

ARCHAEOLOGY OF IDENTITY AND DISSONANCE

Contexts for a Brave New World

Edited by
Diane F. George and Bernice Kurchin

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“El Grito de Caguana”

Identity Conflict in Puerto Rico

ROSALINA DIAZ

Late on Sunday, July 24, 2005, in the small town of Orocovis on the Caribbean island of Boriken (Puerto Rico), Taino activist and elder Naniki Reyes Ocasio looked out on her organic farm at El Caney del Quinto Mundo, the learning center she had founded.¹ The sun began to set behind the mountains of the Cordillera Central, and Naniki's long, silver-gray hair captured the last rays of the sunlight as it completely disappeared beyond the horizon. Naniki slowly entered her home to gather the food, personal, and ceremonial items she knew she would need for the days ahead. She had been fasting all day to purify her spirit for the upcoming ritual, and as she drove west toward the Caguana Ceremonial Center in Utuado, she felt strong in heart and mind. Naniki arrived at nightfall at a previously designated meeting place and was joined by Elba Anacaona Lugo, Taina Rosado, Guatibiri Baez, and Juana Griselle Martinez Prieto. Under the light of the summer moon, the companions traversed the “ancestral pathways” to enter the site unobserved, as they had done on countless other nights over a period of decades. They set up an encampment in the Caguana Ceremonial Plaza and proceeded to perform their customary ritual observances.

The following morning, security guards preparing to open the center to the public were confronted with the sight of the Taino encampment. They took no immediate action—perhaps because they were at a loss as to how to explain to their superiors how the group had entered the ceremonial center during their watch. Instead, the guards opened the park to visitors as was their usual practice and waited. As closing time approached, they asked Naniki and her fellow Taino activists to take down their encampment and hammocks and vacate the site. They refused. The group asserted that on this day, July 25, the anniversary of the constitution of Puerto Rico, they

were reclaiming Caguana in the name of their Taino ancestors, the original builders of the ceremonial site. Their message was clear: “End the destruction and desecration of our sanctuaries and sacred places, our archeological sites, our *coaibays* [cemeteries], our ancestral remains, our sacred funerary and ceremonial objects, and our ceremonial centers—now!” (United Confederation of Taino People [UCTP] 2005a). The guards, again at a loss as to how to proceed, discussed the situation and called their superior, the park administrator. This action sparked an occupation and hunger strike that would last for 17 days and would involve some of the most powerful forces in the Puerto Rican sociopolitical arena. The Tainos’ encampment and the response it engendered would bring to the fore issues regarding Puerto Rican identity that had long lain dormant and unchallenged.

IDENTITY, SPACE, AND HERITAGE

Like any artifact, the structuring of space can express the identity of the individual or group who uses and shapes it. Both natural elements—geography, topography, plant and animal life—and constructed features, such as monuments, buildings, pathways, are formed by action and memory to create a “lived landscape” (Jones 2005:235). These spaces embody group memory and identity yet are continually altered over time as these things shift. Landscape is both a “touchstone” for remembering (O’Keeffe 2016:6) and a canvas for identity production. In the postcolonial heritage context, space can be a site of identity contestation, serving as the locus for negotiating the dissonance between colonial and indigenous identities.

At the root of the conflict at the Caguana Ceremonial Center are issues of space, identity, and heritage resulting from a lengthy and complex colonial history. The island was colonized by the Spanish between the late fifteenth and late nineteenth centuries. One day after independence from Spain, Puerto Rico was tragically recolonized by the United States as booty of the Spanish American War. The wealthy descendants of the Spanish colonizers, faced with nationalist revolts and cultural annihilation, founded the Institute for Puerto Rican Culture (ICP), charged with defining and disseminating the “constituent elements of Puerto Rico’s identity.” As part of this program, the ICP renovated Spanish cultural sites on the island, laying claim to Caguana almost as an afterthought.

Caguana, which stands on a plateau 80 feet above a river, is surrounded by ancient standing stone slabs and petroglyphs. Ancestral pathways lead to a ceremonial plaza where the Taino assemble to enact their seasonal

rituals. To the ICP the site is a museum—the relic of a long-dead indigenous culture their own ancestors conquered and subjugated—but to the indigenous descendants, the site embodies the living, breathing, enduring spirit of the Taino. This center stands as it does because the Taino cared for it for decades, keeping it cleansed of visitors’ rubbish, protecting the petroglyphs from wearing away, and preserving the spiritual purpose of the Center through ritual practices and observances. Although the ICP neglected the site for many years, it has increasingly regulated the Center’s use, restricting Taino access and inscribing modern, Hispanic conceptions of Puerto Rican identity onto the landscape and built environment. Caguana is a site of contemporary identity production for both the Taino and the ICP, based in radically differing conceptions of the past. The landscape has become the locus of conflict over heritage presentation, contemporary narratives of the island’s past and modern Puerto Rican identity.

