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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Caciques and Cemí Idols: The Web Spun by Taíno Rulers between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. By José R. Oliver.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1n41z8q5>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 33(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2009-09-01

DOI

10.17953

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the possibility that Archaic societies had “more complex social, political, or ritual arrangements than once thought” (627). For examples of such complexity, one need only consult the chapters in the volume that highlight long-distance interaction (for example, Richard Jefferies, ch. 15), mound building (for example, Kidder and Sassaman, ch. 16), community patterning (for example, David Benn and Joe Thompson, ch. 14), as well as many of the other well-written chapters that touch on or deal directly with such issues.

In conclusion, this is a wonderful, albeit heavy, book regarding Archaic societies. As someone who is interested in this time period and hunter-gatherers, I heartily recommend professional archaeologists purchase a copy. It is a volume that will be referenced and consulted for years to come. The density of data and description in the volume requires quite a bit of concentration. However, even if you are not an archaeologist, reading this work will give you a good sense of the tremendous amount of diversity and innovation during this period. Further, this volume chronicles an important time in the annals of Native America and showcases the resilience and development of the groups that once inhabited the midcontinent. This history deserves to be known by all.

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Caciques and Cemí Idols: The Web Spun by Taíno Rulers between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. By José R. Oliver. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009. 432 pages. \$59.00 cloth; \$34.95 paper.

Brilliance looking in a mirror can blind. I felt this nearly happen to José R. Oliver in his new book *Caciques and Cemí Idols*. Nearly. Although an inordinate number of conjectural “maybes” and “perhapses” liberally sprinkle this imaginative manuscript, this *profundo* archaeologist expounds brilliantly on the subject and captures new ground with his multidisciplinary analysis about the first civilization nearly erased from history by the Spanish conquest and subsequent historicity.

Scholarship on Taino—particularly with anthropological ambition—is notably limited. Compared to other regions and cultures, Caribbean Taino sources are sparse. Few Taino perceptions are recorded, and Spanish chroniclers and travelers tend to overlap materials, copy from, and embellish each other. Academic pursuit of the question of indigenous Caribbean identity and culture has mostly focused on the deciphering of stone art and iconography.

Oliver mines and reexamines what scholarship there is with clear depth of research and consistent insight. He teases out of the existing literature and archaeology a pathway for understanding more of the functioning of the Taino caciquedoms or chiefdoms, the framework of Taino (Caribbean indigenous) thinking around their cohoba (*Piptadenia peregrina*) ceremony, and their caciques’ (chiefs) connectivity with sacred deities represented in cemís. An established culture in the Greater Antilles, the Taino (Oliver

prefers *tainoan* because *Taino* defines a specific ethnicity, or Native nation, rather than culture) formulated responses to the Spanish entry into their world. Oliver aptly traces the gifting of precious items in the early diplomacy of some caciques, most interestingly the transfer of goeizas or masks made of gold, conch, or wood. The art of the gift and Taino articulations around belief systems are meticulously explored in this book.

Motivated early to know about the relationship that relics “may have had with the native peoples who created and used them,” Oliver purposed his multilayered volume on Taino *cemís* and their reflection in various objects according to the understanding of this relationship. What processes make these objects “active agents” rather than “passive entities”? he asks in studying the actions, attitudes, and early contact activities of the Taino caciques relative to the *cemís*, their iconic representations, ceremonies, and spiritual responses (xiii). Drawing an intricate web of contacts and ownership, the author focuses on gift making, as the Taino leadership pursued spiritual potency in their traditional practice of diplomacy, alliance making, and even war with the Spanish invaders. In this regard, Oliver adds considerable new understanding to the relationships among caciques, the alienability and inalienability of particular *cemís*, and the early adaptability of *cemiism* into dominant Catholic deities. The Cuban Madonna, the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, is the most prominent among blended Catholic deities.

Oliver is appreciable in his respect for the deeply scholarly yet intuitive work of master Caribbeanist, José Juan Arrom. Arrom’s interdisciplinary mining of Taino iconography for meaning and purpose is a penetrating and guiding light. Oliver’s gloves come off, however, regarding the work of Arrom’s fellow Yale scholar, Irving Rouse, whose Caribbean cultural map has been the most generally accepted description of the ancient peopling of the Caribbean islands and the composition of their ethnic-tribal identities at the time of contact with Christopher Columbus and his enterprise. The argument about Rouse is worth contemplating.

