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Teaching Taíno: An Interrogation of Puerto Rican Indigenous Education

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Abstract:

Utilizing a combination of available research and literature on Caribbean-Indigenous history and using fourteen interviews with Caribbean-indigenous activists, Puerto Rican educators, and scholars, this project examines the landscape of current curricula around Caribbean-Indigenous history and knowledge in Puerto Rican public schools. While scholars have had a number of debates regarding Indigenous self-identification, none have looked at the best ways to combine emerging research and current activism to provide Puerto Rican students with a more comprehensive understanding of Puerto Rico's Indigenous history and culture. This capstone project determines what Puerto Rican students learn regarding Indigenous history in Puerto Rican public schools to then analyze how emerging research and activism can be incorporated into schools in an effort to provide a more accurate and inclusive representation of Puerto Rico's Indigenous history. To answer both of these questions, literature (related to Puerto Rican Indigenous research, education and activism) was analyzed alongside interview data gained from interviews with fourteen individuals (a combination of scholars, educators and Caribbean-Indigenous activists). Altogether, this project will focus on how current and emerging research can be used alongside the work of activists to develop a set of best practices for Puerto Rican Indigenous education going forward.

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Teaching Taíno: An Interrogation of Puerto Rican Indigenous Education

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Education Studies Capstone

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Abstract

Utilizing a combination of available research and literature on Caribbean-Indigenous history and using fourteen interviews with Caribbean-indigenous activists, Puerto Rican educators, and scholars, this project examines the landscape of current curricula around Caribbean-Indigenous history and knowledge in Puerto Rican public schools. While scholars have had a number of debates regarding Indigenous self-identification, none have looked at the best ways to combine emerging research and current activism to provide Puerto Rican students with a more comprehensive understanding of Puerto Rico's Indigenous history and culture. This capstone project determines what Puerto Rican students learn regarding Indigenous history in Puerto Rican public schools to then analyze how emerging research and activism can be incorporated into schools in an effort to provide a more accurate and inclusive representation of Puerto Rico's Indigenous history. To answer both of these questions, literature (related to Puerto Rican Indigenous research, education and activism) was analyzed alongside interview data gained from interviews with fourteen individuals (a combination of scholars, educators and Caribbean-Indigenous activists). Altogether, this project will focus on how current and emerging research can be used alongside the work of activists to develop a set of best practices for Puerto Rican Indigenous education going forward.

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I stand on the shoulders of the giants that came before me.

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Introduction

The Caribbean-Indigenous peoples of Puerto Rico, commonly referred to as the Taíno, are believed to have gone “extinct” anywhere between the 16th and 19th centuries after Spanish colonization.¹ During the period mentioned, Spaniards would take Taíno women as wives, leading to a *mestizo* (mixed Spanish and Indigenous) population in Puerto Rico that would go on to incorporate creole characteristics with the arrival of enslaved peoples from Africa.² Incorporation of a *mestizo* category within the island’s census began in the 1580s as a response to an increase in individuals with mixed race ancestry.³ In following years, *mestizo* was replaced by *pardo* which would come to define individuals with a mix of Spanish, Indigenous and African ancestry. While *pardos* across Latin America were able to attain status within Spanish ranks, Black and Indigenous peoples were not afforded the same privilege. The 1777 census in Puerto Rico utilized the following racial categories: white, *pardo*, Black (free), Black (enslaved), *mulato* (mixed white and Black ancestry), and *puro indio* (pure Indian). Racial categorization helped the Spanish to maintain control over Black and Indigenous peoples so that they could avoid potential revolts if non-Spanish populations began to overtake Spanish populations on the island.

Gabriel Haslip-Viera, a professor at The City College of New York who specializes in the evolution of Latinx communities in New York City, explains that an interest in Indigenous identification arose in Puerto Rico starting in the 1840s by creole advocates looking for independence as a means of separating themselves from the Spanish elite and creole loyalists.⁴ Indigenous self-identification would not see a significant increase on and off the island of Puerto

¹Pousada, Alicia. "The singularly strange story of the English language in Puerto Rico." *Milenio* 3 (1999), 2.

² Poole, Robert. "What Became of the Taíno." Smithsonian.com. Smithsonian Institution (2011)

³ Ibid

⁴ Haslip-Viera, Gabriel. "The Taíno Identity Movement Among Caribbean Latinas/os in the United States." (Blackwell Publishing, 2007). 418

Rico until the twentieth century when scholars began to use the term Taíno to refer to the Indigenous populations that inhabited the Caribbean islands of Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, Jamaica, Cuba, and the Bahamas.⁵

In 1921, Mark Harrington, a past curator of the Southwest Museum of the American, used the term Taíno to identify Indigenous groups in Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, and Cuba that he believed were “more advanced.”⁶ During the 1940s, Irving B. Rouse, a Caribbean archeologist from Yale University, would go on to use and popularize the term Taíno in the ways utilized by Harrington.⁷ Rouse is often considered the father of Caribbean archeology due to his contributions to the field. As a result of his influence, the term Taíno would go on to represent all Caribbean-Indigenous peoples that once inhabited Puerto Rico. By 1952, Puerto Rico was granted its autonomous status by the United States, leading the governing Popular Democratic Party (PDP) under Luis Muñoz Marín to work intensely in the sphere of cultural interpretation.⁸ Cultural interpretation would go on to be influenced by the past and present work of Puerto Rican and American scholars.

