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Reseña de "Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean: Amerindian Survival and Revival" de Edited by Maximilian C. Forte
The City University of New York
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For those interested in contextualizing the Vieques experience within the broader framework of the history of Puerto Rico, I would suggest also reading Ayala and Bernabe (2007).

REFERENCES
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Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean: Amerindian Survival and Revival
Edited by Maximilian C. Forte
298 pages, $33.95 [paper]

REVIEWER: GABRIEL HASLIP-VIERA, The City University of New York—City College

On the surface, it appears that the number of Cubans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans who have come to identify as indigenous or Taíno has grown dramatically in recent years. Browsing the internet reveals an ever-increasing number of websites, blogs, chat rooms, message boards, listervs, mailing lists, e-mail petitions, and news groups connected to emergent Taíno tribal groups, confederations, and the idea of indigenous survival and resurgence in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. At one point, there was even a program on public access television in New York. There are also pow-wows, newsletters, journals, poetry readings, children stories, music, dance, and attempts to “recover” the language and history of indigenous peoples allegedly suppressed by traditional elites and their allies in academia and politics. However, the impact of indigenous resurgence on the overall demography of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and its Diaspora does not appear to be all that significant regardless of what is seen on the internet and other media. In the case of Puerto Rico, the three-year estimate by the U.S. census for 2005–2007 revealed that only 0.2 percent of the population or 8,505 persons identified as “American Indian and Alaska Native.” What is not clear is whether these are persons who migrated to the island
from the U.S. mainland and other countries, or whether they are Puerto Ricans who self-identified as indigenous. In any case, this figure is still noteworthy because of the aggressive way that a subset of this population articulates its claims to indigeneity.

A number of academics who support the idea of indigenous survival and resurgence in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean have also emerged in recent years. They include among others, the geneticist Juan Carlos Martínez Cruzado of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez; literature professor Peter Hulme of the University of Essex in England and the lawyer DeAnna Marie Rivera, author of a journal article on legal issues related to indigenous resurgence. They also include Maximilian Forte, Lynne Guitar, José Barreiro, Pedro Ferbel-Azcarate (aka Peter Ferbel), and the other contributors to this book.1

Indigenous Resurgence consists of an introduction, an endorsement by Peter Hulme, and five parts titled (1) “Presence: Contemporary Paths of Survival after the Myth of Extinction,” (2) “Identities: Articulating Indigenous Identities and Spaces in the Contemporary Caribbean,” (3) “Rights: Indigenous Rights, International Conventions, and Current Legal Frameworks within the Circum-Caribbean,” (4) Nation State: Modern Incorporations and Challenges to Articulating and Organizing Aboriginality,” and (5) “Region: The Trans-nationalization of Caribbean Indigenous Resurgence.” The five parts are also divided into chapters that focus on the politics, the realities, or the claims for indigenous survival in the Spanish-, English-, French-, and Dutch-speaking Caribbean with an essay that also deals with the Diaspora and the internet; however, this review focuses on the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and the chapter on the Diaspora and the internet. Incredibly, a chapter on Puerto Rico is not included in this book despite the fact that Puerto Ricans have been at the center of the controversy and debate over indigenous survival and resurgence in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and its Diaspora. However, according to the editor, “a chapter devoted entirely to Puerto Rico” was not possible “because one contributor withdrew when it was too late to find an alternative author” (p. 7).

In comparison to the other contributions under review, the only essay that makes a somewhat credible case for indigenous survival in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean is the chapter by José Barreiro titled “Taíno Survivals: Cacique Panchito, Caridad de los Indios, Cuba.” In this case, there is a long-standing historical tradition acknowledging indigenous survival that is missing from the historical records of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. The Cuban government (p. 22, 25) also seems to recognize certain groups in eastern Cuba as indigenous, a view that is not the case in the other islands. Barreiro makes reference (pp. 26–31) to 1846 court records, and the works of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, such as Antonio Bachiller y Morales, José Martí, and Felipe Pichardo Moya, who commented on the “Indians” that allegedly lived in the eastern part of Cuba in the period before and after the Spanish-American War of 1898. However, there is little doubt that these “Indians” are in fact persons of mixed background who can be referred to as mestizos or mulatos. Barreiro admits that they have a long history of intermarriage and are also descended from “other sources” in addition to the indigenous (p. 25, 26, 29). He also admits that there has been considerable cultural mixing in the history of this population.

Ironically, Barreiro’s essay creates major problems for most Cubans and Cuban Americans who would wish to identify as indigenous or Taíno because, according to Barreiro (pp. 21–30 passim), the “Indians” who are acknowledged to have survived are limited to specific groups of extended families in particular parts of the country with specific surnames such as Rojas and Ramírez. As a result, those Cubans who would
identify as indigenous or Taíno would have to demonstrate some specific genetic or biological connection to these extended families.

The following chapter titled “Ocama-Daca Taíno (Hear Me. I am Taíno): Taíno Survival on Hispaniola, Focusing on the Dominican Republic” includes an introduction, a conclusion, and three sections, each written by one of the three co-authors: anthropologist and historian Lynne Guitar; cultural anthropologist Pedro Ferbel-Azcarate; and Jorge Estevez, a self-identified Taíno.