THE SITE AS A SOURCE OF IDENTITY

The island of Puerto Rico is situated between the Atlantic Ocean to the north and the Caribbean Sea to the south, strategically located at the entry point to the Caribbean. It is the smallest and easternmost of the Greater Antilles, which also includes the Dominican Republic/Haiti, Jamaica, and Cuba. Puerto Rico and adjacent islands constitute 3,435 square miles, 110 miles east to west and 35 miles north to south. Its land cover is variable (40% central high mountains, 35% karst foothills, and 25% narrow coastal plain). The central mountain range (La Cordillera Central) has peaks over 4,000 feet high and can receive up to 200 inches of rainfall annually. These mountain peaks can be seen from every part of the island. There are 50 rivers on the island and hundreds of streams. The Caguana Ceremonial Center sits in the Cordillera Central in the Tanama River Valley (Map 11.1).

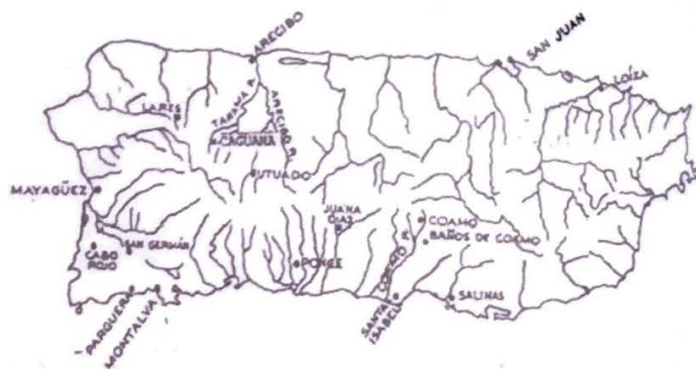
One of the original excavators, Mason (1941:212–213), described the site as follows:

From the Tanama River two ravines extend inward which are dry in rainless seasons but carry off the surplus water in times of rain. Though probably a quarter mile apart at their mouths the upper reaches of the ravines converge until, at a point about a quarter mile from the river they leave between them a narrow deck of land not more than 30 feet in width at the top and gently sloping to the bottom of three ravines some 40 feet below. A roughly triangular piece

of land is thus nearly circumscribed, enclosing about 6 or 7 acres on nearly level ground, at a height of possibly 80 feet above the river. On practically every side the descent is steep.

In 1955, the same year that Puerto Rico was granted commonwealth status, the Puerto Rican legislature passed Law 89, which created the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP) to "conserve, promote, enrich and disseminate the cultural values of the pueblo of Puerto Rico and bring about their broadest and most profound knowledge and appreciation" (Dávila 1997:39). Luis Muñoz Marín, Puerto Rico's first elected governor, appointed Dr. Ricardo Alegria to the position of director of the newly inaugurated ICP. Shortly thereafter, the ICP purchased the Caguana site and commenced minimal renovations, including the construction of a small museum and parking lot. During my visit to the site in 1994, I saw human bodies, including those of an infant, exhibited in this museum with no identifying information, and no indication as to where the bodies had been unearthed. When I returned years later, the bodies were gone, and there is no reference to the mound or any bodies or mortuary items in the official 1992 National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) registration form (Puerto Rico Historic Preservation Office [PRSHPO] 1992).

Once acquired, claimed, and inventoried by the ICP, Caguana was, and has remained, relatively unknown and neglected. Since the original renovations, the only work done on the actual site has been the periodic



Map 11.1. Map of Puerto Rico showing the location of Caguana. From the Caguana Ceremonial Ball Courts Site National Register of Historic Place Registration Form, p. 10.2, Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

cleaning (every two to three years) of the petroglyphs and the alignment of the standing stone slabs. At present the only plan for the site is to construct drainage ditches to divert floodwaters, and gravel walkways to facilitate tourist mobility, during the rainy season. This apparent disregard for the indigenous component of Puerto Rican culture and history exemplifies one aspect of the process of hegemonic cultural manipulation and control necessary for the nation-building project.

The making of heritage is a political process. Certain places may be incorporated into sanctioned views of the national heritage while others may be seen as a threat to the National imaginary and are suppressed or obliterated. . . . It is not simply that heritage places symbolize certain values and beliefs, but that the very transformation of these places into heritage is a process whereby identity is defined, debated, and contested and where social orders are challenged or reproduced. (Karp 1992:5)

According to Naniki Reyes Ocasio (personal communication 2012) (Figure 11.1), during the years that Caguana lay ignored by the ICP, the people of Utuado and the adjoining regions reconnected with their indigenous patrimony via the ceremonial center. Many, as children, had been told by parents and grandparents that they were descended from the indigenous population, and so they willingly embraced this space as the embodiment and physical evidence of this suppressed aspect of their cultural identity. During the period beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, it was the locals who maintained the site, cleared it of trash and rubble after the tourists left for the evening. They educated themselves as to the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance of this sacred space, so as to share this information with others. Manuel Galagarza, a Taino elder, personally made the informational placards that until recently greeted visitors in the park. The locals claim they were initially drawn to the site by a sense of cultural pride, but they returned again and again because of a spiritual connection and eventually became stewards of Caguana, a role in which they continued for decades. Many of the Tainos relate stories of growing up in the area and playing and running amidst the stone slabs bearing the incised images of what they believe to be the Taino goddess Atabey, or of climbing up secret ravines leading to the park late at night to celebrate ceremonies and rituals to honor the sacred ancestors, alongside the elders of the region. It was this consistent interaction with the site and its surrounds that sparked the birth of the Taino movement in Borikén. Ultimately, "culture does not reside in