In 1959, the first governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz Marín, would go on to appoint a Puerto Rican scholar, Ricardo Alegría, as head of the newly formed Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP) which was tasked with the creation of a Puerto Rican identity that would be distinct from an American identity and was meant to combat Americanization on the island.⁹ The ICP would go on to follow the ideology of intellectuals who led the creation of a Puerto Rican

⁵ Curet, L. Antonio. “The Taíno: Phenomena, Concepts, and Terms.” *American Society for Ethnohistory* (2014): 472.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ramos, Aaron Gamaliel. “Performing Identity: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Puerto Rico.” *Pouvoirs dans la Caraïbe Revue du Centre de recherche sur les pouvoirs locaux dans la Caraïbe*, no. 14 (2004): 66-67

⁹ Ibid, 69

identity, including scholars like Rouse, to create clear cultural distinctions between the United States and Puerto Rico in the island's early Commonwealth period.¹⁰ As a result of the ICP's incorporation of the past and present work of Puerto Rican and American scholars, the belief that Puerto Rican culture was established through an intersection of Hispanic, Indigenous (specifically Taíno), and African elements remained. The 1960s and 1970s saw a popularization of Taíno self-identification amongst Puerto Ricans on and off the island as a response to years of political tensions and cultural change in the United States¹¹ marked by movements including the Black Power, Women's, and American Indian Movements. By the 1990's, organized groups began to work within the realms of Taíno linguistic, cultural, and religious revitalization. An ever-increasing interest in Taíno identification, as evidenced by a 49 percent increase from 2000 to 2010¹² in those who identified as "American Indian or Alaska Native," serves to preserve the myth of a racial democracy. Gilbert Freyre coined the term racial democracy to describe Brazil's harmonious multiracial society.¹³ Scholars have gone on to apply the concept of racial democracy to countries across Latin America in an effort to describe Latin American countries as post-racial societies in which individuals do not experience racism unlike in the United States.

The myth of racial democracy assumes that due to Latin America's history of intermixing between Europeans, Indigenous peoples and Africans, racism does not exist. Puerto Rican racial democracy discourses assume that, like elsewhere in Latin America, Puerto Ricans are the descendents of African, European, and Indigenous ancestors. As a result, the use of a racial triad

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Haslip-Viera, Gabriel. 418

¹² Poole, Robert. "What Became of the Taíno." Smithsonian.com. Smithsonian Institution (2011)

¹³ Joseph, Tiffany D. "How Does Racial Democracy Exist in Brazil? Perceptions from Brazilians in Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais." *Ethnic and racial studies* 36, no. 10 (2013): 1524.

to further define a unique Puerto Rican cultural identity was born.¹⁴ Historically, the use of a racial triad has served to maintain *mestizaje*, the belief that all individuals in Latin America have mixed ancestry, as a means to preserve the power of white elites.¹⁵ Throughout Puerto Rican history the terms *creole* (a person of African and Spanish ancestry), *mestizo*, *pardo*, European, Black, and *indio* have been used to create a group based hierarchy on the island. Individuals of mixed ancestry, *creole*, *mestizo* or *pardo*, have always had an intermediate social status while those who are whiter maintain the highest social status and those who are seen as non-white or non-mixed usually hold the lowest social status.¹⁶ The use of a racial triad served to maintain the power of white elites while silencing Black and Indigenous-identifying populations.

Research on Taíno ancestry reclamation, linguistic reconstruction, and the activist project of Taíno identification has already been completed. Researchers have also studied Taíno linguistic, cultural, and historical education along with its importance to a variety of stakeholders, with a focus being on activists and politicians. Unfortunately, there is very little consensus on the most appropriate ways of fusing emerging academic findings with Taíno revitalization efforts and Puerto Rican public education to best educate students on the Indigenous peoples that once dominated pre-colonial Puerto Rican culture. For example, the use of the word Taíno as a means of identifying the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean is well documented. Scholars argue that the word Taíno is a Spanish invention used to demand autonomy from Spain in the 19th century¹⁷ and as a self-identifying tool against “U.S. capitalist

¹⁴ Feliciano-Santos, Sherina. "Negotiation of ethnoracial configurations among Puerto Rican Taíno activists." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 7 (2019): 1149.

¹⁵ De la Fuente, Alejandro. "Myths of Racial Democracy: Cuba, 1900-1912." *Latin American Research Review* 34, no. 3 (1999): 43

¹⁶ Peña, Yesilernis, Jim Sidanius, and Mark Sawyer. "Racial Democracy in the Americas." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 35, no. 6 (2004): 106

¹⁷ Galarza, Surrey M. "Complicating Taíno identifications among Puerto Ricans: Rearticulations of the Taíno trope within nationalist identification debates in Puerto Rico," PhD diss. (Binghamton University, 2007). 93

culture.”¹⁸ The term was molded into a means of creating a national identity within Puerto Rico that leaves the door open for Neo-Taíno Nations to reclaim cultural heritage.¹⁹ The above has led to a partial education of Puerto Rican Indigenous history meant to serve the goals of either the Puerto Rican government or activist groups and has closed the door to the incorporation of emerging academic research concerning the Indigenous history of Puerto Rico. Through interviews it became clear that scholars, activists, and educators all had varying opinions on how Indigeneity was manifesting itself in modern day Puerto Rico as a result of how Puerto Ricans are learning about Puerto Rican Indigenous history and culture. Surprisingly, all interviewees, except for those whose histories were non-native to Puerto Rico, believed that they had some connection to an Indigenous identity.

