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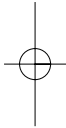
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Conquering Categories:
The Problem of Prehistory in
Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico and Cuba

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[Columbus] brought with him ten natives with whose help it would be possible to transcribe the language of all those islands. They call the sky “turéi”, a house “boa”, gold “cáunis”, a good man “tayno”

(Mártir de Anglería 1:109)

In introducing his study of the prehistoric Indian population of Puerto Rico, the naturalist Agustín Stahl described to his readers the wide range of sources he had consulted: physical remains, artifacts, indigenous words (*vozes indigenas*), comparative ethnographies from the Caribbean, and the chronicles left by sixteenth-century Spanish conquerors and historians such as Peter Mártir and Bartolomé de las Casas. Regarding the chronicles, Stahl admitted their unreliability. They had been “informed by preconceived judgements. Even those parts that appear truthful make one vacillate in accepting or rejecting them” (8). The

Cuban historian Antonio Bachiller y Morales was more caustic in evaluating European written sources. Concerning Columbus’s accounts, he concluded: “Columbus wrote not history but novels” (341). This article will discuss how Puerto Rican and Cuban historians evaluated the written record of the Spanish conquest and the alternative methods they devised to write about the island’s prequest population and culture. It will also show why this intellectual endeavor was so urgent to them by examining the links between the writing of history—especially “prehistory”—and national identity in Cuba and Puerto Rico.¹

As several scholars have recently argued, the construction of Antillean prehistory was a patriotic endeavor, an attempt to craft a national history and to create national symbols (Haslip-Viera). Puerto Rican and Cuban historians undertook this project in the face of a resurgent Spanish colonialism in the nineteenth century. Scholarship of the last twenty years has drawn new attention to the complexity and dynamism of Spanish colonialism in the Antilles after the Spanish American revolutions when Spain lost the majority of its American empire to creole patriots. In response to revolution and separation, the Spanish state and producers reconcentrated their interests on the two remaining Caribbean colonies with a vengeance. However, it is clear that they did so in part by making pacts with the Antillean elite over several issues, the most important being slavery and the slave trade. Separatist movements emerged in the two colonies in 1868, but for much of the century the Antillean dominant groups generally collaborated with Spain as they preferred a status quo of class and racial hierarchies to the uncertainty of armed violence and popular mobilization.²

Nevertheless, one aspect of the renewed colonial offensive from which creole elites dissented aggressively was Spanish nation-building. Spanish colonialism in the nineteenth century was not based solely on coercive military and economic institutions. There was also a significant Spanish effort to incorporate the colonial elite into the Spanish “nation” as Spaniards, not as Cubans or Puerto Ricans. The origins of this project were to be found in the Cortes of Cádiz (1810–14), when Spanish liberals sought to reconstruct the legitimacy of the American empire on the basis of a transatlantic Spanish citizenship. The Cádiz project failed in most of Spanish America as creole patriots successfully asserted their own visions of the nation and citizenship. Regarding Cuba and Puerto Rico, however, Spanish liberals kept this dream very much alive: the two colonies were *la España ultramarina*, transplants of Spanish civilization in the New World. Explicit in that vision was the belief that the Spanish conquerors had supplanted the Indians and remade the Antilles in their image (Fradera; Schmidt-Nowara 2000; Serrano).

The work of the Spanish republican and abolitionist Emilio Castelar, was typical of the nineteenth-century perspective. In a book published in 1892 to commemorate Columbus’s first voyage, Castelar argued that the conquest of the Americas was the founding act of modernity and it was Spain which was at the forefront: “If we recognize that America signals a crucial starting point in the development of Humanity, then our American brothers must recognize that all of modern culture and the vital spirit of that culture originated in the people and the land of Spain” (7). The emphasis was on “the people and the land of Spain,” not the people and the land of America. In Castelar’s history, America appeared as an empty space filled in by the Spanish. America was the “land of progress, of liberty, of democracy, . . . all more easily attainable in that Nature without ruins [*escombros*] and that society without memories than in this overworked Nature where we carry within ourselves, in our spirit, so many dead, as though we lived in an immense cemetery” (24). Even when he acknowledged the violence of conquest, Castelar justified it as the necessary condition of human development: “To want the discovery of America without war, war without conquest, conquest without violence, violence without destruction, destruction without ruin and desolation is like wanting birth without pain and life without death” (27). Spain’s historic task was to vanquish the primitive Indian cultures and to erect a more perfect European civilization that could freely grow in the New World.

But where Castelar saw “Nature” and emptiness, Antillean patriots saw Indian civilization and a deep past. In response to the effort to subsume the Antilles into Spanish

history, Puerto Rican and Cuban patriots crafted their own national histories and identities. This effort to differentiate themselves from the colonial overlord moved them to identify potential symbols of national authenticity and peculiarity: what made Puerto Rico and Cuba different from Spain? For instance, Francisco Scarano has shown that in Puerto Rico, local elites embraced and embellished the *j baro*, the archetypal Puerto Rican peasant, as part of a “masquerade” that distinguished creoles from Spaniards (Scarano 1996). Perhaps the most potent symbol of difference was the pre-conquest Indian population. Here were a people and culture that could not be equated with Spain and Spanish rule. Moreover, patriots argued that the Indians had left important traces of their culture on the language and customs of contemporary Cubans and Puerto Ricans while their civilization continued to shape the very landscape of the two islands. In various ways, therefore, the Indians of the Antilles forever differentiated Puerto Rico and Cuba from Spain because they represented a history and culture that would always exceed the history that began with the Spanish conquests of the early sixteenth century. Prehistory became a space of national authenticity and autonomy from Spain; thus follows the urgency of writing about prehistory and the intense grappling with problems of interpretation and reliability that obsessed creole historians in the nineteenth century.³