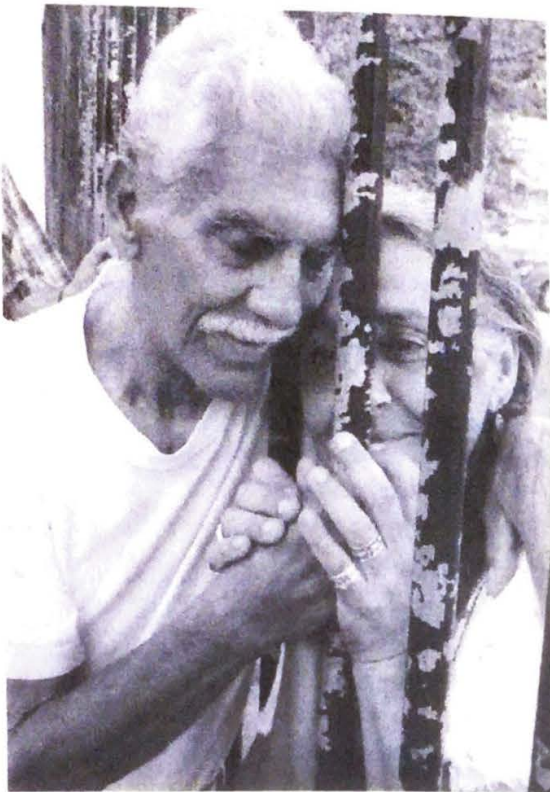


Figure 11.1. Taino elder Manuel Galagarza supporting hunger striker Naniki Reyes Ocasio at Caguana. Photograph by Roger Atihuibancex Hernandez, courtesy of *The Voice of The Taino People Online*.

material things, it resides—or better, is ceaselessly emergent from—meaningful human activity” (Handler 2003:354).

There is no sense in making a distinction between “genuine” and “spurious,” or “authentic” and “inauthentic” cultures and traditions, because all culture exists in the present, and must be enacted and reenacted, or interpreted and reinterpreted in the present by human beings who are all in one way or another “real” or “authentic.” Moreover, the link between living cultural traditions and the past is not a physical one, not even in those cases involving cultural property, or physical heritage objects; rather, the link is a semiotic one. We use objects to refer to, or think about, the past. But those cultural links to the past can exist only in the present and only with present day semiotic activities. To save or conserve the past, tradition, or heritage is to do something today. When people act in the world they are not simply reproducing culture, they are creating it anew. (Handler 2003:355)

Understanding culture in this way clarifies why the Taino feel a sense of ownership over this particular site, as opposed to others that have been unearthed in recent years. These include the Tibés site just north of Ponce, which is better maintained and developed, and the more recently unearthed Jacaná site, which consists of 9 acres and includes a “90-foot-long artifact laden midden mound, . . . what could be as many as 400 prehistoric burials, post holes that delineate ancient dwellings, and a 60-foot-long row of intricately carved granite and sandstone Petroglyphs all remarkably well preserved” (Toner 2008:52). Naniki (personal communication 2012) expressed to me during our interview that it was only at Caguana that she felt the “spiritual connection.”

With every year that followed, the Taino felt that more and more visitors degraded the physical and ceremonial integrity of the Caguana Ceremonial Center, harming the stones and leaving behind larger amounts of litter. Taino community members organized clean-up projects to call attention to this problem. According to the Taino:

Culturally “inappropriate” improvements [made by the ICP] . . . intrude upon Sacred Spaces. A concrete and wood walkway obstructs the natural earth path that guides culture-bearers to the spiritually appropriate direction from which to enter this Sacred Site. Moreover, iron fencing disconnects and imprisons the Batey [ceremonial ball court] and the Tree of Life spiritually and physically from the bordering river, the surrounding sacred spaces, and the Cemi Mountain. This separation has had a devastating effect on the living beings, ancestors and spirits that dwell in these sacred spaces and the sacred energies. (UCTP et al. 2008:9)

Shackled by legal and administrative governmental policies, the Taino say they are unable to fulfill their ceremonial, spiritual, or ancestral responsibilities.

The locals believe that the petroglyph images incised on the stone slabs (Figure 11.2), so prominently displayed at the Caguana site, are representative of Atabey, the mother goddess, making Caguana much more than just a park. To the locals and the Tainos, Caguana is a church, a sacred place of worship. “Caguana Ceremonial Center is the embodiment of a divine energy/being who brings forth, renews, and sustains life” (UCTP et al. 2008:8). Furthermore, they believe that this site provides evidence of a goddess society—a society and culture that existed as the complete antithesis of the Christian male-dominated one that has come to characterize