Education is one of the institutions through which a negotiation between identity and state occurs. Public schools are one site within which education can take place (although there are many) and will be the area of focus for this capstone project because it is the most common place where students undergo a negotiation between identity and state starting from a young age. Education has the ability to mold the identity of individuals through subjects such as history and social studies. History and social studies often retell history with an aim for students to understand the past. Unfortunately, most classrooms fail to connect the past with the present and future which can make students uninterested.²⁰ As such, students should be provided with an education that allows them the space for identity formation through the incorporation of new research that can make history and social studies more connected to the lives of students.

¹⁸ Ibid, 94.

¹⁹ Curet, L. Antonio. 473.

²⁰ Van Straaten, Dick, Arie Wilschut, and Ron Oostdam. "Making history relevant to students by connecting past, present and future: A framework for research." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 48, no. 4 (2016): 479.

Background

There has been a growing interest from individuals, families, and organizations composed of Indigenous-identifying individuals from the Caribbean in the history, culture, and genetics of the Caribbean-Indigenous peoples that first inhabited the Caribbean's islands.²¹ As such, recent research has served to provide more insight into the story of Indigenous peoples in Puerto Rico. New research has added strength to the argument that a majority of Puerto Ricans have some form of Taíno ancestry. In 2001, Dr. Juan Martínez- Cruzado, a biologist and professor from the University of Puerto Rico, completed a study in which mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) recovered from Puerto Ricans living in southern and western parts of the island contained DNA that matched DNA derived from the skeletal remains of a Caribbean-Indigenous in Arecibo, Puerto Rico.²² Results from the 2001 study were utilized by individuals who self-identified as having Caribbean-Indigenous ancestry and individuals who were unsure whether they could identify as Indigenous as evidence for the presence of Taíno ancestry amongst Puerto Ricans throughout the island although many scholars believe that the presence of Amerindian DNA is only indicative of mixing. The mtDNA study led many individuals, families, and organizations composed of Indigenous-identifying individuals from Puerto Rico to urge schools to take note of Indigenous contributions to Caribbean history, oppose construction on tribal sites, and seek federal recognition for the Taíno with added land benefits.²³ On the contrary, some experts believe that individuals often referred to as *jibaros*²⁴, farming peoples who live closer to

²¹ "Taíno: Native Heritage and Identity in the Caribbean | Taíno: Herencia e Identidad Indígena En El Caribe." *National Museum of the American Indian*. Smithsonian Latino Center (2018).

²² Martínez-Cruzado, et al. "Mitochondrial DNA analysis reveals substantial Native American ancestry in Puerto Rico." *Human biology* (2001): 501.

²³ Poole, Robert. (2011)

²⁴ Castanha, Tony. *The myth of indigenous Caribbean extinction: Continuity and reclamation in Borikén (Puerto Rico)*. Springer, 2010.

the interior of the island, are actually descendants of indigenous peoples who escaped Spanish rule. Whether or not this is a reality, it is not even a topic that is remotely discussed within public schools. Regardless, an acknowledgment of a still-present Caribbean-Indigenous or Taíno culture by the Puerto Rican government would push back on popular narratives, such as that of Indigenous extinction, perpetuated by the government and could allow these groups the rights to speak for the care of sacred lands.²⁵ Unfortunately, many scholars and activists have dissimilar opinions on the legitimacy of Taíno self-identification.

In contrast to some researchers, such as Gabriel Haslip-Viera, who have argued that the Taíno identity is an invented category, supporters of Taíno identification have argued that Taíno identification is based on cultural background and/or learned knowledge in an attempt to legitimize self-identification while delineating who can identify as such. Some scholars, like Tony Castanha, have attempted to utilize ethnology, an analysis of the cultural relationships, differences, and characteristics of various peoples, as a base for the reclamation of a Taíno identity.²⁶ On the other hand, some Taíno organizations have incorporated the use of oral histories to determine the course of action necessary in reestablishing Taíno culture. For example, the General Council of Taíno (GCT), Guaka-ku (GK) and Liga Taina (LT) have all made use of *The Prophecy of Aura Surey* (a Taíno oral prophecy) to clarify events and histories to allow outsiders into Taíno culture through familiarization with rhetoric, hierarchy and participation.²⁷ Activists hope to teach the history of Indigenous peoples in Puerto Rico through the lens of reconstruction, focusing on elements of culture, language and history. Carlalynne

²⁵ Feliciano-Santos, Sherina. "How do you speak Taino? Indigenous Activism and Linguistic Practices in Puerto Rico." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (2017): 5.