Prehistory in the Nineteenth Century

Throughout the nineteenth century, scholars of prehistoric Cuba and Puerto Rico generally concurred that only one people lived in the Greater Antilles at the time of the Spanish arrival. Whether they referred to them as Lucayos or Arawaks, historians agreed that the *borincanos* of Puerto Rico, the *haitianos* of Hispaniola, and the *siboneyes* of Cuba, as well as the peoples of Jamaica and the Bahamas, shared a common culture. In this paradigm of prehistory, the other inhabitants of the Caribbean were the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles, cannibals and warriors who occasionally raided the homes of the peaceful Lucayos, though some scholars believed that the cannibalistic Caribs were figments of the European imagination. Much speculation focused on the arrival of these peoples in the Caribbean. Though biblical history still figured into some eighteenth-century histories, by the nineteenth most scholars argued that all Indians migrated to the Americas from Asia while the Lucayos had come to the Greater Antilles from Florida or Yucatan and the Caribs from South America.⁴

Twentieth-century archaeologists revised this vision of prehistory significantly. Irving Rouse argues that at least five different civilizations inhabited the Caribbean islands and that the inhabitants of the Greater Antilles migrated from South America, as did the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles. Rouse divides the peoples of the Greater Antilles into four distinct groups, three of whom bore common origins. Cuba was inhabited by the Guanahatabeys, the least developed people of the region; the Western Tainos, who also inhabited the Bahamas; and the Classic Tainos, in the very eastern end of the island. The core of Classic Taino civilization, the most highly developed in terms of economic and political organization, was Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, while the Virgin Islands were home to the Eastern Tainos (Rouse ch. I).

Despite changes in paradigms, it is apparent that in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries imperial sources—from different moments of conquest—inevitably shaped the categories that organized knowledge of prehistory. For instance, it was not until the twentieth century that the name “Taino” became generally accepted for the peoples of the Greater Antilles, a shift that demonstrated the centrality of imperialist ethnology—both Spanish and U.S.—in shaping historical knowledge. In the nineteenth

century, the Cuban historian Antonio Bachiller y Morales had utilized the term Taino, taking it from the works of the Spanish chroniclers who had reported that upon his arrival in the Antilles, the Indians had greeted Columbus with the cry of "Taino! Taino!" which they translated as meaning "peace" or "friends", or as in Pedro Mártir's version cited above, "good man." Bachiller used the term to distinguish the peaceful inhabitants of the Greater Antilles from the more warlike Caribs of the Lesser Antilles. In the early twentieth century, the North American ethnologist of prehistoric Puerto Rico, Jesse Walker Fewkes, decided to use the same name for similar reasons: "Since it is both significant and euphonious, it may be adopted as a convenient substitution for the adjective 'Antillean' to designate a cultural type." Following Fewkes, another North American, M.R. Harrington, used the same categorization in his study of prehistoric Cuba.⁵

While Taino is clearly the dominant term in present-day Puerto Rico and is considered as potent a symbol of Puerto Rican nationality as the *j baro*, one finds very little trace of it in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Puerto Rican historical discourse (Scarano 1996; Haslip-Viera). For instance, Cayetano Coll y Toste, in his extensive dictionary of Indian words defined "Tayno" in the following fashion:

Good. Doctor Chanca says: "A boat landed to speak with them and they said *tayno, tayno*, which means good." Bachiller y Morales applies this name to the Indo-Antilleans in general in contrast to *Caribe*. The island Caribs are related to the Caribs of the Continent. The other indigenes, who occupied the Antillean archipelago before the Caribs, came from the Arawaks of Tierra Firme. Thus, it is logical to call them *island Arawaks* and then to call them *baytianos, quisqueyanos, ciguayos, borique os, siboneyes, xamayquinos*, etc., according to the island (Coll y Toste n.d.: 253-54).

In nineteenth-century Puerto Rico, most scholars accepted "Boriquén" or "Borinquén" as the island's pre-Spanish name. Hence they called the Indians some variation of "boriqueños" or "borinquenos." "Siboney" was more widely accepted in Cuba, though some used the Castilian spelling "Ciboney."

The changing names of the prehistoric Indian population, and their origins in Spanish, and later U.S., imperial sources, exemplify the dilemmas that confronted historians. Though they sought to write an indigenous history that excluded the Spanish to as great a degree as possible, they nevertheless had to engage with the works of the Spanish conquerors because they were the most accessible and extensive source of information; Mártir, Oviedo, Columbus, and Pané always intervened. Creole historians, however, did not relent passively before the Spanish written record. They theorized and developed diverse methods for approaching and knowing prehistory.⁶ Close scrutiny of the chronicles was a major component of this work. Were the early Spanish chroniclers reliable? What could be gleaned from their descriptions and histories? The study of spoken language was another field as scholars compiled dictionaries of *cubanismos* and *vozes ind genas* to demonstrate the persistence of prehistoric culture; place names, words peculiar to Antillean Spanish, and incidentally preserved fragments of the prehistoric Antillean language culled from sixteenth-century works were the most important sources. Finally, the physical artifacts and remains of prehistory were key sources of information. These collections grew over the course of the nineteenth century, as did the battery of methods employed to interpret them. While these approaches were not

mutually exclusive—for instance, one Spanish archaeologist happily cited Las Casas to support his phrenological study of prehistoric skulls—they nonetheless engendered disagreement and debate over the limits of historical knowledge.

