<sup>139</sup> and “Our Universe: The West Indian Manatee.”<sup>140</sup> In situating themselves with relation to Native Americans, this last article described how “[t]he manatee is as sacred to the Caribbean, Southeastern, and South American Indians as the buffalo is to the Plains Peoples. Not only did we consume the animal for food, just about every other part of the manatee was also used.”<sup>141</sup> The newsletter also included “Did You Know” facts describing various aspects of Taíno culture, “UCTP Historic Print Archive”, and the meanings of various Taíno petroglyphs.

In addition to these informational articles, the *Voice of the Taíno People* also offered ways in which people could begin to practice various aspects of Taíno culture and spirituality. For example, a rare phenomenon involving the planet Venus was set to occur in 2004. An article in the newsletter discussed how “our ancestors observed the movements of the stars and planets and the information obtained during these observations were used to assist the daily life of the community...As the ideals of peace and harmony are foundational principals of ancient Taíno philosophy, the UCTP urges all Taíno, Arawak and Carib peoples to consider this request [to view Venus] as it presents a unique opportunity to unite people around the world via an increase

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<sup>137</sup> Various Issues, as early as *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 3, Issue 3, July-September 2000.

<sup>138</sup> “The Medicinal Use of Cacao,” *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 6, Issue 1, January-March 2003.

<sup>139</sup> “The Taíno Kanoa,” *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 6, Issue 1, January-March 2003.

<sup>140</sup> “Our Universe: The West Indian Manatee,” *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 7, Issue 1, January-March 2004.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

in spiritual awareness.”<sup>142</sup> One editorial described Taíno beliefs of the afterlife and gave suggestions on how to honor the ancestors:

I invite all Taíno who are searching for traditional ways of honoring our *muertos* to consider the following possibilities:

1. To remember and call by name your ancestors and include the names of our Caciques and Cacicás.
2. To light a vigil candle in their memory.
3. To place a bowl of fruit in their honor.
4. To meditate on sharing with relatives and friends.
5. To celebrate their life by dedicating yourself to helping in some community or family project.<sup>143</sup>

The importance of reclaiming and reviving Taíno spirituality is evident in number of Taíno organizations who focus primarily on reclaiming spirituality. Ku Karey Spiritual Circle was established in 2000 “for the purpose of giving people in the community the opportunity to gather in a spiritual Native Taino way...” It is “is a non-denominational spiritual organization dedicated to help individuals along the spiritual path of personal growth.”<sup>144</sup>

Caney Indian Spiritual Circle (CISC), one of the oldest Taíno organizations, provides detailed information on their website for people interested in learning about Taíno spirituality. It provides information on various myths and legends, on the Taíno deities, and on the role of various spiritual leaders. On an individual level, they give information on six rituals which are “the most important links between you and the CEMIES (say-mees), the powerful spiritual entities that control our Universe...[and] between you and the HUPIAS (hoo-pih-ahs), the ancestors.”<sup>145</sup> These are the “ritual water,” the “sacred tobacco,” the “breath of life,” the “moon-path cycle,” the “sun-path cycle,” and the “kansi.” CISC gives detailed information about the

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<sup>142</sup> “Our Universe: Historical Celestial Events – The First of Two Venus Transits,” *Voice of the Taino People*, Volume 7, Issue 2, April-June 2004.

<sup>143</sup> “Editorial: The Day of the Dead,” *Voice of the Taino People*, Volume 7, Issue 4, October-December 2004.

<sup>144</sup> See <<http://www.kukarey.com/>>.

<sup>145</sup> “You Are a Sacred Being,” CISC Website, <<http://caneycircle.owlweb.org/youtaino.html>>.

rituals and how a person can perform them. For example, the “ritual water” focuses on purification, and anyone can do this prayer ritual during a morning shower:

The first and most important step in maintaining a strong personal water purification ritual cycle is to establish a regular bathing or shower time each day which you can initiate with a brief ceremony and prayer. Before stepping into the shower or sitting in your bath water focus on the act that you are about to perform as a sacred thing, a thing that will bring you closer to the realm of the spirits...

[E]nter the water and use a cup or bowl to scoop up of [*sic*] catch a cup-full of water. Lift the cup to the direction of the South first and focus briefly on the quality of Open Mindedness. Pray to ACHIANO (Ah-Chiah-Noh), the spirit of the South that it may endow you with that quality. Pour the water upon your body as if pouring the Open Mindedness over yourself and anointing yourself with that quality.

Then scoop up a second cupfull of water and raise it briefly to the direction of the West. Focus on the quality of Inner Vision (the ability to look within your own self and understand what you see there). Pray to KOROMO (Koh-Roh-Moh), the spirit of the West that it may endow you with that quality. Pour the water over your body as if pouring the Inner Vision over yourself and anointing [*sic*] yourself with that quality.

Then scoop up a third cupfull of water and raise it briefly to the direction of the North. Focus on the quality of Wisdom and Experience. Pray to RAKUNO (Rah-Ku-Noh), the spirit of the North that it may endow you with that quality. Pour the water over your body as if pouring the Wisdom over yourself and anointing [*sic*] yourself with that quality.

Finally scoop up a fourth and final cupfull of water and raise it briefly to the direction of the East. Focus on the quality of Illumination or Enlightenment (clarity of outward vision). Pray to SOBAIKO (Soh-Bye-Koh), the spirit of the East that it may endow you with that quality. Pour the water over your body as if pouring the Illumination over yourself and anointing [*sic*] yourself with that quality.<sup>146</sup>

Initiating these rituals are crucial for anyone interested in reclaiming their Taíno culture and spirituality. “Making these connections with the Cemies and the Hupias is your first step to personal self-respect and spiritual purity.”<sup>147</sup>

In addition to these personal rituals, there are numerous community rituals and celebrations that occur throughout the year. Led by ceremonial leaders called *biekes*, these rituals include the Tobacco Ceremony, Sweat Lodge Ceremony, Full Moon Ceremony, Summer and Winter Solstice, Spring and Fall Equinox, Great Seeding Ceremony, Marriage Ritual, Expectant Mother Ritual, Coming of Age Rite, Vision Quest, and Memorial Service.<sup>148</sup> These

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<sup>146</sup> “Ritual Water,” CISC, <<http://caneycircle.owlweb.org/sacredwater.html>>.

<sup>147</sup> “You Are a Sacred Being,” CISC, <<http://caneycircle.owlweb.org/youtaino.html>>.

<sup>148</sup> “Ceremonies of the Caney,” CISC, <<http://caneycircle.owlweb.org/ceremonies.html>>.

various ceremonies and gatherings have been regularly advertised by means of Taíno websites and newsletters. Also advertised regularly are Native American powwows, in which Taíno cultural groups like Cacibajagua and Presencia Taína participate as Native American tribal groups and to which all Taínos are invited to attend.

Since the early 1990s, persons interested in learning about Taíno history, culture, and spirituality have been aided greatly by the research done by organizations like the UCTP, Nación Taíno, JTTN, and CISC. These and other organizations make much of this information highly accessible through the use of the internet to disseminate information as widely as possible. Interestingly, most websites provide information only in English, while others provide bilingual websites. A smaller number are solely presented in Spanish. This alludes to the fact the majority of Taínos continues to reside within the United States and are either English-dominant or bilingual and are able to access and utilize computers, which may not be an available option in poor and rural areas of Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic. Nevertheless, it is clear that there are numerous organizations and initiatives aimed at reclaiming and reviving Taíno identity, causing one Taíno activist to emphasize that “[i]t is inexplicable if not irresponsible to keep [the] Taíno in the realm of the past.”<sup>149</sup>

### *Contesting Taíno Identity*

In response to the efforts of a growing community that is reclaiming Taíno culture and spirituality, most scholars have been highly critical of the movement and have questioned the validity of a reclaimed Taíno identity. In fact, most of the academic discourse about the Neo-Taíno Movement has focused on either authenticating or illegitimizing Taíno identification. Almost all scholars and critics agree that Taínos have historically and symbolically contributed

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<sup>149</sup> Jorge Estevez, “Amerindian mtDNA in Puerto Rico: When does DNA matter?”, 223.

to Puerto Rican history and culture. Nevertheless, critics question the probability of distinct Taíno cultural continuities which has existed outside of the extreme levels of cultural and biological mixing that has occurred over five centuries of colonialism in Puerto Rico. Stated differently, as a result of the *mestizaje* of the majority Spanish and African population of Puerto Rico, Taínos have become “extinct” as a separate people. As argued by Haslip-Viera,