²⁶ Castaña, Tony. "Adventures in Indigenous Resistance, Survival, and Continuity in Boriken"

²⁷ Feliciano-Santos, Sherina. "Prophetic repairs: Narrative and social action among Puerto Rican Taíno." *Language and Communication* 56 (2017): 20

Yarey Melendez, an anthropologist and activist, of the Liga Guakia Taina-Ke believes that anyone in Puerto Rico may have Taíno ancestry but require proper education to reclaim this root.²⁸ Melendez's Taíno educational organization, Naguake, teaches Taíno language and culture in schools in southeastern parts of the island but struggles to spread her teachings across other parts of the island.²⁹ While interviews have been conducted with Taíno activist leaders in the past, interviews have not placed a heavy emphasis on the educational practices of activist groups. Education, whether formal or informal, provides activist groups with a means of expansion and survival in modern-day Puerto Rico.

Some scholars believe that the Caribbean-Indigenous history of Puerto Rico is more complex than others may wish to believe, bringing into question the validity of Taíno identification and the potential utilization of the term Taíno as a vehicle for the erasure of Black Puerto Rican history. A resurgence of Taíno identification is seen as a means of disputing historical and national narratives of Taíno extinction to better preserve a vital aspect of Puertoricanness by those who identify as such.³⁰ A number of scholars believe that the Taíno identification popularized by organizations including the Puerto Rican Institute of Culture (ICP), DIVEDCO and the Department of Public Instruction has paved the way for organizations to undercut the more present African ancestry in Puerto Rico while establishing a route for individuals to claim indigeneity.³¹ Additionally, scholars argue that the Taíno designation was used as the name for the pre-colonial indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean because it assumes homogeneity in cultures across islands and plays on the Spanish stereotype of the Northern

²⁸ Feliciano-Santos. "Negotiation of ethnoracial configurations among Puerto Rican Taíno activists." 1157.

²⁹ Coto, Danica. "In Puerto Rico, a Push to Save Culture from Long Ago." *Smithsonian Tween Tribune* (2015).

³⁰ Feliciano-Santos. "Negotiation of ethnoracial configurations among Puerto Rican Taíno activists." 1149.

³¹ *Ibid*, 1154.

Antilles “noble savage.”³²As such, they believe the term Taíno is dangerously overused and ignores the heterogeneity of the Arawak peoples that once flourished in the Caribbean. In the context of the debate around the role of Taíno identity in Puerto Rico comes the question of how students should learn about Puerto Rican Indigenous history within the Puerto Rican public school system.

Evolving research from scholars has shed some light on the gaps that currently exist within Caribbean-Indigenous education in Puerto Rican schools. For the purposes of this capstone project, Puerto Rican Indigenous education will be defined as the components within Puerto Rican public education that relate to educating students on any aspect of Puerto Rican Indigenous culture and history. Similarly, Caribbean-Indigenous education will be defined as the components within Puerto Rican public education that relate to educating students on any aspect of Caribbean Indigenous culture and history. A distinction between Puerto Rican Indigenous education and Caribbean-Indigenous education is necessary in order to make a distinction between all of the Indigenous groups that once dominated the Caribbean and the specific Indigenous groups that were present in Puerto Rico. Ongoing research is still being conducted by individuals like Dr. Reniel Rodríguez-Ramos, an archeologist from the University of Puerto Rico, in an effort to determine how Indigenous peoples populated Puerto Rico and their interactions with neighboring communities.

Current Taíno education falls in the hands of the Puerto Rican government in schools and Indigenous-identifying activist groups in a variety of settings (in specific schools, outdoors or even at Puerto Rican Indigenous sites). The Puerto Rican Department of Education (PRDE) has had a hand in painting a picture of the Taíno peoples that aligns with the narrative of the “noble

³² Curet, L. Antonio. 473.

savage,” painting them as a people in need of colonization although it is not clear if this portrayal in textbooks is modified by classroom teachers.³³ The PRDE falls under the United States Department of Education and operates in a similar function to any mainland state’s Department of Education. The PRDE is a direct result of the United States mission to Americanize Puerto Ricans. Starting in 1898, the United States established American schools with an “American curriculum” that included the goal of establishing English as the primary language for teaching and learning, a policy that would last until 1948.³⁴ In recent years, the PRDE has moved to representing the Taíno in a more accurate and inclusive representation of Puerto Rico’s Indigenous history³⁵ but has not incorporated newer research due to the predominant use of state sponsored textbooks and other educational materials that are often outdated in their incorporation of new findings that are made (by both scholars and activists). Similarly, Puerto Rican Indigenous education does not incorporate features of Taíno culture identified by activist groups such as components of Taíno cultural revitalization. Without a consolidated pool of information from which to pull from, understandings of Puerto Rican indigenous identification, language, culture and history vary widely depending on the educator. No previous research has combined the worlds of Puerto Rican Indigenous academia and activism and education to determine specific overlaps in practices or beliefs.