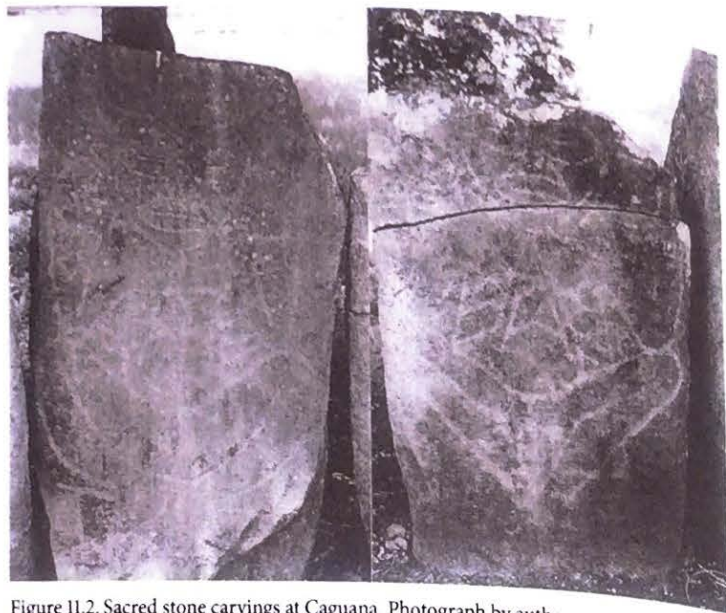


Figure 11.2. Sacred stone carvings at Caguana. Photograph by author.

Puerto Rico today as a result of Spanish imperialism and colonization. This goddess society, unveiled in meticulous detail in various historical archives (see Paiewonsky 1991:23), was one in which women were warriors, leaders, and free and autonomous sexual agents.

As a result of their ancestral connection to, and stewardship of, the Caguana site over at least five decades, the Taino chose to assert what they view as their rights regarding the continued care and use of the site.

The duty to steward cultural resources originates in tribal customary law, which articulates the relationship between the people and the world around them. In most instances tribal customary law dates back to the tribe's very creation story, identifying certain resources as critical to the community and thereby necessitating human care. Because tribal law of cultural resources is ancient, predating the arrival of Anglo-American legal principles, its stewardship principles are not dependent on Anglo-American notions of property (See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006).

The aforementioned recent improvements made by the ICP interfere with this stewardship and, according to the Taino, "intrude upon Sacred Spaces" (UCTP et al. 2008:9). To the Taino, the site is the nexus of a living, breathing culture; to the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, the site is a museum—a relic of a dead culture.

CONTENDERS FOR AN IDENTITY

The significance of the Caguana site, although contested, has certainly not diminished with the passage of time, to which recent events can attest. As a result of the ongoing controversy regarding the political status of Puerto Rico as a commonwealth of the United States of America, the site and its history have taken on new relevance and meaning in the cultural and identity wars of the island. The primary disputants of this conflict are the Taino—represented by several loosely associated organizations (El Caney del Quinto Mundo, the United Confederation of Taino People, and the Consejo General de Tainos Borincanos)—and the ICP. It is difficult to ascertain exactly when the Taino reemerged onto the Puerto Rican political, sociological, and historical scene. If you ask the Taino, they will tell you that there was no reemergence—they have always been here. As the Taino organizations (UCTP et al. 2008:2) reported to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, "as a people, the Taino have inhabited the island of Boriken for thousands of years." The report continues:

The Taino People are Native Peoples of the island of Boriken and other Caribbean island nations. The Taino are historically documented to have lived in Boriken and throughout the region long before the arrival of any colonial governments. . . . They have been subjected to the degradation of the transitions of power between foreign sovereigns: first as a Spanish colony in the late fifteenth century and now as a Free Associated State or colony of the United States. The Taino have undergone many changes in the exercise of their own sovereignty, but remain a distinct people who, despite their inalienable right to self-determination, have been denied their collective rights as a people to exercise that sovereignty in their homeland, Boriken. Such denial has caused intergenerational obstacles, challenges, and threats to the preservation and transmission of their culture, spirituality, language, traditional knowledge and their very existence as indigenous peoples. (UCTP et al. 2008:2)

During the decades that Caguana and the Taino were marginalized in favor of a more Hispanophile national identity, a new living heritage movement was quietly gaining momentum in the hills of Utuado, in the state of Florida, and in the barrios of New York City. Naniki Reyes Ocasio (personal communication 2012), grandmother of the Taino movement, tells of

Taino meetings held in her mother's kitchen in the 1980s in Flushing, New York. The members of this seed group called themselves *La Asociación Indígena Taina de Nueva York*. The group eventually splintered, and its members went on to form many of the groups existing today, including the UCTP, *Nación Taino de las Antillas*, *Tainos de Norte*, and others already mentioned. This unsanctioned "Taino movement" would explode onto the cultural scene during the island's Quincentennial Celebration in 1992,

through which the PPD [Popular Democratic Party] administration emphasized Puerto Rico's ties with the "motherland" through activities, exchanges, and highly publicized official visits to Spain. The celebrations also featured a highly publicized regatta to commemorate Columbus' "discovery" of the island, and the opening of a Puerto Rican pavilion in Seville. The official activities were accompanied by free nationwide public celebrations with strong cultural nationalistic overtones. (Dávila 1997:48)

In this same year, Caguana received National Historic Landmark status from the United States National Parks Service. According to Roberto Borrero (personal communication 2012), president of the UCTP, it was this complete disregard and disrespect for the Taino legacy that galvanized the Taino movement on the island, which up to that point had consisted of several small groups, under one umbrella organization, the *Consejo General de Tainos Borincanos*.