The issue here is not the extinction of Taíno culture, which has had some influence on the contemporary cultures of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, but the near annihilation of the Taíno population by the beginning of the seventeenth century and the subsequent mixing of the remnants with Europeans, Africans, and others. The cultural mixtures that have resulted do not justify the privileging of a Taíno identity or pedigree in the contemporary period.<sup>150</sup>

Thus while there are traces of indigenous culture within Puerto Rican culture, this does not justify the complete denial of *mestizaje* to privilege an indigenous root. As a result of the amount of time that has elapsed since anyone has claimed to be distinctly Taíno, present-day Taínos are seen to be reclaiming a romanticized indigenous past that is not based on cultural continuities. They are merely seen as “playing Indian.” Linguistically, Peter Roberts argues that the terms “Indian” and “Taíno” have historically been appropriated by people who “looked like Indians” for “reasons of politeness and euphemism as well as to access privileges...”<sup>151</sup> Within a U.S. context, Miriam Jiménez Román argues that these appropriations “...diminish the legitimate claims of those who actually suffer the consequences of being Indian, while maintaining the illusion of liberal acceptance of difference.”<sup>152</sup> Thus, present-day Taínos are not seen as identifying with a legitimate identity, but instead are problematically identifying as Indian because of the perceived privileges inherent in being Indian. Additionally, Diasporic Puerto Ricans have a “nostalgia for an idyllic homeland,” which includes the “rejection of what Puerto

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<sup>150</sup> Haslip-Viera, “Amerindian mtDNA does not matter”, 232.

<sup>151</sup> Peter Roberts, “What’s in a Name, an Indian Name?,” in *Taíno Revival: Critical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Identity and Cultural Politics*, ed. Gabriel Haslip-Viera (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001), 97.

<sup>152</sup> Jiménez Román, “The Indains are Coming!”, 108.

Rico has become” and more pointedly “an insistence that it return to what it never was.”<sup>153</sup>

Nevertheless, Taínos challenge these arguments by claiming the continuous survival of Taíno culture through Puerto Rican *jíbaro* culture. As characterized by Roberto Múcaro Borrero, President of the UCTP, “We are not a movement of people trying to go backwards in time...It is an affirmation of culture. Being able to speak out in a way our grandparents were not able to.”<sup>154</sup>

Significantly, many critics cite the reclamation and the essentialization of a Taíno identity as a way to further marginalize the “true” African identity of Puerto Ricans, which continues to be stigmatized and silenced within popular and academic discourse but is both more culturally and biologically relevant to Puerto Rican identity. It is argued by numerous people that the use of the Taíno “root” has been used to displace the African “root” of Puerto Rican identity throughout history, from its use as a symbol by white Creole elites in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the institutionalization of the Taíno root through El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña since the 1950s. It has been noted repeatedly that significantly more institutions, museums, and festivals are devoted to the celebration of Taíno heritage than there are devoted to African heritage.<sup>155</sup> While not completely dismissing the movement, one scholar argues that “...it is exactly because the Indian heritage has historically received greater attention and public acknowledgement in the government’s cultural policy in contrast to what is African, that the emphasis on the Taíno and things Taíno remains contradictory and problematic both for Puerto Ricans in the states and on the island.”<sup>156</sup> The Neo-Taíno Movement is equated with the legacy of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism which has mythologized a Taíno past and simultaneously degraded or ignored the

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 126.

<sup>154</sup> Roberto Múcaro Borrero, quoted in “‘It’s an Affirmation of Culture’: Interview with Taíno President Roberto Múcaro Borrero,” in *La Diva Latina Magazine*, Issue on Native Pride, Vol. 3, Issue 6 (Feb/March 2006).

<sup>155</sup> See Dávila, *Sponsored Identities*; Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*; Haslip-Viera, “Amerindian mtDNA does not matter;” Dávila, “Local/Diasporic Taínos.”

<sup>156</sup> Dávila, “Local/Disporic Taínos,” 39.

African “root.” Through ongoing debates about the origins of musical instruments, food, language, and other cultural practices, Puerto Ricans are literally “making Indians out of blacks.”<sup>157</sup>

This denial of Blackness and the perpetuation of racial hierarchies are seen to be exemplified by the problematic body politics of “looking Indian.” After meeting with Taíno leaders, scholar Arlene Dávila was thought to be Taíno because of how she looked.<sup>158</sup> Most critics question the problematic nature of identifying Taínos based on subjective notions of phenotype. Roberts states that historically, “it is...clear that even if some few original native inhabitants remained...in the very small settlements in the early colonial period, they could not have contributed significantly to the racial characteristics of present-day Dominicans, Cubans, or Puerto Ricans...”<sup>159</sup> Others critique it more specifically based on systems of racism in Puerto Rico and the U.S., as these phenotypical features generally allow a person with a more “European” phenotype entry into a Taíno identity while it specifically excludes an African phenotype. Haslip-Viera states that “...all those who claim an exclusive Taíno identity or pedigree should remember that a Caribbean Latin@ with stereotypical Black African features and tightly coiled hair may indeed have indigenous mtDNA or the Y-chromosome...but this will still be considered Black in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and the United States and will be treated or mistreated accordingly.”<sup>160</sup>

Many of these arguments were presented at a symposium at El Museo del Barrio in New York on February 28, 1998 entitled “Rethinking Taíno: The Cultural Politics of the Use of their

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<sup>157</sup> Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, 262.

<sup>158</sup> Dávila, “Local/Diasporic Taínos,” 33.

<sup>159</sup> Peter Roberts, “The (Re)Construction of the Concept of ‘Indio’ in the National Identities of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic,” in *Caribe 2000: Definiciones, Identidades y Culturas Regionales y/o Nacionales*, ed. Lowell Fiet (Puerto Rico: First Book Publishing, 1997), 103.

<sup>160</sup> Haslip-Viera, “Amerindian mtDNA does not matter,” 233.

Legacy and Imagery” in conjunction with El Museo’s permanent art exhibit entitled “Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean.”<sup>161</sup> Roberto Múcaro Borrero, president of the UCTP, attended the symposium, and offered “a Taíno perspective” that was published in *Taíno Revival* with the essays presented at the symposium. In this essay, he highlighted that the audience was aware of the “anti-Taíno sentiments” of the panelists, and critiqued the most dominant assertion that Taíno identification was merely an attempt to further deny the African identity of Puerto Ricans, stating that “[t]his afrocentric propaganda has served to perpetuate the idea that race relations among Puerto Ricans is simply a ‘Black and White’ issue – totally disregarding even the remote possibility of other realities.”<sup>162</sup> As such, Borrero emphasized the similarities of the Taíno situation with African Americans and other Native American groups. For example, he notes that “although historically not recognized as a separate ethnic group, Caribbean peoples retain much more of their indigenous cultural and linguistic characteristics than do many Indigenous communities in eastern North America.”<sup>163</sup>

Taíno organizations are often highly aware of the publication of academic literature related to Taíno issues. Many actively engage academic discourse by presenting “a Taíno perspective” to counteract their negative portrayal in most academic literature. For example, the newsletter of the UCTP regularly included book reviews on books related to Taíno history, anthropology, archeology, and culture. The newsletter of Nación Taína advertized the publishing of Forte’s edited volume *Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean*:

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<sup>161</sup> El Museo was founded by Puerto Rican activists in 1969 and continues to be the only museum in New York City devoted to Latino history and culture. El Museo continues to provide a community and intellectual space for the Puerto Rican and other Latino communities of New York. As such, the symposium was attended by scholars, self-identified Taínos, and community members. Thus the discourse of a Taíno identity has not remained solely within academia, but has been discussed to some extent within Puerto Rican and Latino communities. For more information on El Museo del Barrio, see < <http://www.elmuseo.org/>>.

<sup>162</sup> Borrero, “Rethinking Taíno: A Taíno Perspective,” in *Taíno Revival: Critical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Identity and Cultural Politics*, ed. Gabriel Haslip-Viera (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001), 147.

<sup>163</sup> Borrero, “Rethinking Taíno,” 146.