Historians frequently bemoaned the fact that the Antilles had no Sahagún, no “busybody [*curioso*] who wrote an embryonic DICTIONARY . . .” (Pichardo 19: emphasis in the original). Though two of the greatest Spanish chroniclers, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo and Bartolomé de las Casas, spent their formative years in the Caribbean, their preservation of native words was accidental rather than systematic. The terms became buried fragments that nineteenth-century scholars had to unearth. Both authors, though in quite different ways, were more concerned with chronicling Spanish deeds rather than Indian history and language. Some interpreters nonetheless relied heavily on Las Casas and Oviedo, as well as Fernando de Colón (whose work included Ramón Pané’s study of indigenous religion), Pedro Mártir, Juan de Castellanos, Francisco López de Gomara, and Antonio de Herrera for close accounts of the Indians encountered by Columbus, Juan Ponce de León, and Diego Velásquez, arguing that these descriptions were generally reliable and necessary. Moreover, bibliophiles like the Cuban Domingo del Monte and the Puerto Rican Alejandro Tapia y Rivera compiled and published vast bibliographies and collections of historical documents so as to make the written record of Cuba and Puerto Rico available to historians, while Spain’s Real Academia de la Historia undertook a massive project of publishing manuscript sources in its archives, the most important for early Caribbean history being Martín Fernández de Navarrete’s collection of documents pertaining to Columbus’s voyages (Tapia y Rivera; Fernández de Navarrete).

The Cuban historian José Antonio Saco was probably the foremost advocate of using the chronicles as sources. His multivolume histories of African and Indian slavery in Spanish America were based largely on the sixteenth-century chronicles of Las Casas, Oviedo, and Pedro Mártir, as well as the later syntheses by Gomara, Herrera, Juan Bautista Muñoz, and Martín Fernández de Navarrete. (The North Americans Washington Irving and William Hickling Prescott also figured prominently in most nineteenth-century Antillean bibliographies). Saco did not read these works with blind faith; he constantly cross-checked them before reaching a conclusion and reflected on the biases of the authors. His belief in the primacy of the chronicles was firm, however. For instance, he clashed with Spain’s Real Academia de la Historia over the publication of Las Casas’s major work, *Historia general de las Indias*, which he saw as the foundational work in Spanish and Spanish American historiography.⁷

Later in the century, the Cuban scholar Manuel Sanguily published several lengthy defenses of the chroniclers as useful historical sources, claiming that “those men saw things as they were. If they made mistakes, it was not in what they saw but in their way of understanding or interpreting it. Their testimony contains the truth even if some points are exaggerated or enhanced” (109). In asserting the basic reliability of the chroniclers, Sanguily’s main target was the Cuban Juan Ignacio de Armas. Armas had published several scathing critiques of the chronicles, which he condemned as useless and misleading. The work that incurred Sanguily’s wrath was an essay on Columbus, the Caribs, and cannibalism. Armas argued that Columbus’s knowledge of cannibalism derived not from eyewitness experience but from preconceived ideas about the customs of primitive peoples deeply ingrained in the medieval European mind. Indeed, for Armas, Columbus’s journal and other sixteenth-century sources read not as accounts of the Caribbean but as evidence of the “fables” (the term he used in the title of his pamphlet) of late-medieval Europeans. In these sources, preconceptions always

trumped the external world. The Puerto Rican José Julián de Acosta had reached a similar conclusion several years earlier. In his revised edition of an eighteenth-century natural history of Puerto Rico, Acosta dismissed the lurid accounts of the Caribs's cannibalism. Quoting at length from Washington Irving's life of Columbus, Acosta concluded that the classic accounts of cannibalism revealed more about European fears than Indian diet and ritual life (Armas 1884; Abbad y Lasierra 152–53).

Armas expressed similar skepticism in his discussion of the origins of creole Spanish. Unlike many Cuban and Puerto Rican scholars who believed that indigenous words riddled their language, Armas argued that the Indian language had vanished with the Indians: "The Antillean tribes gradually disappeared soon after the conquest. With them disappeared their languages, one after the other, without leaving any authentic trace" (Armas 1882: 10). The peculiarities in Antillean Spanish derived from the novelty of New World conditions that the Spanish encountered in the sixteenth century and the need to invent new words to name them. For instance, the first word of creole Spanish was "indio" because it named a people the Spanish had never encountered in the Old World (19). Even supposedly Indian words like "Lucayos" handed down to the nineteenth century by the early chroniclers were Spanish in origin. In the case of "Lucayos," Armas held that it was the Indians's mispronunciation of "los cayos." Columbus and others then mistook that mispronunciation as an Indian word for the islands (Lucayas) and their people (Lucayos) (12). The myriad "Indian" words and names in the Antilles were nothing more than travestied Castilian or new words invented by the Spanish. Armas thus concluded that the contemporary language of the Caribbean owed nothing to the Indians; it was "the child of [the language] brought by the discoverers, the conquerors of America" (5).