³³ Interview with Anidia Santiago, History teacher, Feb. 10, 2021

³⁴ Crucible, Colonial. "Empire in the Making of the Modern American State." *Edited by Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press (2009).*

³⁵ Interview with Anidia Santiago, History teacher, Feb. 10, 2021

Literature Review

Puerto Rican Indigenous History

Having ready access to available information regarding the Indigenous history of Puerto Rico and understanding how this information is constantly evolving through the work of scholars and activists is essential towards reaching a more accurate and inclusive representation of Puerto Rico's Indigenous history. The history of Puerto Rican Indigenous peoples goes as far back as 400 B.C. and begins in the Orinoco Delta in Venezuela where the Arawak peoples originated. Through hundreds of years, these peoples established their presence within the Antilles (the modern-day Caribbean), including Puerto Rico.

It was not until the late 15th and early 16th centuries that Spaniards began to arrive on the island. As a result of their arrival, the Indigenous population within Puerto Rico began to see a significant decline as they were decimated by new diseases and were restricted from utilizing their land for sustenance crops including yuca (a starchy root which resembles a potato) which is still commonly eaten amongst the general Puerto Rican population. Indigenous women were often forced to marry conquistadors due to the enslavement or death of their husbands, leading to the creation of a mestizo population that would ultimately come in contact with enslaved Africans, creating a mestizo population with creole characteristics.^{36,37,38,39} Population data taken by Spaniards in 1514 shows that by the early 16th century nearly 85 percent of the *puro indios* (pure Indians), as Indigenous peoples were recorded on the census, had vanished due to the

³⁶ Poole, Robert. (2011)

³⁷ Rivera-Rideau, Petra R. "From Carolina to Loiza: Race, Place and Puerto Rican Racial Democracy." *Identities* 20, no. 5 (2013): 616.

³⁸ De la Fuente, Alejandro. 43

³⁹ Peña, Yesilernis, Jim Sidanius, and Mark Sawyer. 106

factors previously outlined. Little evidence exists to show that a significant enough population of Puerto Rican Indigenous peoples escaped to the interior of the island to evade Spanish rule. As a result, many current Puerto Rican Indigenous activists (referred to as Neo-Taínos by some) have relied on oral histories to tie them to their Taíno or Caribbean Indigenous identification. Caribbean-Indigenous identity has not only been studied in terms of culture, but also biologically.

In 2001, a study investigating the existence of Amerindian (Indigenous) mtDNA combined with evolving efforts by activists to revive elements of Taíno culture led to the utilization of mtDNA data in support of Taíno identification although the traces of Amerindian DNA discovered are likely present as a result of mixing.⁴⁰ Although most scholars agree that, in biological terms, the Taíno went extinct in approximately the 16th century, the value of Taíno identification holds personal and political power. Many individuals who self-identify as Taíno in the modern day heavily rely on genetic studies that have been completed and show remnants of Amerindian mtDNA within a majority of individuals in Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, mtDNA only displays genetic information for one's maternal line. It has also been well documented that Spaniards would get rid of male Taíno to keep their Taína wives meaning that the genetic information that many are basing claims on may be telling one part of a larger story. As such, tensions exist between the potential biological and cultural qualifications, deemed necessary to varying degrees depending on the individual or organization, for Puerto Rican Indigenous identification.

⁴⁰ Haslip-Viera, Gabriel. "Educating Neo-Tainos Part 1." (City College of New York, 2015).

The Politics of Indigenous Identification

_____The belief that most, if not all, Puerto Ricans have a right to claim Taíno Indigeneity arises from the myth of racial democracy and Puerto Rico's racial triad. The Puerto Rican conception of a racial triad began after American colonization in the early 20th century as a way to claim a different national identity and ethnic homogeneity in direct opposition to the United States.^{41,42} The use of a racial triad has been popularized by members of the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) and the New Progressive Party (NPP) in Puerto Rico who have dominated Puerto Rican politics since its establishment as a Commonwealth (neo-colony).⁴³ The PDP was established in 1938 by Luis Muñoz Marín to solidify colonial dependency on the United States. In 1952, the PDP supported the United States in its decision to establish Puerto Rico as a Commonwealth that would be financially dependent on the United States. The NPP, on the other hand, was formed in 1967 by Puerto Rican statehood advocate Luis Ferré under the belief that Puerto Rico would only progress through a further solidified relationship with the United States in the form of statehood. While neither the PDP nor the NPP have formally endorsed or denied the idea of Taíno self-identification, the creation of the ICP in 1956 helped charter a path towards self-identification.⁴⁴ The ICP had a key role in portraying Puerto Ricans as a community built from the intersection of Hispanic, Indigenous and African elements.⁴⁵ The perceived inherent intersection of the aforementioned groups has allowed Puerto Rico, like many other countries, to fall prey to the myth of a racial democracy. The myth of racial democracy was

⁴¹ Morris, Nancy. *Puerto Rico: Culture, Politics and Identity*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995.

⁴² Godreau, Isar. "Changing Space, Making Race: Distance, Nostalgia, and the Folklorization of Blackness in Puerto Rico, Identities", 9:3, (2002): 283.

⁴³ Anderson, Robert W. "Political Parties and the Politics of Status." *Caribbean Studies* 21, no. 1/2 (1988): 13.

⁴⁴ Dávila Arlene M. *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997.