*Amerindian Survival and Revival*.<sup>164</sup> In a more significant example, UCTP sponsored a traveling multimedia exhibition that included print art, bead and feather work, and pottery that coincided with the re-release of *Taino Revival* in order to offer “a grassroots perspective on the subject of Taíno cultural...survival.”<sup>165</sup>

I agree with scholars who argue the relative “safeness” of a romanticized Taíno past and the appeal of claiming a Taíno identity instead of a stigmatized and marginalized African identity. However, it is important not to essentialize the reclamation of a Taíno identity as the denial of an African identity. It seems ironic that arguments against the essentialization of a Taíno identity often involve the importance of reclaiming of an essentialized African identity. It is important to note that both of these identities have been marginalized<sup>166</sup> in favor of a white Puerto Rican identity through the *blanqueamiento* of a *mestizo* and *jibaro* identity. While the denial of an African identity is related to ideologies of *blanqueamiento*, there are other factors that need to be considered in order to understand this movement.

There are a growing number of scholars who are praising the movement for reclaiming a lost indigenous identity and are highly critical of scholars who attempt to delegitimize this movement. These scholars highlight a person’s right to choose their own identity. For example, Ferbel-Azcarate argues that “just because a person with multiple ancestries wants to celebrate their Taíno roots does not necessarily mean they want to negate their African, European, or other heritages.”<sup>167</sup> He further suggests that “the idea that the Taínos of today must prove themselves to be comparable to the Taínos of 1492 ought to be as nonsensical as Spaniards today proving

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<sup>164</sup> “New Book! Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean,” *Official Taíno Nation News*, March 19, 2006.

<sup>165</sup> “508 Years: The Contemporary Presence of the Taíno Indian in Boriken and Beyond – UCTP Sponsored traveling Multimedia Exhibition Focusing on Taíno Survival on Tour,” *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 4, Issue 4, October-December 2001.

<sup>166</sup> Albeit in varying degrees.

<sup>167</sup> Guitar, Ferbel-Azcarate, and Estevez, “*Ocama-Daca Taíno*,” 53.

themselves to be comparable to Spaniards of 1492.”<sup>168</sup> Forte asks, “If Indians with ‘one drop’ of African blood are evading their ‘Blackness’ by proclaiming themselves Indian, then what do we say of Africans with ‘one drop’ of Indian blood who proclaim themselves African?”<sup>169</sup>

### Genetic Research and the Discourse of “Taino Blood”

Indeed, the question of “blood” has been significant within discussions of race throughout U.S. history. In the present day Spanish-speaking Caribbean, race is supposedly characterized by a homogenous *mestizo* identity even though the privileging of certain races over others continues to exist. In contrast, the U.S. racial paradigm is generally described as the rule of hypodescent. Essentially, “one drop” of Black “blood” classifies and essentializes a person’s Black identity. While the definition of “one drop” has varied from place to place,<sup>170</sup> this classification of race has historically been used to define legal and social barriers which segregated and oppressed persons of African descent.

For Native Americans, however, blood quantum has been not used to define a person as Native American, but as a means to erase a Native American identity. While not the exclusive determinant of Native American identity,<sup>171</sup> blood quantum has been crucial in identifying individuals and tribes who are eligible to receive federal benefits as a result of over 370 historic treaties and agreements between sovereign indigenous nations and the U.S. government.<sup>172</sup> In

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<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>169</sup> Maximilian C. Forte, “Searching for a Center in the Digital Ether: Notes on the Indigenous Caribbean Resurgence on the Internet” in *Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean: Amerindian Survival and Revival*, ed. Maximilian C. Forte (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006), 261.

<sup>170</sup> For example, one-eighth Black blood made a person legally Black in colonial Virginia, while one-sixteenth Black blood made a person legally Black in colonial North Carolina. See Fogelson, Raymond D. “Perspectives on Native American Identity” in *Studying Native America: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. Russell Thornton (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 45.

<sup>171</sup> Fogelson states that “...blood, land, and community remain the *sine qua non* for legal recognition as tribal Indians, whereas other identity markers tend to be employed more flexibly: they can be lost and regained or...invented or reinvented.” See Fogelson, “Perspectives on Native American Identity,” 40-41.

<sup>172</sup> For a discussion of the history of Indian sovereignty and federal Indian policy, see Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third*

the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the explicit goal of establishing levels of blood quantum by the Office of Indian Affairs<sup>173</sup> was the “ultimate absorption of the Indian race into the body politic of the Nation. It means, in short, the beginning of the end of the Indian problem.”<sup>174</sup> In essence, the goal of federal Indian policy was to aid in the legal “extinction” of Native Americans through biological assimilation. While the legal ramifications of the Native American case are different than that of the Taíno case, racial mixing in both cases is equated with “extinction.”

Today, each federally recognized tribe determines the criteria for tribal membership. About two-thirds of these tribes require a minimum of blood quantum ranging from one-sixteenth to as high as five-eighths Indian “blood.” The most common requirement is one-fourth Indian “blood.”<sup>175</sup> Blood quantum is determined by tracing one’s ancestry to an officially recognized tribal roll which states the level of Indian blood of an ancestor.<sup>176</sup> Tribes must be federally recognized to receive federal benefits, which include economic benefits for education and infrastructure and legal benefits for legislation such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) or the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. However, in order for individuals to receive federal benefits, they must both be enrolled in a federally recognized tribe and hold a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood, which requires one-

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*Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2007).

<sup>173</sup> Today the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

<sup>174</sup> Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1917, as quoted in Thomas Biolsi, “The Birth of the Reservation: Making the Modern Individual among the Lakota,” in *American Ethnologist*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Feb. 1995), 41.

<sup>175</sup> Eva Marie Garroutte, “The Racial Formation of American Indians: Negotiating Legitimate Identities within Tribal and Federal Law,” in *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Spring 2001), 224; Pauline Turner Strong and Barrick Van Winle, “‘Indian Blood’: Reflections on the Reckoning and Refiguring of Native North American Identity,” in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No. 4, *Resisting Identities* (Nov. 1996), 555.

<sup>176</sup> Russell Thornton, “The Demography of Colonialism and ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Native Americans,” in *Studying Native America: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. Russell Thornton. (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 27-28.

fourth Indian blood.<sup>177</sup> While anyone is able to self-identify as Native American on the U.S. Census, there are many more legal restrictions to being federally recognized as such.

Thus there is a historical significance of tracing indigenous ancestry in the U.S. through blood. The Neo-Taíno Movement has gained national recognition as a result of ongoing genetic testing which claims to “prove” the predominance of Taíno blood of Puerto Ricans. While these tests cannot show the level of blood quantum of indigenous blood among Puerto Ricans based on Native American standards of providing documentable proof, these tests are situated within a culture that privileges science and biology over the more “subjective” politics of cultural identification.

Since the completion of the Human Genome Project in 2003, there has been a surge in genealogical DNA testing.<sup>178</sup> On a popular level in the U.S., this has been particularly popular amongst African Americans attempting to find their ancestral roots in Africa.<sup>179</sup> In Puerto Rico and the rest of the Caribbean, this new data has been primarily used to determine ancient indigenous migrations and populations. There have been various biological studies attempting to find the “origins” of Puerto Ricans with different methods of analysis and differing results.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 27-28.

<sup>178</sup> For example, see Parra, Flavia C., Roberto C. Amado, José R. Lambertucci, Jorge Rocha, Carlos M. Antunes, and Sérgio D.J. Peña. “Color and Genomic Ancestry of Brazilians” in *Annals of Human Genetics*, vol. 64, no. 6 (2000), 491-506; González, Ana M., Antonio Brehm, José A. Pérez, Nicole Maca-Meyer, Carlos Flores, and Vicente M. Cabrera. “Mitochondrial DNA Affinities at the Atlantic Fringe of Europe” in *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, vol. 120, no. 4 (2003), 391-404.

<sup>179</sup> For example, Professor Henry Louis Gates of Harvard University has joined and promoted “AfricanDNA.com” to trace African American ancestral roots, with celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Chris Tucker, and Whoopi Goldberg eager to find their ancestral roots. Another popular website is “AfricanAncestry.com”. For a critique of DNA testing to determine ancestry, see Andrew Yang, “Is Oprah Zulu? Sampling and Seeming Certainty in DNA Ancestry Testing” in *Chance: A Magazine of the American Statistical Association*, No. 20 (1 November 2007), 32-39.