While some Antilleans shared Armas's patronizing view of prehistory and his close identification with the Spanish conquistadors (Saco was the most prominent), the majority view was that the Indians of Cuba and Puerto Rico had indeed left important traces behind them. Nowhere was this truer than in the area that Armas had explored: language. While other scholars conceded Armas's point that the Spanish chroniclers had probably misunderstood many of the Indian words and misspelled them, they still believed that some reconstruction and correction was possible.⁸

The Cuban Esteban Pichardo published four editions of his dictionary of "cubanisms" over the course of the nineteenth century, a project first sounded by Havana's Real Sociedad Económica in the late eighteenth century and then actively promoted by Cuba's most prominent man of letters and collector, Domingo del Monte. Contrary to Armas's position, Pichardo insisted that "Indian words" (*vozes ind genas*) persisted in the Antilles and accounted for the peculiarities of creole Spanish. Pichardo introduced himself to the reader as one especially qualified to study the prehistoric Antillean language, having been born in the then Spanish colony of Santo Domingo before moving to the "*crioll sima* city of Puerto Príncipe" as a youth, and having carried out his studies and research throughout the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico. In his extensive travels and investigations in the Antilles, he found compelling proof that the Indian language lived on, having decisively shaped the Castilian spoken in the Caribbean:

[n]owhere . . . did I hear the natives pronounce . . . the Castilian Z, or *Ce Ci*, the *Ll* or the *V*, but always the *S* or *B* as is the case with almost all Americans. The force of tradition had been such that even Castilian words are pronounced in this way . . . (18–19).

In Pichardo's view, Spanish chroniclers in the sixteenth century had mistakenly spelled many of the words spoken to them by the Indians; for instance, the correct spelling of "Havana" was "Habana," an Indian, not a Spanish, place name (19). The proof that verified prehistoric language, interestingly, was in the present as it was actually spoken by Cubans and Puerto Ricans. Indeed, Pichardo even hinted that some of the peasants of eastern Cuba were mestizos, descendants of Spaniards *and* Indians. In other words, the most creole segment of Cuban society not only spoke elements of the prehistoric Indian language but also physically embodied prehistory, forming an especially powerful link between the present and the distant Cuban past (18–19).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Cuban and North American archaeologists and anthropologists carried out research in the area indicated by Pichardo, especially in the environs of El Caney (a name with potent historical connotations; it was the indigenous word for a ruler's dwelling, and it was the site of Spain's most serious military engagement with the United States in 1898), in the belief that the local inhabitants were descendants of the prehistoric Cubans. M.R. Harrington included photographs in his important study as conclusive evidence of the persistence of the local Indian population, though the skeptical viewer would be hard pressed to admit any difference between these mestizos and the other Cubans photographed for Harrington's study. In *Cuba before Columbus*, Harrington stated that "much may also be learned from the objects of aboriginal character still made and used by the mixed-blood descendants of the aboriginal Cubans." His guide in this research was the Cuban anthropologist Carlos de la Torre y Huerta, who carried out research around El Caney and Baracoa. His textbook on Cuban history, written soon after Cuban independence, also emphasized the persistence of Indian words, tools, and blood.⁹

Even the most robust advocate of linguistic and genetic continuity, however, preferred physical artifacts as reliable sources. De la Torre y Huerta and Harrington, for instance, built their arguments upon a growing collection of physical artifacts compiled throughout the nineteenth century. The physical artifacts of the Antillean Indians were the most suggestive and compelling pieces of evidence for scholars, especially as the nineteenth century progressed and the disciplines of anthropology and archaeology took on greater prestige. Indian statues, pots, ax heads, skulls, and bones littered the Antillean countryside and filled collectors' cabinets. For scholars, the physicality of these objects, their apparently unmediated passage through time from the Indians to the Cubans and Puerto Ricans of the nineteenth century made them more authentic and reliable data than the chronicles or spoken language, both of which were more subject to the partiality of human perception and practice.

For instance, Manuel Sanguily, a defender of the chronicles, nonetheless pined for more physical evidence of prehistoric society. In his view, knowledge of the Indians was static until new sources materialized: "We need huge efforts, serious and continuous research, and more than anything, a series of skulls . . ." (134). The Puerto Rican naturalist Agustín Stahl relied on a wide variety of sources in his study of Puerto Rican Indians—chronicles, language, comparative ethnographic studies of other American Indians—but considered physical artifacts (such as pottery, small statues, and human remains), of which he had collected and catalogued more than 800 examples in his study, as the most valuable: "These objects are the Ariadne's thread for the researcher. They guide him through the intricate labyrinth and allow him to make judgements, if not exact then approximate and hypothetical, about the character and conditions of these peoples" (8). Havana's Anthropological Society, founded in 1877 as a branch of the Madrid Society, advertised for the physical remains of Indians, an announcement

worth quoting at length because it indicates the intense interest in artifacts and human bones as proof of the past:

The Director of this publication requests in the name of the Society's members that those persons who possess Indian relics notify us of them and that they send us either a description of them or the objects themselves which will be returned as soon as the necessary description has been made and filed. Aboriginal crania are of particular interest as are any authentic bones

There are many people in possession of objects of incalculable archaeological value without knowing it or who do not realize their origin. With the help of enlightened people, the Society can obtain if not the object itself (which is preferable) then its description which is also valuable (*Boletín* n 72).