Understanding the actions and policies of the ICP regarding the Caguana ceremonial site requires deconstructing the historical context within which the ICP was established. After Spanish decolonization and U.S. recolonization in 1898, Puerto Rico struggled to maintain its own unique sense of identity and to obtain democratic rights as a newly acquired possession of the United States. The Jones Act of 1917 gave American citizenship to Puerto Ricans—whether they wanted it or not—and in 1952 Puerto Rico's constitution was approved by the Puerto Rican voters and Congress, giving it commonwealth status.

Ricardo Alegría, the first director of the ICP, was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on April 14, 1921, in the midst of this political transition. He was born to a well-to-do family with political connections and pride in its Spanish heritage, in an opulent home that clearly reflects its Spanish influence. In addition, the family owned a hacienda dedicated to the cultivation

of sugar cane, where Ricardo heard stories of the slaves, workers, and natives eulogizing the "Spanish" past. His schooling emphasized Americanization, teaching in English, and pledging allegiance to the American flag. In an attempt to counter this assimilative process, Ricardo's father gave him and his siblings lectures on Spanish Puerto Rican history, and Ricardo himself joined with friends to perform small acts of oppositional behavior, particularly targeting the American flag.

In 1947 Alegría received a master's degree in anthropology and history from the University of Chicago, thus becoming, at the age of 26, the first professional Puerto Rican anthropologist. A year later he was made director of the Museum of History, Anthropology and Art at the University of Puerto Rico. He received his PhD in anthropology from Harvard University in 1954, at the same time that Puerto Rico attained local autonomy through commonwealth status and the government first made a concerted effort to define an official cultural policy and to stipulate what could rightfully represent Puerto Rican culture.

The ICP was created in 1955 with the mandate of "defining and disseminating the constituent elements of Puerto Rico's identity" (Dávila 1997:4). Ricardo Alegría, as its newly appointed director, was tasked with constructing a new national identity. In reality, this process entailed the much more complex project of manipulating and shaping the nation's historical narrative. "History reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives" (Handler 1988:211). In the case of Puerto Rico, the narrative quickly became apparent.

Simultaneously with his appointment as director, Alegría, at the request of the ICP board, became responsible for the major renovation and restoration of historic Old San Juan, the ruins of Caparra, Fort San Jerónimo, and other Spanish sites. As a result of his work, Old San Juan was declared a Historical World Treasure. Additional "first initiatives" included renovation of Spanish military structures and churches, opening the national archives (which focused on Puerto Rican history under Spanish rule), activities centered on "Western cultural expression" such as flamenco and Spanish dances by the Ballet of San Juan, readings of Hispano-American literature and poetry, choral chamber music, and orchestral concerts and art exhibitions (Dávila 1997:62–63). All these initiatives reflect "the hispanophile and occidentalist tendencies of [Alegría and other] Puerto Rican intellectuals" (Dávila 1997:62).

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Jesse Fewkes (1907:24–25), in *The Aborigines of Porto Rico and Neighboring Islands*, provides one of the most complete historical and evidentiary records of the early history of the Taino and their ritual and ceremonial practices in the Caguana region:

Many of the inhabitants of a mountainous region called Indiera, at the western end of the island, also have pronounced Indian features, and we may expect to find in that region many legends, curious customs, and words directly traceable to the aborigines. . . . It is probable that the entire mountainous interior of Porto Rico from the eastern to the western end, was the last refuge of the aboriginal Indian population, and the names of the various caciques that are applied to sections of the mountain chain support this belief. . . . Several contractors who have employed large numbers of laborers in building roads have noticed the predominance of Indian features in the mountains near Utuado and Comerio.

Fewkes (1907:82) goes on to speak extensively about the customs, traditions, and ritual practices of the Taino, as well as the archaeological evidence located in the Caguana region, mostly in the form of over 20 *bateyes* (ball courts) (Figure 11.3). According to the author, the best known were Cayuco, Arenas, Salto Arriba, Vivi Abajo, Jayuya, Mameyes, Paso de Palma, Alonso, and Alfonso, as well as several in the barrios of Utuado. All of these were identified and excavated by the eminent Agustin Stahl, Puerto Rico's first scientist and ethnologist, during the course of his archaeological studies in 1903. Regarding these dance plazas and ball courts, Fewkes states:

The Porto Rican *juegos de bolla* [ball courts] were first described by Doctor Stahl who speaks of several of these inclosures. . . . [T]hese sites are formed of laminated stones of different sizes, placed vertically in position, and forming inclosures of rectangular form measuring 15 meters, more or less, in size, the walls being slightly elevated above the surface of the ground. . . . The General appearance of these inclosures, with idols and pictographs carved on some of their boundary stones, and the presence of neighboring mounds, some of which were burial places, others of the prehistoric pueblos, confirm my belief that they were plazas in which were celebrated the ceremonial dances called *areitos*, and especially those mortuary rites