⁴⁵ Ramos, Aaron Gamaliel. 69

popularized by Gilberto Freyre in an attempt to describe the cultural identity of Brazil under the assumption that due to heavy intermixing, many of the issues around race that were seen in the United States were not present within Latin America.^{46,47,48} Ethnological studies completed within the Caribbean have served to show that the popularization of a Puerto Rican racial democracy by the Puerto Rican government, while acknowledging European, Indigenous and Black ancestry, pushes the inherent goodness of *blanqueamiento* (whitening).^{49,50} While claims of racial harmony predominate popular thought, people who are lighter in the color-race continuum hold strong prejudices against those who are darker.⁵¹ Individuals who appear non-white or non-mixed (containing some white ancestry) are typically marked as socially inferior and undesirable.⁵² As a result, many individuals who are not seen as Black or white fall into a grey area, leaving them to piece their own identities. Puerto Ricans who do not wish to self-identify as Black, due to issues of discrimination, internalized anti-Blackness, or white, due to the belief that their skin color is not light enough, identify as Taíno in an effort to fit the Puerto Rican mold popularized by the ICP. An increase in Taíno-identifying individuals has led to the call for schools to acknowledge Indigenous contribution to Puerto Rican identity, construction to be prohibited on tribal sites and for federal recognition of the Taíno with added benefits.

⁴⁶ Fernandes, Florestan. *A integração Do Negro Na Sociedade De Classes*. São Paulo, Brazil: Dominus Ed., 1965.

⁴⁷ Smith, Thomas Lynn. *Brazil: People and Institutions*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana : Louisiana State University Press, 1963.

⁴⁸ Peña, Yesilernis, Jim Sidanius, and Mark Sawyer. "Racial Democracy in the Americas." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 35, no. 6 (2004): 749.

⁴⁹ Pedreira, Antonio S., Nicolas Kanellos, and Aoife Rivera. Serrano. *Insularismo: an Insight into the Puerto Rican Character*. New York, New York: Ausubo Press, 2005.

⁵⁰ Godreau, Isar P., Mariolga Reyes Cruz, Mariluz Franco Ortiz, and Sherry Cuadrado. "The Lessons of Slavery: Discourses of Slavery, Mestizaje, and Blanqueamiento in an Elementary School in Puerto Rico." *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 1 (2008): 115–35.

⁵¹ Burdick, John. "Myth of Racial Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean." *African American Studies Center*, 2005.

⁵² Quiñones Arcadio Díaz. *El Arte De Bregar Ensayos*. San Juan, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Callejón, 2003.

Although indigeneity within Puerto Rico and the rest of the Caribbean is often placed within a monolith through the popularization of terms such as Taíno, more recent research is emerging to combat claims that were once popularized by Irving Rouse. New research by individuals including Reniel Rodríguez-Ramos and Carmen Laguer Diaz, in the fields of archeology and anthropology has shed light on the precolonial history of Puerto Rico. For instance, Rodríguez-Ramos believes that Rouse's model inappropriately attempts to define Puerto Rican Indigenous history through periods defined by normative cultural elements and their evolution across time including shifts in decorative practices.⁵³ Instead, Rodríguez-Ramos proposes that Puerto Rican Indigenous history should be periodized based on the process of intersocietal interactions that resulted in observed archeological findings.⁵⁴ Similarly, research from Laguer Diaz has provided insight on the process of transculturation, a term coined by Fernando Ortiz in 1940⁵⁵ to describe the merging of cultures across time, as seen through Puerto Rico's archeological record.

Puerto Rican Indigenous Education

Puerto Rican schools currently teach Puerto Rican Indigenous education through a romanticized lens as activists and scholars utilize emerging data to further unravel the story of the island's Indigenous communities. Luckily, educators have the power to shift modes of Puerto Rican Indigenous education. This is evidenced by their early opposition to English language instruction at the beginning of the 20th century that directly countered the PRDE's belief that

⁵³ Ramos, Reniel Rodríguez. "Current Perspectives in the Precolonial Archaeology of Puerto Rico." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*. 2019.

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ortiz, Fernando. "Contrapunteo Cubano del tabaco y el azúcar [Cuban counterpoint: Tobacco and sugar]." *Havana: J Montero* (1940).

English instruction was necessary and led to a lack of English language implementation in public schools.⁵⁶ The PRDE's Indigenous education is limited to some textbook and online materials that try to shed light on the history of the Taíno and other Indigenous communities while continuing to promote the notion of a racial triad.⁵⁷ To clarify, the materials that are provided by the PRDE surrounding Puerto Rican Indigenous education give some background regarding Indigenous social, cultural and religious practices while feeding the idea that Indigeneity solely survived through intermixing. Dissimilarly, activists are working towards a revival of Arawak language, the preservation of Indigenous cultural sites, and establishing preserves for Indigenous-identifying individuals⁵⁸ while scholars have made breakthroughs in the analysis of Puerto Rican mtDNA to link an Indigenous past to modern-day Puerto Ricans. A clear gap exists between the three different pools of information related to Puerto Rican Indigenous education (educators, activists, and scholars). As such, I sought to investigate the overlaps that exist between the aforementioned groups to create a set of best practices for Puerto Rican Indigenous education which may allow educators an avenue for enriching their Indigenous education in the face of increasing Taíno self-identification.