As the announcement implied, many of these artifacts resided in private collections, though many made their way to museums in the later nineteenth century. Some were discovered by anthropologists and archaeologists, such as the Spaniard Miguel Rodríguez-Ferrer, who had carried out investigations in eastern Cuba and donated his findings to the University of Havana and to the Gabinete de Historia Natural in Madrid (Rodríguez-Ferrer ch.1). Agustín Stahl's collection ended up in New York's Museum of Natural History (Fewkes 22). José Julián de Acosta relied on artifacts in his own private collection, particularly *am s*, statues representing the deities of the prehistoric Puerto Rican Indians. He also consulted the collection in the Museo de Artillería in San Juan and the large private collection of Jorge Latimer, the North American merchant resident in Puerto Rico, who later donated it to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington (Abbad y Lasiera 51; Mason) Part of his own collection came to him by an accident that allowed him to reflect on the different layers of civilization that made up nineteenth-century Puerto Rico:

One day some slaves were planting cane in the fertile plane of Ponce (the hacienda of Don Juan de Dios Conde) when an unhappy black's hoe popped loose from the ground a carved stone that grabbed his attention. How singular an image: the Indian fetish in the hands of a savage African who had been transported to America! (Abbad y Lasiera 50)

What did these physical sources reveal to the researcher? By the mid-nineteenth century, they allowed most historians to place the Antillean Indians in the deep history of humankind. Eighteenth-century historians had still thought in terms of biblical history; human history, which began with the Creation, could be no longer than 6,000 years, even if the earth itself were older. Moreover, all humans descended from common origins. For instance, the Cuban historian Ignacio José de Urrutia y Montoya argued that the Indians were children of Ham, Noah's son who had been cast out for mocking his father's drunkenness and nudity (Urrutia y Montoya 58–60). In the nineteenth century, though, historians relied on an amalgam of social science approaches derived from naturalists like Humboldt and Darwin and from Enlightenment historians like William Robertson. In this more secular view of history, all human societies passed through the same stages of civilization, though at different times: for instance, in the categorization of Robertson, savage, barbarian, and civil society. Most historians agreed that the

Antillean Indians were “barbarians” who had attained some level of sedentary agriculture and political organization (Mason 391). Increasingly, historians like Acosta, Stahl, and Sanguily showed the influence of Darwin. These scholars thought in terms of deep historical time and the varieties of humans that could have evolved in isolation from one another. In other words, human history was much longer than 6,000 years, and humanity did not share a common biblical ancestry.¹⁰ Acosta, for instance, considered the Puerto Rican Indians to have attained the “second period of the stone age,” a level which was indicated by the ornate nature of the *am s* and other carved stone (Abbad y Lasierra 51). Coll y Toste concurred, like Acosta reading the Indians’s level of development off the stone remains encountered in the Puerto Rican landscape:

The characteristic cuneiform instrument of that epoch is the stone ax that the *borinque o* possessed in abundance. The *indo-borinque o* had abandoned the cave and built huts. From being a wandering hunter and fisher, he had become an agriculturalist. From the horde [*borda*] and the primitive family, he had advanced to the tribe or clan. He had chiefs and a priestly caste (Coll y Toste 1907: 47–48).

Stone artifacts and human remains told historians about the social or evolutionary stage of the Antillean Indians. They also potentially told them how old these civilizations were, giving them the sense of a long history that preceded the Spanish conquests in the Caribbean. As we will see in the next section, that sense of time shaped a historical narrative that transcended the particularities of method, sources, and interpretation.

The Place of the Nation

From birth tobacco was, and was called, tobacco. This was the name the Spaniards gave it, using the Indian word; so it is called in the world today, and so it will be known always (Ortiz 1995: 42).

Fernando Ortíz identified tobacco with pre-Colombian America and implied an unbroken history from the Cuban Indians to the present, a history embodied in the tobacco plant, especially in its name. In contrast to sugar, a European import worked by imported slave labor, tobacco was an original and authentic product of the Cuban countryside. Ortiz’s counterpoint used tobacco and the Indians as metonyms for the Cuban nation, a familiar rhetorical device in Antillean letters already in the nineteenth century. The place of the Cuban and Puerto Rican nations was the countryside, their temporal origins in the prehistory of the Antillean Indians. Tobacco, *am s*, and human remains were a loosely knit family of symbols that referred to an authentic Antillean past. They were all rooted in the land in one way or another, either as organic products of Antillean agriculture, like tobacco, or as buried memories of Antillean history. The land, the primordial countryside, then, was the medium that united and gave birth to the disparate symbols that composed Puerto Rican and Cuban nationality.¹¹

In Puerto Rico and Cuba, the “uses of the Amerindian past” were unevenly connected to those of the old imperial centers, such as Mexico and Peru. Anthony Pagden has argued that Mexican creoles like Mario Sigüenza y Góngora in his *Theatro de virtudes políticas* and Francisco Javier Clavigero in his *Storia antica del Messico*, written in the late seventeenth and the late eighteenth centuries respectively, had sought to endow the Aztec empire with a biblical past and to reinvent it as a classical precursor to the contemporary Mexican *patria*: virtuous rulers, a strong state, and highly developed

commerce and culture were the Aztec legacy that lived on in Mexico (Pagden).