Oliver deconstructs Rouse’s linear progression of Taino cultural development in the Caribbean. He challenges Rouse’s strict definition of three Taino culture areas, ostensibly extending from Western Taino (Cuba, Bahamas, Jamaica) to Central, or Classic, Taino (Hispaniola, Puerto Rico) to the Eastern Taino (Virgin Islands to north of Guadalupe). Rouse’s argument presupposes a sole ancestral culture that developed into Taino, which, based on the Taino’s development of ceramics and agriculture, he distinguishes from the earlier “archaic” cultures. However, Oliver provides compelling evidence of early agricultural and ideological (*cemiñism*) practice among the so-called archaics, pointing out a plurality of cultures and ethnicities that coexisted and shared in the development of what becomes “tainoness.” Small three-cornered stones—precursors of the large Taino *cemís* seen in use by Columbus—that date as far back as 2330 BC were found in Vieques, Puerto Rico. Grinding-stone tools dated between 1300 and 400 BC among “archaic” groups have given evidence of manioc, maize, common bean, sweet potato, *yautia*, and other domesticates associated with a Taino culture that Rouse strictly assigned to a much-later age. Rather than having little or nothing to contribute to what has come to be

identified as Taino culture, earlier Caribbean migrations—one from Yucatan/Belize going east, another one coming northwest from Venezuela up the Lesser Antilles to the larger islands—were convergent. “Groups from each of these two different continental regions brought with them different bodies of knowledge and material culture to the Caribbean” (11).

The post-Rouse theory that Oliver articulates proves to be even more emphatically Caribbean as it assigns the cultural origins of what would become Taino, or tainoan, to varieties of interaction among a multiplicity of tribes and local ethnicities. In this context, perhaps it would help to consider the Taino or tainoan culture analogously to the Incas, who did not invent so much as they reorganized and standardized preexisting methods and systems.

A broad point of interest is in Oliver’s take on the term *Taino*, which has remained constant and deep in the Spanish-speaking Greater Caribbean for more than five centuries. (In English, the dominant term to describe the indigenous of the Greater Antilles has been *Arawak*.)

Oliver quickly allows that the term and its meaning are “hugely powerful . . . imbedded in our minds . . . [and] so ingrained in both popular and academic circles that it is virtually impossible . . . to try to eradicate it,” but he diminishes its importance and potential actuality (27). This is not unusual, as the divergent points of view regarding this powerful word largely dismiss the possibility of *Taino* being a dominant descriptive of continuity over time since contact. This is not to argue that the term strictly described an ethnic nation in its early use, or that it was retained as such by the Indian-descendant *sui generis* communities. (It does not appear so, for example, in the Indian-descendant community in Cuba.) But it is arguable that the term has been constant in the popular culture, certainly in the eastern region of Cuba, and likely the country and the Greater Antilles generally. This is of high interest to many people. The term’s very retention as a descriptive—whether of language or of ethnicity—and why it shows up in the works of Daniel Brinton and Constantine Rafinesque, and others in the nineteenth-century United States, also deserve further research. That such a deeply suggestive word reenters the Spanish-speaking Caribbean as a result of its usage by Anglo scholars is difficult to believe.

Tayno was the term noted in use in 1493 by early Spanish chronicler Dr. Diego Alvarez Chanca during Columbus’s second voyage. Native captives of so-called Caribes in Guadalupe appear to self-describe as “tayno,” meaning “the good ones,” or perhaps “noble people” to a Spanish landing boat. These and other captives of the Caribes (ostensible cannibals, according to Alvarez Chanca) were from Boriken (now Puerto Rico) and approached the arriving Spanish to request asylum during that contact at Guadalupe.