Methodology

This project relies on interview data collected through fourteen interviews with scholars (7), educators (4), and activists (4). One overlap is considered for Dr. Dominique M. David-Chavez who identified as having indigenous ancestry tied to Puerto Rico and has continued to complete academic research within the field of Puerto Rican indigenous research. Scholars have

⁵⁶ Moral, Solsiree del. *Negotiating Empire: the Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898-1952*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013.

⁵⁷ "Portada." Departamento de Educación, November 6, 2020. <https://de.pr.gov/>.

⁵⁸ Feliciano-Santos, Sherina. (2017): 5.

been defined as individuals that are currently doing research or work within the realm of Puerto Rican indigenous history (including archeologists, genealogists, and anthropologists). Educators were defined as individuals currently teaching in a public school within Puerto Rico. Activists were defined as individuals who are currently completing work within the realm of Caribbean indigenous history for the purposes of revitalizing, preserving, or honoring Caribbean indigenous culture. Interviews were conducted via phone or Zoom call in accordance with standards set forth by Yale's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Snowball sampling was also used to recruit a number of participants for this study. Issues relating to the ethics of the interviews were mitigated through a clear description of the work I was completing along with the creation of an easily reproducible process for communicating intentions with interviewees. Communication was key in the creation of a comfortable space for all individuals that became involved in this project. If individuals were not comfortable with lending certain pieces of information towards research even if provided, it was not utilized towards the completion of this project. Preserving the autonomy and control that interviewees have over their interviews was crucial in creating trust between the researcher and the individual being interviewed. An effort was also made to build a rapport with individuals who I would like to interview prior to the interview phase to allow for the most comfortability during interviews.

Interviews were transcribed via Trint and analyzed with a qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, was used to further organize interview data to determine trends across interviews and literature that were utilized within the context of this work. In the findings below, I discuss the central themes that came out across interviews in the areas of identification, existing Puerto Rican Indigenous curriculum, and the ways that Indigenous education within Puerto Rico

can be improved upon to provide Puerto Rican students with a more accurate and inclusive representation of Puerto Rico's Indigenous history.

Findings & Analysis

Opinions on Identification

_____ While scholarly research often presents a strong binary between Puerto Ricans who identify as indigenous and those who do not, interviewees did not seem particularly static in their own beliefs. In fact, a number of interviewees stated that they understand that information is always changing, especially regarding Caribbean indigeneity which has been, in the last few decades, dominated by Western archeology and anthropology. As such, almost all interviewees stated that they were prepared to adapt to new information as it was revealed to them via their work or the work of others. Olga, a public school history teacher from San Germán stated her belief in the power of new information to drive education in schools:

Original: “Los maestros deben capacitarse y educarnos sobre lo que está llegando nuevo. La información es nueva sobre hallazgos arqueológicos pero nos dejamos llevar por los libros de texto que pasan los años y llega un punto en que ya no sirven.”

Translation: “Teachers should educate themselves and build up a capacity concerning new information. New information is available through archeological findings but we often limit ourselves to textbooks which, after years and years pass, become obsolete.”

Surprisingly, no interviewees stated that they believed that the indigeneity of Puerto Rico was gone. Scholars, activists, and educators all had varying opinions on how indigeneity was manifesting itself in modern day Puerto Rico. For example, Dr. Antonio Curet, whose research focus is on cultural and social change in the Ancient Caribbean, stated that he believed mixing on the island is the cause for Indigenous survival in Puerto Rico in comparison to other potential forms of survival through the Caribbean:

“Interracial relationships and dynamics were different in the Dominican Republic and Cuba. It’s not that there is no racism in Puerto Rico, because we have it, but there was more mixing.”

On the other hand, activists like Tai Pelli, a leader of the United Confederation of Taíno People and the Caribbean Amerindian Development organization, have familial ties to an Indigenous identity:

“I’ve always known that I was Indigenous. I know the people that I was coming from. I was raised with my grandparents and my great grandmother so there was no question in my identity.”

Those who self identified as being of Caribbean-Indigenous descent felt that they had a direct ancestral tie to indigeneity that has persisted over the years via their relatives. Many Indigenous-identifying interviewees told stories of a relatives who would provide oral histories or other evidence of Indigenous ancestry that further solidified their identities:

“My ancestry comes through my mother, through my grandfather, my great grandmother. The other family members are also Indigenous. I mean, we have a multi heritage ancestry. I think my mother mostly identifies as Afro Caribbean and indigenous, and some of the family talk about it and some of them don't.” - Dominique M. David-Chavez

“I've identified as Taíno my entire life since I was five years old, and started with a conversation that I had with my grandmother back then in the Dominican Republic.” - Jorge Estevez, leader of Higuayagua: Taíno of the Caribbean

Lastly, information that students are learning through the current curriculum should be connected to the present more effectively due to potential benefit to student livelihood. As Tai Pelli stated:

“We cannot compare indigeneity with a Eurocentric understanding.”