Cubans and Puerto Ricans, however, did not have a powerful empire to refer to, but rather the less developed cultures of the *boricanos* and *siboneyes* which had left behind bones, place names, and a few artifacts, despite a University of Havana professor's mid-century argument that the great civilizations of Mexico, the Maya and the Aztec, were descendants of the Cuban Indians who had migrated to the mainland sometime during the prehistoric period (Valdés Aguirre). In contrast, one of the major scholars of Antillean prehistory, Alvaro Reynoso, saw no need to link the first Cubans to Mexico and Peru because they had created an almost perfect society by themselves. Reynoso expounded this view in curious fashion. In his influential study of Indian agriculture, Reynoso praised the Indians's ingenuity but also spelled out to the reader the impossibility of using it as a model in the present. In the body of the text, he said that there was no reason to give up modern technological gains: "In the century of steam and electricity . . . when progress seems to us to be infinite, we cannot regress and use the defective means that functioned well enough for the gentle *siboneyes* and *baït es* as they worked the land" (52).

Yet in a lengthy endnote attached to that section of his study, Reynoso eulogized prehistory with intense nostalgia and desire. In many ways, his was a classically antinomic sensibility of Cuban history, contrasting the world of "steam and electricity," which in Cuba meant the world of the sugar mill, the site of Cuba's most sophisticated technological development, to the primitive yet organic and authentic landscape of the Antillean Indians.¹² In his rendering, prehistory was quite literally the Garden of Eden:

The *siboneyes* and *baït es* stood out from other Indians. Quite possibly, there has never existed in any country in the Universe a similar social state, so perfect of its type. Certainly they cannot be compared in terms of the development of general civilization with the Mexicans and Peruvians, nor with earlier peoples whose history resides mysteriously in the ruins of awesome monuments.

But in terms of human happiness, their existence was without a doubt superior to the condition of the Mexicans and Peruvians. If Milton had lived in that time . . . he could have celebrated an actual paradise (101).

In describing this Eden, Reynoso imagined a world in which desires and necessities were simple and always met. It was a self-contained world of rich gardens, frugal homes, and benevolent deities that the author himself seemed to long for: "Living in the most beautiful country in the world, with an extraordinary fertility, under the influence of the most clement and gentle climate, in the seat of abundance, how could they not be completely happy . . . ?" (103).

Reynoso's praise and desire for the indigenous past was exceptionally explicit but expressed the muted utopian (and dystopian) impulses at work in many Cuban and Puerto Rican studies of prehistory.¹³ Moreover, what Reynoso shared with other Antillean scholars was the focus on the land, in his words "the most beautiful country in the world, with an exceptional fertility." In general, historians refrained from nostalgic longings for a lost Eden ruined by conquest. For most creole patriots, the "veneration of the trace" (Nora 13)—the careful study of bones and primitive artifacts—was more than enough to craft a national history that linked the present and prehistory. Their purpose in studying the pre-Colombian population was not to seek glorious

predecessors, a model for contemporary civilization; Hatuey was not necessarily another Moctezuma. Manuel Sanguily, for instance, a convinced patriot who took up arms against Spain, referred to the Antillean Indians as “gentle and . . . cowardly,” as opposed to the “bellicose and independent” Caribs (132).

Instead of precursors or objects of desire, scholars looked for markers that made Cuba and Puerto Rico distinctive places with a history that exceeded that of Spanish colonialism: Cuba and Boriquén, the Indian names for the two islands, could not be reduced to the history of conquest and colonization. The presence of the past in the bones and pottery of the *siboneyes* and *boricanos*, in names like El Caney and Habana, indicated that these were lands with peculiar histories that ultimately separated them from Spain. The nation in this rendering, then, was not only a community joined by language, religion, and history but a physical place—a place that had preceded the Spanish and would also outlast them.

An outstanding example of this perspective can be found in the work of the Puerto Rican naturalist, Agustín Stahl. In addition to a multi-volume study of the flora and fauna of Puerto Rico, Stahl wrote a sophisticated study of “los indios borinqueños,” published in 1889, which he dedicated to the “men who love this soil [*suelo*]” (VII). Stahl mobilized various types of sources for his study—chronicles, physical artifacts, contemporary language, and comparative studies of American Indians—and reflected at length on what each could tell the historian about Antillean prehistory. Overarching these different methods, however, was the physical place of prehistory, the land, the medium that connected the Puerto Ricans of the past and present:

After a long and careful study of the mysterious race of dead Indians who hardly 400 years before inhabited the soil [*suelo*] of our Island, unaware of the undeserved turn of events that would quickly bury them in the mists of the past, I propose in this modest work to awaken their remembrance in the memory of scholars and of the *borincanos* who have replaced them (V).

Indeed, the land led him to ponder the links between *borincanos* of prehistory and those of his own day. The trigger for these reflections was a visit to his mother’s grave in his hometown of Aguadilla, a place that forced him to draw a series of connections between the living and dead, between himself and his mother, between the present of Puerto Rico and the many layers of its past:

Aguadilla, the picturesque region where I was born and to which I am bound by fond memories. It was also the place where Christopher Columbus landed on the 18th of November, 1493, on his second voyage of discovery. Avid and possessed by a restless spirit, I have frequently wandered those pleasant and peaceful beaches that are kissed by the gentle waves that lightly slip over the white sand, leaving arcs of foam that in turn are renewed by playful new waves. In the same way my profound affection for that enchanting landscape is renewed (4).