<sup>180</sup> For example, see Hanis, Craig L., David Hewett-Emmett, Terry K. Bertin, and William J. Schull. “Origins of U.S. Hispanics. Implications for Diabetes” in *Diabetes Care*, vol. 120, no. 4 (2003), 618-627; Bonilla, Carolina, Mark D. Shriver, Esteban J. Parra, Alfredo Jones, and José R. Fernández. “Ancestral Proportions and their Association with Skin Pigmentation and Bone Mineral Density in Puerto Rican Women from New York City” in *Human Genetics*, vol. 115, no. 1 (2004), 57-68; Bonilla, Carolina, Mark D. Shriver,

The work that is most often cited is that of the research of Dr. Juan Martínez-Cruzado, a professor of biology at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez who received a \$270,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to determine the indigenous ancestry of Puerto Ricans.<sup>181</sup> His research has tried to determine the indigenous ancestry of Puerto Ricans through testing their mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which passes exclusively through a person's matrilineal line. According to his 2002 study of a random sample of 800 Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico, Dr. Martínez Cruzado found that "489 (61.1%) had mtDNA of indigenous origin, 211 (26.4%) had mtDNA of African origin south of the Sahara, and exactly 100 (12.5%) had mtDNA of Caucasian origin."<sup>182</sup> In an updated study, Martínez-Cruzado was able to further identify the African components of Puerto Ricans to be from West Africa and the European component to be from Western Europe.<sup>183</sup>

The results of these studies have been widely publicized in the Puerto Rican and U.S. press, and the results have been utilized by Taínos and Taíno organizations as "scientific proof" which shatters the myth of extinction. Jorge Estevez states that "[r]ecent mitochondrial DNA sequencing studies have revealed that not only are there indigenous genetic markers in the current population of the Greater Antilles, but the quantity is so staggeringly high it directly

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Esteban J. Parra, Alfredo Jones, and José R. Fernández. "Ancestral Proportions and their Association with Skin Pigmentation and Bone Mineral Density in Puerto Rican Women from New York City" in *Human Genetics*, vol. 115, no. 1 (2004), 57-68.

<sup>181</sup> *El Nuevo Día*, "Estudia le genetic de los Boricuas," 11 July 1999; *El Nuevo Día*, "Estudio podría probar población indígena no fue exterminada," 8 January 2000.

<sup>182</sup> Martínez-Cruzado, Juan C. (2002). The Use of Mitochondrial DNA to Discover Pre-Columbian Migrations to the Caribbean: Results for Puerto Rico and Expectations for the Dominican Republic. *KACIKE: The Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology* [On-line Journal], Special Issue, Lynne Guitar, Ed. Available at: <http://www.kacike.org/MartinezEnglish.pdf> [Date of access: 27 October 2008], 2.

<sup>183</sup> Martínez-Cruzado, Juan C., Gladys Toro-Labrador, Jorge Viera-Viera, Michelle Y. Rivera-Vega, Jennifer Startek, Magda Latorre-Estevez, Alicia Román-Colón, Rebecca Rivera-Torres, Iris Y. Navarro-Millán, Enid Gómez-Sánchez, Hector Y. Caro-González, and Patricia Valencia-Rivera. "Reconstructing the Population History of Puerto Rico by Means of mtDNA Phylogeographic Analysis" in *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, vol. 12 (September 2005).

challenges the ‘facts’ of Taíno extinction.”<sup>184</sup> “When it is showing that 61 percent of a population is of Amerindian origin, and there isn’t supposed to be any persons with such a background, the results are very impressive.”<sup>185</sup> Thus, the results are used to highlight what Taínos claim to have known without the genetic testing, but its publicity will help others see that Taínos are not naïve in their claims to indigenous ancestry. One Taíno leader highlights that “what our grandparents said is now confirmed by DNA tests. It’s time to affirm our culture.”<sup>186</sup> “I wouldn’t say that everyone needs to go and get a DNA test. But those tests do prove what our oral histories, that have been passed down through the generations, have been saying all along.”<sup>187</sup>

Nevertheless, the significance of this research has been publicly debated by scholars and Taíno activists, particularly in an ongoing exchange of articles between Gabriel Haslip-Viera – a sociologist at the City College of the City University of New York – and Jorge Estevez – a long-time Taíno activist from the Dominican Republic.<sup>188</sup> There are three main critiques of the research and the use of the research. First, genetic studies are challenged on their reliability and the methods used to make claims of ancestry. Second, Taíno organizations are criticized for only highlighting studies which help to bolster their arguments. Lastly, it is argued that the tests don’t validate the privileging of a Taíno ancestry. Instead, it shows how Puerto Ricans are thoroughly mixed.

Genetic studies are challenged on their ability to accurately discern a person’s genetic makeup as a result of incomplete databases, contradictory results, and disagreements on how to

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<sup>184</sup> Guitar, Ferbel-Azcarate, and Estevez, “*Ocama-Daca Taíno*,” 61.

<sup>185</sup> Jorge Estevez, “Amerindian mtDNA in Puerto Rico: When does DNA matter?,” 221.

<sup>186</sup> Roberto Múcaro Borrero, quoted in “It’s an Affirmation of Culture.”

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> This debate has included published articles between Gabriel Haslip-Viera, Sociologist, and Jorge Estevez, Taíno activist, between 2006 and 2008 and continues today. See Haslip-Viera, “The Politics of Taíno Revivalism;” Estevez, “Amerindian mtDNA in Puerto Rico;” Haslip-Viera, “Amerindian mtDNA does not matter.”

define ethnic groups. As an example, Pakistanis have been shown to have as much as 30 percent Native American ancestry.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, genetic ancestry claims are based on the ambiguities of possibly having one indigenous ancestor in the past 500 years. As elaborated by Haslip-Viera:

[T]he indigenous mtDNA found in 61 percent of Puerto Rican islanders is insignificant because almost all the persons in an individual's family tree dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century are not analyzed. All persons living today have two parents, four grandparents, eight grandparents [*sic*], sixteenth great grandparents, and thirty-two great, great grandparents...Projecting farther back in time, each of us had 128 parental ancestors in 1790, 1,024 in 1700, and 16,384 in the 1580s, when *pure blooded* Taínos...probably became extinct. In actuality mtDNA, which is traced through a single female line...only constitutes a tiny element or residue of the total genetic composition of each Caribbean Latin@ if the family tree is projected back to the end of the sixteenth century. This means that Martínez Cruzado and his team have traced the indigenous mtDNA of only fifteen females in a family tree of 16,384 individuals over the course of fifteen generations.<sup>190</sup>

Regardless of the limitations of these studies, it is critiqued that they are selectively chosen to highlight favorable results. Most significantly, in addition to the other studies mentioned early, Martínez Cruzado has also begun research on the Y-chromosome, thus tracing ancestry through the paternal line. While having all of the limitations of the mtDNA testing, what is significant is that these results are almost reversed. "About 70% of the Y chromosomes in his 800 samples showed European traits, 20% African and 10% Indian."<sup>191</sup> According to Martínez Cruzado, these results make sense when considering the historical realities of the predominance of male Spanish settlers taking non-Spanish wives. Nevertheless, this study has not been as widely publicized and has yet to be published. Thus, DNA tests generally have been critiqued for their commercialization, their lack of scientific peer review, and the "deliberate public distortion of test results."<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Gabriel Haslip Viera, "Amerindian mtDNA does not matter", 229, 233; Yang, "Is Oprah Zulu", 37.

<sup>190</sup> Emphasis of author. Haslip-Viera, "Amerindian mtDNA does not matter," 228.

<sup>191</sup> "Puerto Rican Gene Pool Runs Deep," Juan González, *New York Daily News*, November 4, 2003.

<sup>192</sup> Haslip-Viera, "Amerindian mtDNA does not matter," 233.