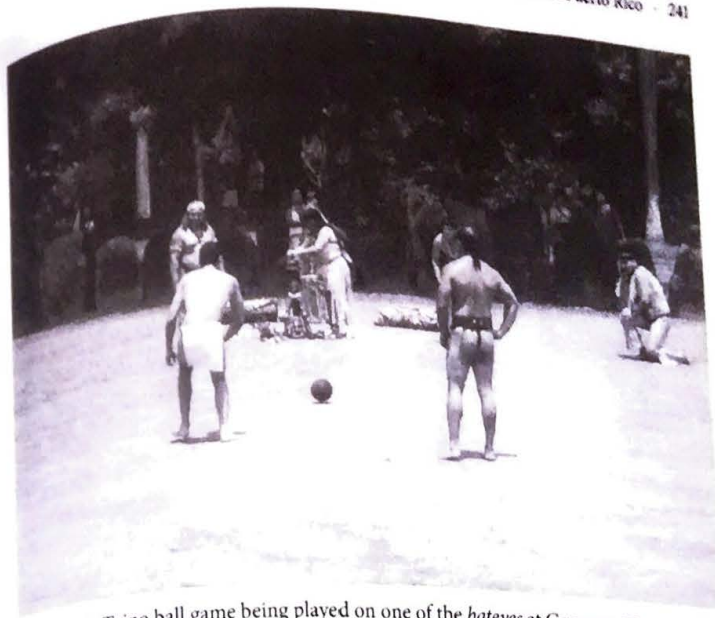


Figure 11.3. Taino ball game being played on one of the *bateyes* at Caguana. Photograph courtesy of *The Voice of The Taino People Online*.

of ancestor worship which reached so high a development among the prehistoric Porto Ricans. Here were performed dances commemorative of the dead interred nearby, and here songs were sung in memory of ancestors, as Oviedo and others have stated. (1907:82–84)

It is interesting to speculate upon the mysterious “neighboring mounds” that were excavated by Stahl. Fewkes (1907:82) also states that “just outside the boundary wall of every one of the enclosures studied by the author [Stahl] there were found one or more low mounds which bear superficial evidences of having been made by human hands.” Fewkes excavated one of these mounds near Utuado in 1903 and references it in his account of Porto Rican pictography:

In my studies of one of these enclosures at Utuado I found that the main road from that town to Adjuntas had cut through the edge of one of the mounds, revealing a few feet below the surface, a layer of soil containing fragments of pottery, a few broken celts, and the long bones of an adult. . . . This earth was very moist and ill adapted to the preservation of bones or other fibrous material. Nevertheless, we

found 10 skeletons of adults and infants, with mortuary objects so distributed as to indicate that they had been placed there as offerings. One of the best preserved of these skeletons was found in a sitting posture with its legs drawn to its chest and with ceramic objects lying at one side. (Fewkes 1903:457)

Fewkes elaborates, "The discovery that these mounds are Indian cemeteries sheds light on the nature and use of the neighboring enclosures. The conclusions drawn from my excavations of the Utuado mounds are that large numbers of the dead were buried just outside the dance courts and that the elaborate *areitos*, or mortuary dances, were held in the latter. . . . [T]he majority of the prehistoric Porto Rican dead were undoubtedly buried in these cemeteries above referred to" (1907:458).

According to the application for National Register status (PRSHPO 1992:7:2), in 1915 the Caguana site came to the attention of the eminent anthropologist Franz Boas, who was directing a group conducting extensive scientific studies on Puerto Rican prehistory and culture for the New York Academy of Sciences. Under his direction, Robert T. Aiken and J. Alden Mason were assigned to investigate the site between July 2 and December 11, 1915. Mason and Aitken found the site "covered with a valueless growth of brush" and were able to clear it and bring its view to "full extent" in a matter of days (Mason 1941:211–212). During the period of excavation, the team uncovered 14 stone features. In the excavation report, not published until 1941, Mason described the site as consisting of six long courts with parallel lines of stones and open ends, one large long court with parallel side lines of slabs and closed ends, one long narrow structure of parallel lines of stone, one oval plaza bounded by a ring of stones, one smaller structure of parallel and transverse lines of stones, one large earth mound, and two areas containing structural remains (PRSHPO 1992:7:14). The site consists of a total of 10 ball courts over an area of approximately seven acres, making it "the largest ceremonial site of its type not only in Puerto Rico, but the entire West Indies" (PRSHPO 1992:7:1). Mason believed the site was the ceremonial center of a large village or populated area dating from the immediate preconquest period, and the "ten stone-bounded enclosures were used for the performances of ceremonial dances, games and other rites" (Mason 1941:261). He also observed that "one of the slabs bore a large carved face and several of the others showed traces of similar faces, now eroded" (Mason 1941:217). After uncovering 25 additional slabs, he stated, "The weathered remains of pictographs are discernible on some of

them, and it is probable that everyone originally contained some incised or carved face or other design" (Mason 1941:218).