Oliver dismisses the self-description as merely a way for the captives to assert that they are good, “unlike those others” (the ostensible cannibals), and he agrees that this singular (yet seminal) use of *Taino* by Caribbean indigenous people is not evidence of its use as the name of an extended ethnic group (6). Others such as Oxford scholar Peter Hulme further posit that it is actually the Spanish sailors who shouted “taino,” to mean that *they* were good. Hulme offers that “taino . . . slipped imperceptibly, without anyone taking a

conscious decision, or showing any awareness of the possible consequences, from the level of linguistics, to that of culture, to that of ethnicity” (*Colonial Encounters*, 1986, 60).

A related term, *ni-taino*, does appear in Columbus’s journal and over time in various chronicles and is defined by Las Casas and others as describing a high or noble class among Caribbean caciquedoms. Oliver argues that *Taino* is a derivative of *ni-taino*. Thus Oliver states, “The term *nitaino* from which Taino derived, refers to an elite stratum or class and not to an ethnic group” (6).

There are other theories about this, and perhaps closest to certainty is that *taino* meant “good,” and *ni-taino* meant a “noble” group of people with a well-considered standing in the society, and likely described a way of being or behavior that others might have striven to emulate. Did the term perhaps sustain in Caribbean consciousness long enough to be pulled into English in the nineteenth century? Certainly, it continues to be used in many forms. Most interestingly, the Greater Antilles indigenous resurgence movement of the past three decades, which surprised many scholars, forms significantly around the nomenclature of *Taino*. Some argue this is telling of invention by the resurgents, but reality dictates that the term is undeniably held close to the chest among many Caribbean people of Indio origins and appears to revitalize through time. Meeting the languages of the West always traumatizes ethnic or tribal self-identification terms, while reconstitutive nomenclature is common to revitalization movements.

Oliver is not alone in his awareness of a continuity of Caribbean indigenous (that is, an Indio identity) even to the present. He asserts with some zeal, however, that the Taino of old (precontact) would find nothing recognizable in today’s Caribbean Indio populations. This assertion is perhaps too strict. Jose Garcia Molina et al. have documented various currents of indigeneity in eastern Cuba (*Huellas Vivas del Indo-Cubano*, 2008). Recent ethnographic narratives from Indio-Cuban elders at the community of Caridad de los Indios (Guantanamo, Cuba) provide testimony of clearly “animistic” belief and ceremony (José Barreiro, *Panchito: Cacique de Montaña*, 2001). Although “mestizado” or “cruzado” (mixed), their range of ceremony, prayers and songs, and particular approach to the natural world, including dream communication and spiritual expressions of interspecies respect, evidence practice and perception that ancient American indigenous people of the Caribbean might recognize with affinity.

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Chief Bender’s Burden: The Silent Struggle of a Baseball Star. By Tom Swift. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 368 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

Journalist and baseball historian Tom Swift offers the latest in a growing body of biographies about American Indian athletes in major American sports. His recent work chronicles the life of Charles Albert Bender, an Ojibwe baseball

pitcher from the White Earth Reservation. “Chief” Bender enjoyed a nearly forty-year professional baseball career, as a major league player (fifteen seasons, plus a token appearance in 1925), a minor leaguer, and a coach. As his subtitle suggests, Swift constructs a narrative of Bender as an exceedingly intelligent and strong-willed individual who quietly absorbed the brunt of a thoroughly racist society and sport during the early 1900s. Through his careful research and representation of key events and games, Swift conveys the immensity of Bender’s remarkable accomplishments, both on and off the pitcher’s mound.

My analysis and critique of *Chief Bender’s Burden* reflects my interests as an ethnic studies scholar who is primarily concerned with how individuals and communities of color negotiate systems of power shaped in part through the social construction of racialized identities. I am also explicitly interested in the manuscript’s usefulness for scholarly research and university teaching. With these particular concerns in mind, I also compare Swift’s book to two recent texts covering Charles Bender and American Indian baseball players: William Kashatus’s biography *Money Pitcher: Chief Bender and the Tragedy of Indian Assimilation* (2006) and Jeffrey Powers-Beck’s *The American Indian Integration of Baseball* (2004).