If we do take these genetic tests at face value, it's argued that the results don't validate the privileging of a Taíno ancestry. Instead, they show how Puerto Ricans are thoroughly mixed. Thus, as with the historical arguments of *mestizaje*, genetic testing which shows that Puerto Ricans are *mestizo* do not "prove" the existence of Taínos nor justify the privileging of a Taíno identity, regardless of the amount of Amerindian genes. Again, the focus is on essentialist notions of "extinction" and "survival." The focus of these critiques have cited works which show how Amerindians were no longer "genetically pure" by the early seventeenth century. Culturally and biologically, Taínos were absorbed into a *mestizo* population. It is argued that Taínos are claiming an essentialized identity which denies their *mestizo* identity and marginalizes their African identity. According to Haslip-Viera,

...[F]rom the standpoint of genetics, there seems to be little doubt that the Taínos became extinct...Martínez-Cruzado...admit that the Taínos inevitably mixed with Spaniards and Africans...In order to make the case against extinction, Martínez Cruzado...would have to locate individual Puerto Ricans who are "Amerindian" and demonstrably pure from a biological standpoint. However, it appears that locating such individuals would be highly unlikely if not impossible.<sup>193</sup>

Self-identified Taínos constantly challenge these essentialist notions of "extinction" and "survival," arguing that Taínos have survived through *mestizaje*. Most Taínos don't claim an exclusive Taíno identity. "After all, if the classic Taíno were a mixture of many different ethnicities – and they were – then nothing has really changed. We continue to be a people of mixed blood."<sup>194</sup> Similar to the Red Power Movement, the amount of Taíno blood a person has is less important than having any blood at all. Furthermore, Taínos are challenging the dominant discourse of a homogenous Latino, Hispanic, and *mestizo* identity. Roberto Múcaro Borrero states: "This westernized, homogenized Latino thing is an inequitable concept where indigenous

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<sup>193</sup> Haslip-Viera, "The Politics of Taíno Revivalism," 267.

<sup>194</sup> Estevez, "Amerindian mtDNA in Puerto Rico," 226.



peoples are concerned...I have a real problem...when those people preferring to affirm an African or even a Spanish side to their history say that I can't affirm who I am as an indigenous person, as though everybody else is entitled to be who they are on our ancestral homeland, except us."<sup>195</sup> Estevez believes that the implications of the mtDNA tests are clear.

...[I]dentifying with the Indian component of this tripartite population is somehow seen as a denial of Negritude and misguided romanticism. The obvious implication of Taíno DNA in modern Puerto Ricans suggests that perhaps the history of the island must be re-evaluated. If this is the case, then people claiming Taíno descent are not delusional, as some have stated, but rather part of a growing trend among Caribbean peoples to learn the truth about their past.<sup>196</sup>

There is no clear and obvious connection between biological survival and cultural survival. Genetic continuity through *mestizaje* does not automatically equate with cultural continuity. Nevertheless, Taínos affirm their right to reclaim a history and culture that has been suppressed and mixed within broader Puerto Rican society. Do the results of genetic research "...mean that all Puerto Ricans are Indians? No, but it does suggest that people who identify with their native roots should be taken seriously and with as much respect as anyone claiming African or Spanish descent."<sup>197</sup>

### **Political Activism within National and International Forums**

The majority of Taíno organizations continue to be concerned with the revival and reclamation of Taíno culture and spirituality and focus on an individual's right to self-identification. Nevertheless, the founding of the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP) in 1998 has shifted the Neo-Taíno Movement to a period of increased activism, grassroots organizing, and international advocacy. Specifically, the UCTP as a unifying body is concerned

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<sup>195</sup> Borrero, quoted in Veran, "Born Puerto Rican."

<sup>196</sup> Estevez, "Amerindian mtDNA in Puerto Rico," 219.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

not only with education, culture, and spirituality, but also with the official recognition of the Taíno as an indigenous people and the legal rights associated with that claim. The UCTP has been particularly concerned with the inclusion of Taíno and other Caribbean indigenous peoples within international forums, as well as the reclamation of Taíno sacred sites and the repatriation of ancestral remains. In essence, Taínos need to be recognized as an indigenous group in order for their demands to be taken seriously. As such, the UCTP explicitly states that as “a part of our overall strategy with regard to Nation building, UCTP participation within international forums addresses development issues and provides additional platforms for recognition.”<sup>198</sup> The UCTP has faced numerous difficulties because of their unrecognized status as an indigenous group within the colonial context of Puerto Rico and by extension within the international community. Thus in addition to struggling for Taíno rights, they are also struggling for legitimacy as an indigenous group. Nevertheless, their persistence within these various contexts has increased their visibility, led to forms of informal recognition, and challenged national and international bodies to engage with Taíno issues.

### *Political Activism in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Native American Framework*

Since the majority of self-identified Taínos are from Puerto Rico or the Puerto Rican diaspora, most Taíno activism has focused on Taíno issues in Puerto Rico. Much of their demands for sovereignty and indigenous rights are directed towards Puerto Rican governmental bodies and authorities, such as the Governor of Puerto Rico and El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP). Nevertheless, because of the colonial status of Puerto Rico, Taíno organizations recognize that any decision made by the Governor of Puerto Rico needs the

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<sup>198</sup> This statement is including with almost every document related to international activism. See <[http://uctp.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=47&&Itemid=38](http://uctp.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=47&&Itemid=38)>.

approval of the U.S. Congress in order to receive rights as indigenous people. Therefore, Taíno organizations situate themselves not only in relation to Puerto Rican authorities but also within the framework of U.S. federal Indian policy and Native American discourse.

Like many Native American tribes in the U.S., various Taíno organizations – including the UCTP, el Consejo General de Taínos Borincanos (CGTB), Caney Quinto Mundo (CQM), and Ihuche Rareito (IR) – are concerned with the reclamation of sacred sites and the repatriation of ancestral remains. “A principle obligation for the Taíno is to ensure that their culture, spirituality, stories, customs, dances, and songs continue even after over five hundred years of colonial rule.” In order to fulfill these obligations, Taínos believe that “they need to maintain their spiritual reciprocal relationship with *Atabey* [Mother Earth], the Ancestors, and sacred sites.”<sup>199</sup> As such, they have consistently advocated for the reclamation of sacred sites such as Tibes Ceremonial Center in Ponce, as well as the respect and repatriation of ancestral remains from Vieques, PO29 burial site in Ponce, La Piedra Escrita and La Tumba del Indio in Jayuya, Ojo de Agua in Arecibo, other local and national museums, and the University of Puerto Rico. Furthermore, they have demanded the right to revitalize their indigenous culture and freely practice their religious beliefs.

The largest actions have been taken with regard to Caguana Ceremonial Center in Utuado, Puerto Rico. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, it is considered the most sacred ceremonial site for Taínos. Additionally, it has both historical and archeological significance as the largest ceremonial site in the Caribbean. Instead of the more academic view of Caguana held by scholars and government bodies, Caguana represents a symbol of Taíno culture and spirituality. To the Taíno, Caguana represents “the spirit that brings all life” and “is

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<sup>199</sup> Joint Shadow Report, Submitted by the UCTP, CGTB, and CQM to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms Racial Discrimination (CERD), January 23, 2008, Item 6.

the embodiment of a divine energy/being who brings forth, renews, and sustains life.”

Additionally, the *bateys* (ball courts) at Caguana “awaken stories” of the Taíno ancestors, and “are the sacred places of birth and re-birth after the Taíno emerged from hiding following the end of the Spanish slavery system.”<sup>200</sup> As such, Caguana Ceremonial Center continues to be the most contested sacred site.

Because of its cultural and spiritual significance, Taínos have demanded greater access to Caguana. On an individual and organizational level, Taínos wish to go to Caguana to pray, hold spiritual ceremonies, and celebrate cultural events. These gatherings were “not intended to occur on a 8:00-4:00pm schedule.”<sup>201</sup> As Caguana is a sacred site, conflicts arise when Taínos refuse to pay the admission fee to enter the site when they are going for prayer.<sup>202</sup> Even when allowed to enter and pray during regular visiting hours, Taínos contend that they are “monitored, watched, and ultimately humiliated in the process of enacting their religious ceremonies.”<sup>203</sup> Since “Caguana holds many of the teaching necessary to continue as a people” as is embodied by the sacred *Cemis* and petroglyphs surrounding the *bateys*,<sup>204</sup> the inaccessibility of Caguana has prevented their “right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs,” as is asserted by the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other similar declarations.<sup>205</sup> Additionally, this inaccessibility has caused Taínos to argue that they have been denied their freedoms of religion, association, and equality under the law as is guaranteed under the Puerto

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, Item 28.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, Item 68.

<sup>202</sup> UCTP Report on Cultural Heritage and Sacred Sites, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, submitted by UCTP and Ihuche Rareito Coalition, May 15, 2002.

<sup>203</sup> Joint Shadow Report, CERD, Item 67.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, Item 68.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, Item 51.