His dead mother, the first *borincanos*, Columbus, and Stahl himself were all joined in Stahl’s meditation on his native landscape. The waves of history were ephemeral (though unending), but the beach, the land itself was constant, an eternal verity that unified the disparate and peculiar elements composing Puerto Rican history. The

image of his mother's grave implied that Stahl and his fellow *borincanos*—past and present—were children of the land: Puerto Rico/Borinquen was their common mother.

Stahl was not alone in his meditations. Acosta, too, had implied the constancy of the land underneath the layers of human history through his expression of wonder at the image of the African slave working on a plantation and puzzling over an Indian *am* (Abbad y Lasierra 50). The collector/merchant Jorge Latimer had apparently discovered most of his pieces—*am*s, celts, collars—in similar fashion. His nephew reported to the Smithsonian that “some of the specimens were found in caves, but the greater part were turned up by the plow and hoe, when new lands were put under cultivation” (Mason 391). Reynoso, in his study of indigenous agriculture, had concluded that the origins of modern agricultural techniques were to be found in the Indian use of the land because the Indians, “relative to the plants they grew, essentially carried out the procedures today considered most perfect” (64). The land, the bearer of Indian remains, Indian names, and Indian products like tobacco, was also the repository of the Antillean nations. This countryside transcended the ephemeral stages of human development and joined its inhabitants in a timeless and autonomous community of nationality, one that antedated the Spanish conquest and implicitly exceeded it.

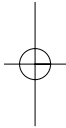
Conclusion

One recognizes the temporal and spatial contours of the nation in these histories. As Benedict Anderson has argued, patriotic history is one of deep linear time that unites the nation across the past, present, and future (Anderson 187–206). Prehistoric Puerto Ricans and Cubans had left their stamp on the landscape, the spoken language of the Antilles, and in the view of some historians, on the very genetic basis of contemporary Puerto Rico and Cuba.¹⁴ Indian relics in the land and *vozes indígenas* thus became monuments that represented what the French historian of nationalism, Pierre Nora, has called “illusions of eternity” (12).

While the time of the nation is open, the nation's space is clearly delimited (though not necessarily physically so), a feature that Francisco Scarano and Partha Chatterjee have explored in the case of nation-builders living under colonial regimes. They argue that patriots strive to carve out a physical and psychological space that preserves national authenticity and purity from the corrupting effects of colonial rule (Chatterjee 3–13; Scarano 1996). In nineteenth-century Puerto Rico and Cuba, patriots created that space in a variety of ways, whether through the idealization of the *jíbaro*'s rural idyll or, paradoxically, by borrowing baseball from Spain's imperial rival, the United States (Pérez; Scarano 1996). The peasant's home or the baseball diamond came to represent the national space in miniature, an autonomous sphere that Spanish colonialism could not penetrate. The same could be said of the land in general. Repository of human remains and agricultural products like tobacco that antedated the Spanish conquest, the land of Puerto Rico and Cuba became an irreducible national space despite its occupation by the Spanish conquerors.

The time and place of the Antillean Indians were perhaps the most potent symbols of national authenticity and autonomy. Examining the nation-building project inscribed in Puerto Rican and Cuban studies of prehistory helps us to understand why historians struggled so persistently with problems of interpretation. The choice of method was potentially a political one, a subtle rejection of the Spanish colonial regime through identification and affiliation with the victims of the Spanish conquest. For Puerto Rican and Cuban patriots, the effort to circumvent the written legacy of conquest and colonization was also an endeavor, frequently frustrated, to liberate

themselves, if not from the political and economic institutions of colonialism, then from the categories of imperial knowledge. If the Antillean nations did not exist as independent states, historians could strive to endow them with their own authentic and autonomous pasts and, perhaps, futures.



NOTES

This work has benefited greatly from conversations with numerous scholars. Thanks to James Amelang, Jorge Duany, and Joshua Goode for careful comments on a longer version of this paper. Thanks also to Gabriel Haslip-Viera, Félix Matos-Rodríguez, and Francisco Scarano for insights and tips on sources. I would like to express my gratitude to Miriam Jiménez Román and two reviewers for CENTRO for helping me clarify my arguments and style. Finally, this article is dedicated to the memory of Carlos Serrano.

¹ “Prehistory” referred to the pre-European period and to a period of history for which there existed no written documents. For instance, see Coll y Toste 1907: 28–29.

² This literature is now extensive. Among many works, see Scarano 1984; Scott; Cubano Iguina; Bergad; Ferrer; Fradera; Schmidt-Nowara 1999. For a recent overview, see Scarano 1998. The recasting of Spanish colonialism in Cuba and Puerto Rico, I believe, made the politics of writing prehistory different from those in other Caribbean islands, including the Dominican Republic where the question of foreign rule (including the Spanish occupation between 1861 and 1865) was indeed pressing, and analogous, but nonetheless distinctive.