As one might expect, Swift’s extensive biography is filled with the intricate details of long-forgotten games and the antics of a baseball man not yet contained by the later corporatization of professional sports leagues. For a diehard baseball fan, the intimate description of individual innings and plays no doubt offers a fantastic way to experience historic games never witnessed by many in the first place. Most of these details and antics were quite enjoyable and extremely helpful in visualizing the spirit of the games and in reviving the ghosted players.

For those of us not so invested in the minutiae of baseball lore, however, these nuanced stories at times became a reader’s burden. Although I thoroughly appreciated the craft of reviving the play-by-play of games from a century past, not all of the resurrection efforts served to enhance an academic reader’s understanding of Bender as either a player or person. Thus the book’s success as a baseball biography and historical chronicle are also its shortcomings as a resource for (nonhistorian) scholars. It seems clear that the book targets a more general baseball-interested audience, indicated not only by the neatly packaged, brief chapters but also by the bibliographic essays (vs. endnotes/footnotes) and journalistic storytelling. These are not damning attributes, simply parameters that must be understood.

As a more journalistic piece, Swift’s text takes the liberty to leap back and forth across time and space, creating a rather chaotic path for his readers and compounding the challenge of following a text already bursting with names, places, and events. Although I am always happy to resist a strict chronological narrative, Swift continually redirects the reader’s attention toward Bender’s single biggest failure as a player: his loss in the 1914 World Series and subsequent release from the Athletics team. Along the way, we are bandied about across Bender’s life waiting for the “resolution” of this supposedly monumental moment. Swift’s not-so-subtle implication that Bender’s legacy

spiraled into disaster during one moment (finally revealed in ch. 21) undercuts some of the power and beauty of his life story and ultimately that of the author's preceding chapters.

The core of Bender's amazing playing career stretched from 1903 to 1917, and Swift offers generous coverage of most of those years, as well as compelling stories about his life before and after his time in the big leagues. Yet Swift's constant and disruptive allusions to Bender's "failure" ventures too close to the vanishing, noble Indian narrative that Bender's life story seems so effectively to disrupt. In this way, it mirrors the narratives more appropriately constructed in David Fleitz's *Louis Sockalexis: The First Cleveland Indian* (2002) and Brian McDonald's *Indian Summer* (2003) about the Penobscot star who flashed onto the national baseball stage in 1897 before flaming out in equally glorious and tragic fashion after only a single season. In contrast to Sockalexis, Bender actually enjoyed a successful, sustained career with far fewer public implosions, even as he endured similar racially discriminatory treatment. Further, and as Swift successfully relays, Bender enjoyed a brilliant personal life and employment history long after his playing days were finished. Although Sockalexis might have fit the trope of the tragic Indian destroyed by Western "civilization," Bender was clearly not Sockalexis. Swift goes to great pains to try and convince us of this, but much of the structure of his work suggests the opposite.

Swift is not alone in being swept up by the narratives of Western progress and inevitable, tragic American Indian demise, but his intellectual veering away from the racial "burden" of Bender's career leaves him less well defended than some other recent work on American Indian baseball players. The most direct comparison clearly comes from Kashatus's earlier biography on Bender. The two books cover much of the same materials, use many of the same sources, and offer overlapping arguments, although Swift is clearly more exhaustive in his treatment of the details and generous play-by-play descriptions of key games. As Kashatus's subtitle suggests, he also views Bender's career and life largely through the lens of failure, despite the clear trumpeting of his successes.

Swift's volume benefits from a later publication date in that he stakes out a few obvious points of contention with Kashatus, including rebuffing that author's suggestion that Bender intentionally lost the 1914 World Series game that effectively ended his major league career. He also offers a handful of anecdotes and data from new sources that will be of special interest to serious historians. Kashatus's version, however, offers a couple of valuable tidbits sorely lacking in *Chief Bender's Burden*, perhaps reflecting Swift's effort to distinguish the two works. One of the most obvious is Kashatus's inclusion of a tidy chart of Bender's career statistics. Although chapter 23 adeptly discusses Bender's career statistics as a way of contextualizing his place among the greatest baseball players ever, I was quite surprised to find that this baseball researcher did not offer an easily consumable table featuring Bender's numbers and comparing them to contemporaries. Without these, the reader is compelled either to try to compile them using the data strewn across twenty-five chapters or to seek them elsewhere.