Overall, the authors of this chapter fail to make the case for indigenous survival in Dominican society from the standpoint of biology, “race,” genetics, and history. In fact, the authors demonstrate a considerable amount of confusion when it comes to these issues. Claims for the biological survival of indigenous persons are made in a forceful or assertive manner, but the claims are subsequently contradicted or diminished by statements that are made in other parts of the chapter. For example, it is stated at the beginning that recent “historical, ethnographic, ethno-archeological, linguistic and DNA studies are demonstrating multidisciplinary evidence for both Taíno cultural and biological survival” (pp. 41–2). However, they also state (p. 41) that “a poor but landed peasantry developed from the original groups of Taíno, Africans, and Europeans, who blended both their genes and cultural traditions.”

Quite remarkably, there is only a brief, perfunctory reference by Lynne Guitar (p. 52) to the mandated indigenous identity that has been used in the Dominican Republic to privilege and separate Dominicans from Haitians and all other “Black” people by definition. Historically, the Taíno and the indigenous as a concept have been used in the Dominican Republic to marginalize and denigrate Africans and African-descended persons and their cultural contributions. The authors know that all non-white persons defined as Dominican are officially referred to, and are always asked to identify as some type of Indian or Indio regardless of their skin color and appearance under the assumption that Dominicans cannot possibly be “Black”; however, the authors also minimize or ignore the importance of this concept, along with its official application and its importance to the formation of national identity in the Dominican Republic.

In the chapter titled “Searching for a Center in the Digital Ether: Notes on the Indigenous Caribbean Resurgence on the Internet,” Maximilain Forte shows how the movement for Amerindian revival and its development has been greatly facilitated by the internet and other contemporary media. Unfortunately, Dr. Forte fails to examine this phenomenon with the skeptical eye of the professional scholar he claims to be. As an enthusiastic advocate for Amerindian resurgence and the idea of indigenous survival, he loses all sense of objectivity by accepting any and every claim made by persons who assert an Amerindian identity.

Without any degree of skepticism or hesitation, Forte asserts (p. 267) that Taíno activists have been able to use the internet to actually recover “a history and identity that had been marginalized, reduced to a symbolic category without a living reality, and treated at best as something to be commemorated rather than experienced personally.” With such a view, he also dismisses the critique of Taíno revivalism by academics and others in a perfunctory manner by claiming that it is “impossible for contemporary Taínos to explain their identity to individuals who refuse in advance, to admit that they could ever be speaking to Taínos” (p. 267).

In this book there are also many other problems with the chapters that focus on the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and its Diaspora. Perhaps the most serious is the failure of the editor and contributors to fully engage the issue of national identity and its connection...
to modernization, globalization, and the evolving U.S.-led imperialism at the beginning of the twentieth-first century. Ferbel, Guitar, Estevez, and Forte seem to be oblivious or dismissive of this issue at the same time that they promote a narrow, exclusivist indigenous identity full of romanticized nostalgia for the simple lifeways of the pre-Columbian Tainos in an aggressive manner. Instead of support for an ethnically mixed national or regional identity with a progressive political and social agenda, we get a retrograde ethnoracial fragmentation that would officially divide Caribbean Latin@s into competing groups of Blacks, Indians, and Whites, with the Neo-Tainos potentially engaged in conflictnal agendas that would emphasize (according to Forte) “indigenous entanglements with the wider societies they inhabit,” “competition for resources,” “the struggle for rights within the politics of the nation state,” and the rejection of hybridity or creolization as an ideal (See pp. 4–5, 8, 14 and passim). This rejection of creolization by the authors and editor is clearly demonstrated in the book’s introduction (pp. 4–5), where Forte launches a perfunctory, arrogantly dismissive, but broadly based attack on the many scholars who have written on the reality of creolization in the Caribbean and elsewhere. However, sooner or later, Forte and all other advocates of indigenous survival will have to confront the actual reality of this creolization and the essentialist fallacy of an invented and romanticized indigeneity for Caribbean Latin@s and others. They will have to deal with the evidence that strongly suggests that the indigenous contribution to the demography and culture of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and its Diaspora is minimal compared to the African and the European, and they will have to confront the predicted results of DNA testing, including mtDNA, Y-Chromosome, and admixture tests that will confirm what we have known all along—that Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans are biologically and culturally mixed.

NOTES
1 Maximilian C. Forte teaches anthropology at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. José Barreiro is Assistant Director for Research at the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington D.C. Dr. Lynne Guitar is an independent historian and anthropologist currently living and working in the Dominican Republic. Pedro Ferbel-Azcarate (aka Peter Ferbel), also an anthropologist, is affiliated with the Archivo Historico de Santiago, Dominican Republic, and teaches in the Black Studies Department at Portland State University, Oregon. Jorge Estevez, another contributor under review, is the Workshop Coordinator at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in New York.

Out of Bounds: Islands and the Demarcation of Identity in the Hispanic Caribbean

By Dara E. Goldman

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249 pages; $52.50 [cloth]

REVIEWER: ÁNGEL A. RIVERA, Worcester Politeknic Institute

“Se ha dicho hasta la sociedad, y siempre habrá que repetirlo: nada hay firme en una isla. Lo verdaderamente firme está en el mar.”

— ABILIO ESTÉVEZ, INVENTARIO SECRETO DE LA HABAN A (P. 19) —