In 1938 Irving Rouse of Yale University excavated two test pits near the edge of the site, making him the second American anthropologist to excavate at Caguana. Ricardo Alegria (1983:78) reported that these excavations "revealed potsherds mixed with humus in several concentrations which suggested house sites" along with several other artifacts which included ceramic griddles, a stone polisher, several stone celts, and three stone collars. Rouse (1992:9) was the first to identify the ceramics from the site as "representing a distinctive style that was restricted in a temporal and geographic context," adding that the analysis "has been instrumental in the identification of late prehistoric and early contact period sites throughout Western Puerto Rico and Eastern Hispaniola." As a result of this excavation, Rouse (1992) agreed with Mason's conclusion that the site may have been the ceremonial center of Cacique Guarionex, but disagreed with the classification of it as part of a larger village.

In 1949 Alegria, then director of the Archaeological Research Center of the University of Puerto Rico, undertook a reexamination of the Caguana site to determine whether it should be developed as an interpretive park open to the public. During this extensive 4-month excavation, Alegria (1983:84) found 1,680 potsherds, 5 fragments of stone collars, 2 small zemis, 1 stone ear spool, 3 stone grinders, 27 flint flakes, 59 stone chips, 3 broken stone celts, 1 stone bead, and 1 stone mortar. In addition, he uncovered features not exposed by Mason or Rouse, including a series of postholes and wooden post remnants, representing a large structure. A fragment of one of the wood posts was radiocarbon-dated to 1200 ± 80 BP, which indicated that the site was in use long before the arrival of the Spanish (Alegria 1983:85). Based on the archeological evidence, Alegria (1983:87) concluded that the ceremonial center had been "sparsely inhabited, except during special occasions when people from surrounding villages gathered for religious ceremonies."

The report accompanying the National Historic Places registration form (PRSHPO 1992:8:1) states that the Caguana site represents the largest and most complex ball court and ceremonial site in Puerto Rico and the West Indies. According to earlier assessments, the primary purpose of the Utuado ceremonial plazas was the celebration of *areitos* (dances), mainly those associated with ancestor worship and mortuary rites. The report, however, prioritizes only the importance of the ballgame of *batey* in Taino Indian culture. By tracing this game through the accounts of early

explorers and linking the courts in Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Cuba to those found at the Olmec site San Lorenzo in Mexico, the report concluded that the game was originally introduced into Puerto Rico from Mesoamerica (PRSHPO 8:2, 8:6). Alegría suggested that “construction of courts and ceremonial centers required a high degree of technical development, . . . and that this kind of work could be carried out only in a stratified society with a powerful chief to direct large numbers of workers and with specialists with the authority and knowledge to design and supervise the construction of the court” (1983:155–56).

The PRSHPO report (1992:8:10) concludes that the Caguana site falls within the category of “Indigenous American Populations, subtheme Pre-historic/Historic Archeology, and topical aspects of Religion, Ideology, and Ceremonialism, and Major Contributions to the Development of Culture Histories.” As of the writing of this chapter, the ICP manages and operates the Caguana site, which is a National Historic Landmark, as an archaeological tourist park (UCTP et al. 2008:8).

A PROTEST AND THE POWER OF POWER

Beginning on Tuesday, July 26, the day after the initial occupation of the Caguana Ceremonial Center (Figure 11.4), a number of significant events occurred. The Taino asked for a meeting with representatives from the ICP, as well as municipal government representatives, to present their demands. The ICP declared that only if the demonstrators left the grounds would they meet with them. Negotiations were unsuccessful, due to the absence of significant stakeholders. Naniki and six others who refused to leave the ceremonial center commenced a hunger strike. Teresa Tio, executive director of the ICP, told the press:

We recognize their right to practice any ritual and ceremony they wish. Of course that is assuming that these are subject to the laws of our Puerto Rican society and the rules regarding use of an ICP installation, which apply to everyone. . . . We will also not allow the practice of cannibalism nor the sacrifice of enemies captured in battle. . . . [T]hese so-called Tainos carry an attitude of superiority over other Puerto Ricans. . . . *We cannot, nor should we recognize them for what they are not, nor legitimize a claim that has no foundation.* (Kuilan-Torres 2005, emphasis added)



Figure 11.4. Taino protestor Sonia Viro Acevedo at site awaiting executive order from the governor. Photograph by Roger Atihuibancex Hernandez, courtesy of *The Voice of The Taino People Online*.

When the court ordered the police to withdraw, the ICP countered by hiring “club waving” private security guards (UCTP 2005b).

Initially, the Judicial Administration dismissed charges against the Taino, finding no probable cause for trespassing, and stated they would make no arrests. Judge Concepción Figueroa, however, found that the accused were exercising dominion over the space and ordered a hearing. Later, she charged five of the activists with contempt for failing to appear before her on the August 3 hearing date, setting bail at \$1,000 apiece. The mayor of Utuado, Alan González Cancel, publicly declared sympathy with the protesters, but Gov. Aníbal Acevedo Vila refused to meet with them. The group inside the park would not leave the grounds until he did so.