Rican and U.S. Constitutions, the 1898 Treaty of Paris, and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, among other treaties and declarations.<sup>206</sup>

Táinos have also criticized El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña for the mismanagement and desecration of sacred sites and the “culturally inappropriate treatment” of these sites. They argue that Caguana’s status as a Historic Landmark has not prevented the deterioration of the sacred stones and other artifacts found at these sites. “Weed trimmers and tractors hurl pebbles and debris at the fragile, ancient stones. Guards, tour guides, and tourists freely jump between the stones threatening to topple them to the ground.”<sup>207</sup> They also disagree with the “culturally inappropriate” practices of building concrete buildings, fencing in the site – which “disconnects and imprisons the Batey and Tree of Life” – as well as man-made entrances which obstruct the “spiritually appropriate” entrance to Caguana.<sup>208</sup>

In addition to these grievances, Táinos are most significantly concerned with the disinterment and desecration of ancestral remains and their public display in museums and other “educational” venues. The Táinos consider the display of ancestral remains as sacrilegious and also a violation of their human rights as indigenous people.<sup>209</sup> Recently, they have been concerned with the seemingly “frequent” disinterment of Taíno ancestral remains and funerary objects. For example, during a flood control and dam project in Ponce in October 2007, sixty-six Taíno ancestors were disinterred. That same year, forty ancestral remains and funerary objects were disinterred from Arecibo. In both cases, the remains were sent to a laboratory in Atlanta, Georgia for testing.<sup>210</sup> Táinos argue that under the U.S. Historic Preservation Act, they should

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid, passim.*

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid, Item 30.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid, Item 32.*

<sup>209</sup> UCTP Report on Cultural Heritage and Sacred Sites, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, submitted by UCTP and Ihuche Rareito Coalition, May 15, 2002

<sup>210</sup> Joint Shadow Report, CERD, Items 20, 74-79. See also Rick Kearns, “Federal Grave Robbing of Taíno Remains,” *Indian Country Today* (Nov. 23, 2007).

have been notified and consulted in the matter.<sup>211</sup> Additionally, under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), they argue that they have the right to their ancestral remains for proper burial.

Taíno advocates have achieved small victories with regard to ancestral remains. For example, the ancestral remains of a 1500 year old Taíno woman at the Cedreta Museum in Jayuya, Puerto Rico were stopped being displayed in February 2002, though the remains continue to be property of the museum.<sup>212</sup> A more significant victory occurred with the repatriation of Taíno remains to a Taíno community in Cuba by Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. The significance of this was described by the UCTP Newsletter *The Voice of the Taíno People*: "For the first time in over 500 years, the Taíno descendant population of Caridad de los Indios will be recognized in a formal international encounter."<sup>213</sup>

Nevertheless, Puerto Rican and U.S. authorities have generally been unresponsive to Taíno demands. April 2001 marked the first formal attempt at dialogue with the Governor of Puerto Rico and other state agencies to discuss issues related to sacred sites.<sup>214</sup> Receiving no response after submitting a petition, the UCTP and IR took their petition to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, though this petition also went unanswered.<sup>215</sup> Taking matters into their own hands, leaders from the UCTP, CGTB, and CQM organized an occupation of Caguana in order to reclaim their right to this sacred site, as was described in the introduction of this paper. While the occupation was seen as a "victory" because of the amount of publicity and recognition that their actions received, they have more recently lamented that "the Taíno are

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<sup>211</sup> Joint Shadow Report, CERD, Item 20.

<sup>212</sup> "Campaign Update for the Respect of Taíno Ancestral Remains in Boriken," *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 5, Issue 1, January-March 2002.

<sup>213</sup> "Smithsonian's NMAI Returns Taíno Remains to Cuba: After 500 Years the Taino Community Continues to Gain Recognition and Respect," *Voice of the Taíno People*, Volume 5, Issue 3, July-September 2002.

<sup>214</sup> UCTP Report on Cultural Heritage and Sacred Sites, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, submitted by UCTP and Ihuche Rareito Coalition, May 15, 2002.

<sup>215</sup> UCTP Intervention on Culture, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, May 29, 2003.

still denied their human, social, cultural, and political rights to practice their ceremonies in the places sacred to them.”<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, the

Continued desecration and disinterment of Taíno ancestors has the spiritual consequence of interrupting their journey, thus interrupting the cycles of birth, life, transformation, and rebirth...Disinterment of so many untold numbers of ancestral remains is tantamount to genocide.<sup>217</sup>

Taíno organizations have faced difficulties in gaining recognition as an indigenous people because of the fact that Puerto Rico continues to be a colony of the United States. In order to receive the benefits of various U.S. treaties and declarations like the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) or the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, the indigenous tribe must be “federally recognized” by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) through the Office of Federal Acknowledgement. In order to receive federal recognition, tribes must undergo a long and arduous process in order to fulfill the following criteria:

- (a) The petitioner has been identified as an American Indian entity on a substantially continuous basis since 1900...
- (b) A predominant portion of the petitioning group comprises a distinct community and has existed as a community from historical times until the present...
- (c) The petitioner has maintained political influence or authority over its members as an autonomous entity from historical times until the present...
- (d) A copy of the group’s present governing document including its membership criteria. In the absence of a written document, the petitioner must provide a statement describing in full its membership criteria and current governing procedures...
- (e) The petitioner’s membership consists of individuals who descend from a historical Indian tribe or from historical Indian tribes which combined and functioned as a single autonomous political entity...
- (f) The membership of the petitioning group is composed principally of persons who are not members of any acknowledged North American Indian tribe...
- (g) Neither the petitioner nor its members are the subject of congressional legislation that has expressly terminated or forbidden the Federal relationship...<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Joint Shadow Report, CERD, Item 19.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, Item 128.

<sup>218</sup> 25 CFR Part 83 Procedures for Establishing that an American Indian Group exists as an Indian Tribe, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Item 83.7 – Mandatory Criteria for Federal Acknowledgment, available at <<http://www.doi.gov/bia/ofa.html>>.

Thus the primary criterion for becoming federally recognized is documentable historical continuity. While there is no specific mention of blood quantum for becoming an officially recognized tribe,<sup>219</sup> certain levels of blood as recognized by Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood are necessary for individuals to receive specific BIA benefits. As of April 4, 2008, 562 tribal entities have been “recognized and eligible for funding and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs by virtue of their status as Indian tribes.” About three-fifths of these were recognized tribes within the contiguous U.S., and the rest were recognized Alaskan Natives.<sup>220</sup> At least 250 more tribes have stated their intent to apply for federal recognition but have not yet gathered the necessary material for evaluating their application.<sup>221</sup> Thus the process of federal recognition is difficult to fulfill for most tribal entities. While the strongest case could possibly be made for the cultural survival of Taínos in Puerto Rico, cultural continuities are not a requirement for federal recognition.<sup>222</sup> Taíno organizations have openly attacked “the discriminatory practice of ‘federal recognition’ by the United States as a pretext for the denial of Taíno rights.”<sup>223</sup>

Despite their disdain for the U.S. colonial framework, Taíno organizations situate themselves within relevant Native American discourses in order to advocate for their rights as indigenous peoples. One self-identified Taíno scholar and UCTP representative has outlined the legal similarities between Native Americans and Puerto Ricans with regard to colonization, citizenship, and land removal and distribution. As a result of this similar legal history, she

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<sup>219</sup> Indeed, there are some federally recognized tribes that do not maintain blood quantum requirements for membership.

<sup>220</sup> “Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible To Receive Services From the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs,” Notice, *Federal Register*, Vol. 73, No. 66, April 4, 2008. Available at <<http://www.doi.gov/bia/ofa.html>>.

<sup>221</sup> The Office of Federal Acknowledgement, Brief Overview, 9/22/2009. Available at <<http://www.doi.gov/bia/ofa.html>>.

<sup>222</sup> For example, the Mashantucket Pequot Indians of Connecticut have achieved federal recognition, but have since hired anthropologists to teach them about Pequot culture. See Jiménez Román, “The Indians are Coming!,” 107.