³ On creole nationalism in Puerto Rico and Cuba see especially Moreno Friginals; Scarano 1996; and Haslip-Viera. For comparative perspectives on nationalism in a colonial context, see Anderson; Chatterjee.

⁴ Useful surveys of nineteenth-century thought include Fewkes; Harrington; Ortiz 1936; Lewis.

⁵ Bachiller y Morales 338; Harrington vol. 2: 412–13; Fewkes, 26.

⁶ This was a familiar debate in Spanish American and Spanish historiography regarding the use of the chroniclers and sources. See Cañizares Esguerra. See also the seminal article on European historiography and antiquarians by Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian” (Momigliano 1–39).

⁷ Completed shortly before Las Casas’s death in 1566, the *Historia general* languished in archives until finally published by the Real Academia de la Historia in 1875. On the manuscript’s history, see Hanke.

⁸ Pichardo 19; and Stahl 136. Other important collections of *vozes ind genas* include Bachiller y Morales and Coll y Toste.

⁹ Harrington 1:19; de la Torre y Huerta et al. 5: chapter 3. Havana’s Anthropological Society had urged investigation of those regions in the 1870s because of the *mestizo* population.

¹⁰ On the revolutionary impact of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859) on historical consciousness, see Grayson. On the spread of Darwin’s thought, see Glick.

¹¹ It also distinguished the nationalities of the Greater Antilles from one another. While Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, and Haitians admitted a common prehistoric culture, they found differences that were grounded in the land. Thus, while all the Indians of the Greater Antilles were “Lucayos” or “Arawaks” (and later Taínos), they were also *borincanos* or *haiti* s because of their specific interactions with the land.

¹² That elite Puerto Rican and Cuban patriots intentionally excluded the plantation, slaves, and free blacks from their nation-building project in favor of the Indian is well established. By writing an “indigenous” Puerto Rican or Cuban history, patriots were writing a history that was not only not Spanish, but also not African. On Puerto Rico, see Jorge Duany, “Making Indians out of Blacks: The Revitalization of Taíno Identity in Contemporary Puerto Rico” (Haslip-Viera 31–55). On Cuba, see Moreno Friginals.

¹³ For a similar Puerto Rican expression of utopian desire, see the anonymous poem “Aguainaba el bravo,” *El Ponce* o (Ponce), June 17, 1854.

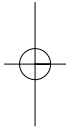
¹⁴ While this bundle of evidence has remained stable over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the supposedly genetic basis of the nation has taken on greater urgency in the present as the contributors to an important study of the “Taíno revival” have recently noted. See Haslip-Viera.

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The twentieth century communities Puerto Ricans forged throughout the United States bear witness to their place in American history, particularly in the arenas of labor, community building, bilingual and higher education, politics and organization. Their struggles for justice, equality and inclusion have strengthened American democratic principles. It was, however, the emigrations of the nineteenth century that set into motion patterns of population movements within the Americas reflected in the diasporic communities of the present day. The last half of the century witnessed increased emigration from Puerto Rico, as individuals were ousted from the island or left of their own accord to escape tyranny and exploitation or search for economic opportunity. Puerto Rico spent centuries as a Spanish colony, before it was taken by US troops in July 1898 and ceded by a treaty in 1899. Most other territories seized by the US in the course of the Spanish-American War, such as Cuba and the Philippines, have since become independent. Not so Puerto Rico, which remains an unincorporated territory of the US. Puerto Ricans were given US citizenship in 1917 – right on time to be drafted into Woodrow Wilson’s war in Europe, the cynics said – but they can’t vote in presidential elections and are represented in Congress by a non-voting resident commissioner. Both Puerto Rico and Cuba had been colonies of Spain until the Spanish-American War. The United States took over both islands as a result of the war. The US promised Cuba eventual independence and Puerto Rico self-government. 2.1K views · View upvotes · Another form of control was economically. The Cuban economy, being devastated by the 19th century wars against Spanish control, began to be dominated by American businesses. It grew steadily until it reached between 70–80% during Batista’s illegal second term (1952–59), which the U.S backed. So to conclude, Puerto Rico didn’t receive the same attention as Cuba (no statements, major press reports or Teller Amendment), most Americans didn’t care and revolutionary movements failed. 24. 1. Puerto Rico is a large Caribbean island of roughly 3,500 square miles located in the West Indies. It’s the easternmost island of the Greater Antilles chain – It’s the easternmost island of the Greater Antilles chain, which also includes Cuba, Jamaica and Hispaniola (divided into Haiti and the Dominican Republic). After centuries of Spanish rule, Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States in 1898 and has been largely self-governing since the mid-20th century. It has a population of some 3.4 million people and a vibrant culture shaped by a mix of Spanish, United States and Afro-Caribbean influences. Native Population. In 1511 Diego Velasquez conquered the island of Cuba and he founded several settlements including Havana. The natives devastated by European diseases, to which they had no resistance. From 1526 the Spanish imported African slaves into Cuba. By the late 18th century Cuba was prospering by growing and exporting sugar. The plantations were worked by huge numbers of slaves. However, in the 19th century, there was an increasing movement for independence. US forces invaded Cuba and Spain surrendered shortly afterward. The peace treaty made Spain relinquish all claims to Cuba. However, after the war, Cuba was occupied by US forces for nearly 4 years. They left in 1902 and Cuba became nominally independent but in reality, it was dominated by the USA.