On August 8 a United Nations representative called the governor’s office to inquire about Naniki’s health. The governor’s representative claimed she had not been on a hunger strike and told the caller that they had sent rain gear and shelters for the protestors; Carlos Morales entered the park on August 9 and certified that Naniki Reyes Ocasio had indeed been on a

hunger strike for 14 days (UCTP 2005c). On August 10, the fifteenth day of Naniki's hunger strike, she and two other activists, Guatibiri Baez and Juana Griselle Martinez Prieto, were arrested inside the ceremonial center by police brandishing automatic weapons and were evacuated in shackles (UCTP 2005d). Three other protesters, Elba Anaca Lugo, Taina Rosado, and Margarita Shashira Muñoz, later surrendered themselves to authorities and were arrested as well, but charges were dropped against all other participants.

CONCLUSION

The injunction barring the protestors, members of their organizations, their attorneys, agents, and supporters from entering the Caguana Ceremonial grounds after official visiting hours is still in place and strictly enforced by the ICP and its agents. In an article dated August 13, 2005, Naniki stated:

The court basically is reviewing an injunction that seeks to temporarily or permanently prevent us [Taino] from staying overnight on the grounds, which is a direct violation of our religious freedoms. . . . The court and the [Puerto Rican] Institute of Culture view "dominion" as a form of possession so it is obvious that they have no concept of indigenous perspectives as they relate to those terms. . . . If the Institute had their way they would have barred anyone identifying themselves as Taino from entering the park permanently but this did not happen. (UCTP 2005d)

In the same article, Roger Atihuibancesh Hernández, a representative of the United Confederation of Taino People, added:

We have exposed the Executive Branch of the Government and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture not only for failing to recognize indigenous rights, but they are now well documented to be publicly hostile to the Taino People on the island. . . . The Caguana action is a victory for all Taino People as we have raised the issue of Taino rights, as well as the desecration of sacred sites, ancestral remains, and sacred artifacts to an unprecedented level here in Boriken. (UCTP 2005d)

Regarding the contemporary Taino, the ICP sees only a group of people with genetic and biological characteristics similar to their own, "inventing" a connection to a long-dead past in order to acquire public property and a cultural patrimony that the ICP believes should be common to all. An ICP

representative has unofficially stated in an interview with me that the Taino ancestry is invented and recreational, and that there is no historical basis for the ways in which any of it was actually enacted.

The ICP seems to have developed selective amnesia regarding both the huge repository of historical archives documenting Taino culture and practices and its own role in "inventing" a culturally expedient and palatable identity for Puerto Rico. "Since its inception, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture served as the main disseminator of the blending myth in Puerto Rico, or the idea that Puerto Ricans are made up of three ancestrally distinct cultures that, long extinct as separate populations, have merged into a unique whole: the Puerto Rican culture" (Dávila 1997:69–70). In my conversation with Naniki (2012), she compared the "blending" myth to the melting-pot story that characterizes American culture, associating both with cannibalism. "You get eaten up and then vomited out—and then you are just one big mess—you don't know who you are anymore."

Puerto Rico, however, is much more racially differentiated and segregated than the myth would suggest. One has only to visit the town of Loiza on the eastern coast to see the racial segregation that exists on this island, and to understand that the Puerto Rican triad (blending of three races) is an expedient social construct—another invention. In fact, "there is probably no time or place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the invention of traditions, in this sense. However, we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed" (Hobsbawm 1992:5). Such was the case in Puerto Rico during the period of American colonization. Unfortunately, as Dávila explains, in constructing a nationalist ideology by drawing on the ideas of the hispanophile elites, Puerto Rico ended up embracing its previous colonizer, the Spanish, and inadvertently colluding with, and accommodating, the American colonial project. One thing, however, is certain: The cultural wars of Puerto Rico have long served as an expedient distraction from the current economic, social, and political ills that plague this small island nation.

When I initially visited Caguana in 1994, the owner of a local ramshackle bookstore just outside the site asked me if I knew the story of La Mujer de Caguana.² I answered that I had done some research on the subject. She informed me that people think they know about her, but they don't really know who she is at all. She referred me to several books, including the Jesse Fewkes book she kept under the store counter. "La mujer de Caguana es la madre de todos [the mother of all]," she stated, and then, leaning into

me and whispering conspiratorially, she added "Es cosa muy sagrada [It's a very sacred thing]." During my subsequent visit to Caguana in the summer of 2012, I returned to the same spot, but the bookstore was gone. In its place was a brand-new structure, now contained within the gates of the Caguana Ceremonial Park—owned and operated by the ICP.

NOTES

1. The account of the occupation of Caguana and the surrounding events was compiled from interviews by the author with Naniki Reyes Ocasio, elder and founder of Caney Quinto Mundo, on August 19, 2012, in Orocovis, Puerto Rico, and with Roberto Borrero, director of the United Confederation of Taino People (UCTP), on April 4, 2012, in New York City, as well as from updates on the UCTP news blog, *Voice of the Taino People Online* (<http://uctp.blogspot.com>).

2. *La Mujer de Caguana* translates literally as "The Woman of Caguana," but in colloquial Puerto Rican Spanish, *mujer* also means mate, companion, or wife. The woman in the bookstore was referring to the fact that the role of the *Mujer de Caguana* had been downplayed in the present day as the mistress of the god Yucahu, when in fact the Taino believe her to be Atabey, the primary deity of the Taino and the mother of Yucahu and all the other deities.

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