<sup>223</sup> Joint Shadow Report, CERD, Item 14.



argues that the Taíno should be awarded the same rights as other Native American peoples.<sup>224</sup> Whether or not Taínos are ever awarded official “federal recognition,” Taíno organizations have argued for their inclusion within various Native American treaties in the same way Native Hawaiian communities have benefited from them despite not being a federally recognized entity.<sup>225</sup> To Taíno organizations, “[t]he fact that the US has included Native Hawaiians in NAGPRA despite not being a federally recognized tribe...but has failed to develop a similar process for the inclusion of the Taíno is further indication of US discriminatory policy with respect to the Taíno Native Peoples of Boriken.”<sup>226</sup>

Despite these similarities, it is also important to recognize the true uniqueness of the Puerto Rican situation and its implications for Taínos. For the majority of its colonial history, Puerto Rico was a colony of Spain, not of the United States. It was under Spanish colonial rule that the indigenous population of Puerto Rico was virtually annihilated, thus providing a possible counterargument for U.S. responsibility for recognizing Taínos. Nevertheless, if the U.S. were to take full responsibility of the indigenous situation in Puerto Rico as a U.S. possession, the BIA’s emphasis on historical continuity and documentation eliminates any chance for Taínos to successfully argue for recognition. The dominant historical narrative continues to portray the annihilation of the Caribbean indigenous population within the first fifty years of Spanish colonialism. Furthermore, the last significant historical reference of the indigenous population is from a late 18<sup>th</sup> century census. This extensive period of European colonization has minimized the possibility of gaining federal recognition. Native American tribes in the eastern United States have faced similar problems because of their longer history under U.S. colonization in

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<sup>224</sup> DeAnna Marie Rivera, “Taíno Sacred Sites: An International Comparative Analysis for a Domestic Solution,” in *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2003), 443-489.

<sup>225</sup> Joint Shadow Report, CERD, Items 9, 72.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, Items 9, 91.

relation to the western frontier. Alaska, as a location with minimal historical contact with the colonization, is able account for two-fifths of all recognized tribes. Thus as a result of their inability to acquire any form of recognition as an indigenous group in the United States, Taínos have looked to international forums to pressure the U.S. into recognizing their rights as indigenous peoples.

### *Political Activism within International Forums*

Like the efforts made by AIM through International Indian Treaty Council in 1974, Taíno organizations have increasingly utilized international indigenous forums to advocate for Taíno rights and issues of sovereignty. They have particularly utilized various forums within the United Nations (UN), most importantly the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).<sup>227</sup> The declarations of these and other committees are non-legally binding, and some nations choose not to adopt them. Nevertheless, the significance of international forums “...is their ability to record and set normative standards. Though there is always the risk of deviation from those standards, such actions do not necessarily negate the legitimate expectation-building that occurs in the process of establishing norms.”<sup>228</sup>

As such, Taíno and other indigenous Caribbean organizations led primarily by the UCTP have actively utilized these forums to address their concerns as indigenous people since at least

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<sup>227</sup> The UNPFII “...is an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.” Indigenous communities from around the world have increasingly turned to the international community to voice their issues and concerns which in many instances are ignored by their respective national governments. The Permanent Forum holds annual two-week sessions in order to provide a space for indigenous representatives to voice their concerns. Information about the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and official reports are available at <<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/>>.

<sup>228</sup> DeAnna Rivera, “Taíno Sacred Sites,” 473-474.

2002.<sup>229</sup> Additionally, Roberto Múcaro Borrero – President of the UCTP – continues to serve as the Chairperson of the NGO Committee on the United Nations International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples and has served as the Masters of Ceremonies for numerous UN events related to indigenous people. As with their arguments in the Puerto Rican and U.S. contexts, Taínos have argued for the reclamation of sacred sites, the repatriation of ancestral remains, and their recognition as an indigenous people. Moreover, Taíno organizations advocate for indigenous rights and sovereignty within Puerto Rico's colonial framework. Thus Taíno organizations have become an active voice in challenging the colonial status of Puerto Rico and advocating for decolonization at the United Nations from an indigenous perspective, calling “attention to the continued colonization of the Taíno peoples,”<sup>230</sup> “the violation of the Taíno community's inalienable right to self-determination, the continued status of *Boriken* as a colony of the United States, and the discriminatory practice of ‘federal recognition’ by the United States as a pretext for the denial of Taíno rights.”<sup>231</sup>

UCTP advocacy on behalf of Taíno and other Caribbean peoples has led to the resuscitation and development of the Caribbean Organization of Indigenous People (COIP) and the Indigenous Peoples Caucus of the Greater Caribbean (IPCGC). They have advocated for their inclusion within the United Nations system, and their efforts have led to the explicit recommendation within the Draft Programme of Action for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People “that representatives of Caribbean indigenous peoples should be included in region-specific consultations and conferences in Latin America and the Caribbean, and on steering committees for planning and implementing the programme of activities for the

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<sup>229</sup> UCTP Report on Cultural Heritage and Sacred Sites, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, submitted by UCTP and Ihuche Rareito Coalition, May 15, 2002.

<sup>230</sup> Joint Shadow Report, CERD, Item 3.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, Item 14.

Second International Decade. Serious consideration should also be given to organizing a special regional consultative session focusing on the unique situation of Caribbean indigenous peoples...”<sup>232</sup>

Ironically, this UCTP activism has led to the increased inclusion of the Circum-Caribbean indigenous populations of Guyana, Suriname, and Belize within the UN system while Taíno issues remain marginal.<sup>233</sup> The UCTP challenges these exclusions by arguing that “...Caribbean Indigenous Peoples participation should not be limited to representatives from the Caribbean coast of South and Central America but inclusion and participation should extend to indigenous representatives from the Caribbean islands and its Diaspora without discrimination.”<sup>234</sup> This marginality has occurred precisely because the majority of Taínos are Puerto Rican from either the island or the diaspora. Because of Puerto Rico’s colonial status, it cannot become an official member of the United Nations. This has also limited the ability of Taínos to receive funding to represent themselves within United Nations. For example, the UCTP as represented by the Indigenous Peoples Caucus of the Greater Caribbean (IPCGC) have explicitly demanded the recognition of this colonial situation, requesting that the UN

pay particular attention to ensuring access including equal funding to representatives from the Island of Borikén...to ensure their participation at the Regional and Special Consultative Session. Since Puerto Rico is not a member State of any UN or OAS International bodies, Agencies or Organizations because of its colonial status, Indigenous Representatives have been denied funding by the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples to participate in meetings, conferences, regional specific consultations, capacity building opportunities and conferences...Failure to address the effects of institutionalized colonialism only serves to perpetuate colonialism, and affect our ability to participate effectively within these systems...<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Draft Programme of Action for the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People, Report of the Secretary-General, 18 August 2005, Item 86.

<sup>233</sup> UNICEF Summary Report, Meeting on the Rights of Indigenous and Maroon Children in the Caribbean, June 28-29, 2007.

<sup>234</sup> UCTP Intervention, International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, January 8-10.

<sup>235</sup> IPCGC Intervention, Item 4, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, May 22, 2006.

As such, while advocating for their rights as indigenous people, Taínos are also consistently challenging the colonial status of Puerto Rico in the international arena. Ultimately, “[t]he Taíno seek equal treatment as indigenous peoples whose origins are rooted in the lands and territories under United States’ colonial control.”<sup>236</sup>

### *Informal Recognition of Taíno Organizations*

Despite these difficulties with obtaining “official” recognition, the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP) has made significant steps towards gaining recognition of Taíno issues and advocating for Taíno rights. Primarily through the UCTP, Taínos have been recognized by various U.S. and Puerto Rican government officials. The adoption ceremony of the Declaration of the UCTP in 1998 was held in New York’s City Hall and was co-sponsored by New York City Councilman José Rivera, who declared March 27, 1998 as the “United Confederation of Taíno People Day in the City of New York.”<sup>237</sup> A year later, the UCTP was commemorated for their first anniversary by the State of New York Legislature.<sup>238</sup> Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez of Illinois encouraged Congress to observe the United Confederation of Taíno People Day, stating that “[t]he Taíno people have the collective and individual right to identify themselves as indigenous, to be recognized as such, and to practice, revitalize, develop and transmit to coming generations the past, present and future manifestations of their distinct identity, ethnic, cultural and spiritual traditions, history, language, and customs.”<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Joint Shadow Report, CERD, 2008, Item 71.

<sup>237</sup> Proclamation, The City Council of New York, 15<sup>th</sup> District, The Bronx, José Rivera, March 27, 2998.

<sup>238</sup> State of New York Legislative Resolution, Assembly No. 1017, M. of A. Rivera, Arroyo, Diaz, Espaillat, Lopez and Ortiz, June 1, 1999.

<sup>239</sup> Congressional Record, Vol. 145, No. 43, United Confederation of Taíno People Day, Hon. Luis V. Gutierrez of Illinois, March 18, 1999.

The UCTP has received support from various Native American organizations, such as from the National Congress of the American Indian (NCAI) in support of Taíno efforts to reclaim Caguana Ceremonial Center as a sacred site.<sup>240</sup> Taíno organizations have also supported various Native American initiatives, such as offering support for the Washoe tribe of Nevada and California in protecting a sacred site,<sup>241</sup> petitioning for a National Native American Holiday in the United States,<sup>242</sup> and numerous petitions against the celebration of Columbus Day in the U.S. by most Taíno organizations.

The UCTP has also entered into “Declarations of Unity” with various tribes in the circum-Caribbean, including El Movimiento Indígena de Guayana (MIG of Venezuela),<sup>243</sup> the Arawak Lokono Nation of Hoboshirima (Venezuela),<sup>244</sup> the Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Amerindian Tribal Nations of Guyana,<sup>245</sup> and the Kalinago Carib Nation of Dominica.<sup>246</sup> Within all these declarations, there is an agreed commitment to “co-operate and assist each other...in matters of mutual interest and concern,” and to “jointly pursue and promote...cultural...activities for the development of our contemporary communities...”<sup>247</sup> Specifically with the Pan Tribal Confederacy, “the protection and maintenance of our ancestral remains, sacred sites, artifacts, and religious practices” is also emphasized.<sup>248</sup>

Nevertheless, as was seen with the support from Mayor Alan González Cancel of Utuado, Puerto Rico of the Caguana occupation, and with the lack of significant response from the United

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<sup>240</sup> The National Congress of American Indians, Resolution #SD-02-018, November 2002.

<sup>241</sup> United Confederation of Taíno People, Letter to Supervisor Maribeth Gustafson, April 1, 2002.

<sup>242</sup> United Confederation of Taíno People, Letter to Mike Graham, October 31, 2001.

<sup>243</sup> Declaration of Unity and Act of Cooperation between the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP) and the Movimiento Indígena de Guayana (MIG), June 27, 2003.

<sup>244</sup> Declaration of Unity between the Arawak Lokono Nation of Hoboshirima, Venezuela and the United Confederation of Taíno People, June 11, 2005.

<sup>245</sup> The Sisimuit, Kalaalit Nunaat (Greenland) Declaration between the United Confederation of Taíno People and the Pan Tribal Confederacy of Amerindian Tribal Nations of Guyana, October 12, 2001

<sup>246</sup> Invitation, Special Event and Reception Honoring the Declaration of Unity between the Kalinago and Taíno Nations, April 25, 2008.

<sup>247</sup> Declaration between Arawak Lokono and the UCTP, June 11, 2005.

<sup>248</sup> Declaration between the UCTP and the Pan Tribal Confederacy, October 12, 2001.

Nations, this informal recognition from U.S. and Puerto Rican government officials has had marginal effects on the various demands of sovereignty, land, and the reclamation of indigenous remains and artifacts. Recognition and declarations with other circum-Caribbean indigenous groups has developed beneficial relationships but have also had little effect on legally-binding forms of recognition of Taínos. Taínos continue to struggle with authenticating and legitimating their assertion as an indigenous people, and continue their efforts to revive and recreate Taíno identity, create a transnational Taíno community, and advocate for Taíno rights within national and international forums.

### **Conclusion**

Soon after Columbus initiated the conquest of the Americas, it became widely believed that the indigenous population of the Caribbean simply ceased to exist. Most were believed to have died, and the remaining few were absorbed into the numerically significant European and African populations of Puerto Rico. Indeed, “pure” Indians no longer existed. Nevertheless, as I have argued throughout this paper, this emphasis on racial and cultural purity should not be essentialized and equated with extinction. Taíno leaders continue to emphasize and redefine *mestizaje* not as the site of extinction, but as the site of cultural and biological survival. By redefining *jíbaro* culture as Taíno, self-identified Taínos are utilizing a nationally recognized emblem of cultural survival to argue for historical and cultural continuity. Thus they are redefining the very essence of Puerto Rican culture as Taíno.

There is much at stake in potentially recognizing Taínos as an indigenous group. On one level, it would mean that governing bodies would have to recognize Taíno rights to revitalize and practice their culture and religion. Taínos could no longer be turned away from praying at Caguana Ceremonial Center, and they would have to be consulted about their concerns regarding

the repatriation of ancestral remains. On a more basic but significant level, accepting the Neo-Taíno Movement as legitimate would require us to rewrite a history of “extinction” that has been told for the past 500 years.

Instead of merely debating the legitimacy of the Neo-Taíno Movement, more academic effort is needed to historicize the movement, understand why and how these new identities and cultural practices have arisen, and the ways in which self-identified Taínos are utilizing this new identity within public and political spheres. The current scholarship continues to focus on illegitimizing the movement, particularly as it relates to Puerto Rico’s African heritage. Indeed, it is clear that Puerto Rico’s African history and cultural heritage continues to be marginalized and silenced within political, academic, and popular discourse. Nevertheless, I have shown that the reclamation of a Taíno identity should not be essentialized and dismissed as simply the denial of an African identity. Instead, it should be situated and analyzed within the racial politics of Puerto Rico and the U.S., within a history of displacement and migration as a result of U.S. colonialism, and within a framework which challenges essentialist notions of race and extinction. While there are undoubtedly individuals who identify as Taíno simply because of romanticized images of a Taíno past, the Neo-Taíno Movement as a whole has strived to reclaim and revitalize the identities and cultural practices of their parents, grandparents, and other ancestors. The relative significance of genetic tests and historical documentation will continue to be argued and debated, but oral histories passed down within families present a different story of cultural survival that often holds more much more relevance than prevalent academic discourse. It is important to remain critical of this movement, but it is also important to understand and historicize it.



## **Appendix A – Taíno and other Caribbean Indigenous Websites**

Note: All websites were last accessed on March 19, 2009.

### **Taíno Newsletters**

*Official Taíno Nation News:*

< [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Official\\_Taino\\_Nation\\_News/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Official_Taino_Nation_News/)>

< <http://tainonationnews.blogspot.com/>>

*UCTP Taíno News “Did You Know Files*

< <http://taino-facts.blogspot.com/>>

*La Voz del Pueblo Taíno (Online):*

<<http://cuptboriken.blogspot.com/>>

*Voice of the Taíno People (Partial Online Archive):*

< [http://uctp.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=46&&Itemid=38](http://uctp.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=46&&Itemid=38)>

*Voice of the Taíno People Online:*

< <http://uctp.blogspot.com/> >

### **Taíno Organization Websites (Listed Alphabetically)**

*Biaraku*

< <http://www.biaraku.com/>>

*Bohio Atabei, Caribbean Indigenous Women’s Circle*

< <http://bohioatabei.blogspot.com/>>

*Caney Indian Spiritual Circle*

<<http://caneycircle.owlweb.org/>>

*Cacibajagua Taíno Cultural Society*

<<http://tainoculture.blogspot.com/>>

*Caney Quinto Mundo*

<<http://www.prtc.net/~caney/>>

*Concilio Taíno Guatu-Ma-cu A Borikén*

< <http://conciliotainopr.org/mission.ingles.htm>>

*El Consejo General de Taínos Borincanos*

<<http://naciontaino.blogspot.com/>>

*Iukaieke Guainia*

<<http://guaynia.blogspot.com/>>

*Ku Karey Spiritual Circle, Inc.*

<<http://www.kukarey.com/>>

*Presencia Taína*

<<http://www.prescenciataina.comoj.com/>>

*The Jatibonicu Taíno Tribal Band of Borikén*

< <http://www.taino-tribe.org/jatiboni.html>>

< <http://members.dandy.net/~orocobix/jatiboni.html>>

*The Jatibonicu Taíno Tribal Band of New Jersey*

< <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/Taino/jatibonuco.html>>

*Nación Taína de las Antillas / Taíno Nation of the Antilles / Taínkaya Kurixia*

< <http://tainonation.info/index.html>>

*The Tekesta Taíno Tribal Band of Bemini, Florida*

< <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/Tekesta/index.html>>

*Turabo/Aymaco Tribe*

< <http://www.indio.net/aymaco/>>

*The United Confederation of Taíno People*

< <http://uctp.org/>>

*Wakia Arawaka Taína*

< <http://wakiarawakataina.4t.com/index.html>>

### **Caribbean Indigenous Organizations Websites**

*Caribbean Organization of Indigenous People*

<<http://coipnews.blogspot.com/>>

*Indigenous Peoples Caucus of the Greater Caribbean*

<<http://indigenouscaribbeancaucus.blogspot.com/>>

*Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Indigenous Tribal Nations*

<<http://www.pantribalconfederacy.com/>>

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