According to Tai, Eurocentric views are focused on fractioning identities while indigenous people “see being as a totality” meaning that an indigenous identity cannot be taken away from you regardless of factors such as intermixing. Intermixing in the Eurocentric view represents a diminishing of ancestry that can be taken away after generations, as is often argued occurred with the indigenous peoples who were present on the island prior to and during Spanish rule. One way that the idea of total indigenous extinction (culturally, genetically, traditionally, and

linguistically) can be combated is by finding ways to connect information that students are learning with the present.

The present and past can be in conversation in a number of ways including the utilization of traditionally indigenous practices to combat everyday ailments and issues. Many of the indigenous practices that have been passed down through generations (either due to ancestral ties or other proximity to indigenous traditions) will be lost to time. As Po Araní, head of the Indigenous Collective of Boriken and the Caribbean stated:

Original: “Le damos la tecnología más importancia, a lo de afuera, pero no integramos de nosotros entonces.

Translation: “We give technology great importance, to what comes from outside (of the island), but we don’t integrate our own knowledge.”

On the other hand, most scholars interviewed, all of whom but two were Puerto Rican, believed that they had ties to indigeneity that were ancestral, but that they could not claim an indigenous identity due to a lack of personal connection with indigenous traditions and stories:

“My family does not have any particular connection to our Indigenous past that is stronger than the connection that we have to our African ancestors and our European ancestors so I cannot say, as some other families can say, that they have knowledge that is being passed down.” - Maria Nieves Colón

“I started thinking more about that sort of indigenous connection and my grandfather but I usually have a stronger connection with my father's side and it's that African connection.” - Carmen Laguer Diaz

Some of the scholars interviewed for this study included Carmen Laguer Diaz, Maria Nieves-Colón, Antonio Curet, and Reniel Rodriguez-Ramos, who work in the fields of archeology and anthropology. Similarly, educators believed that indigenous peoples were the first inhabitants of Puerto Rico and likely their oldest ancestors. As such, they believed that an education that is relevant to whatever region in which it is being taught within was most necessary. To elaborate, many individuals who state that there has been indigenous survival on the island that goes beyond the sixteenth century specifically believe that indigenous peoples could have easily moved into the central and more inland areas of Puerto Rico to avoid capture by the Spanish. As a result, any curriculum that is designed to effectively address current issues in indigenous education should address the needs and histories of individual communities. Overall, the opinions related to an indigenous identification that came across through interviews went on to directly combat the strong binary often presented through scholarly research between Puerto Ricans who identify as indigenous. A majority of materials that were referenced and focused on Caribbean-Indigenous identification made it appear as if dissenters of indigenous self-identification in Puerto Rico did not believe that they had any connection to Caribbean Indigeneity. Surprisingly, all individuals, except for those whose histories were non-native to Puerto Rico, believed that they had some connection to indigeneity.

Improving Puerto Rican Indigenous Education

Across all interviews, scholars, activists, and educators alike agreed that they saw a need to incorporate new research on Puerto Rican Indigeneity into current models of education.

William Keegan, Curator of Caribbean Archeology and professor of anthropology, stated:

“I would like to see more of a focus on informal education and writing articles for newspapers, writing articles for magazines, writing articles, blogs. It helps getting information out there in the hands of the public to sort of educate them without them realizing it, because then that makes the information more accessible than when it's presented in other ways.”

Educators including Joaquin Faria, Associate Dean of Student Affairs at the Pontifical Catholic University in Puerto Rico, believe that Puerto Rican Indigenous history is not currently well taught:

Original: “A lo largo de todo su tiempo [en la escuela] el conocimiento que [los estudiantes] de la historia de Puerto Rico en general y de la cultura indígena en particular es bien deficiente.”

Translation: “Throughout all of their time [in school] the understanding that [students] have concerning general Puerto Rican history and Indigenous culture, particularly, is very deficient”

Activists, including Dominique M. David-Chavez, see the importance of Puerto Rican Indigenous history in the lives of both self-identifying and non-Indigenous identifying individuals:

“We have to keep learning what's been forgotten, what's been dormant and sleeping to bring it back. And to value it, like anyone who lives on the island now should be learning the indigenous history, even if they don't identify indigenous like that's where they live.”

Whether individuals referred to research being completed by Caribbean Indigenous activists, by other scholars, or even themselves depended on the individual's relationship with a Caribbean-Indigenous identity. Regardless, all individuals believed that incorporating new research into current educational practices would best serve the needs of students in contextualizing a history and present influence on Puerto Rican culture that is marked by indigeneity. The types of research that were deemed as most necessary include the mtDNA analyses that have been conducted in Puerto Rico, botanical and ecological research, archeological research, linguistic research and ethnographic research to name a few. All pieces of research are meant to serve a different purpose in contextualizing the indigenous education that is currently being provided to students on the island. According to Dr. Hannes Schroeder, who works within the realm of ancient DNA and molecular anthropology, a proper explanation of the story mtDNA tells would allow individuals to see that the story of indigeneity in Puerto Rico did not stop after the arrival of Columbus as students are often told within Puerto Rican public schools. Unfortunately, many

interviewees expressed the feeling that little change would be made in the near future due to the frequency at which changes are made to the public school general curriculum.

Many of the scholars that were interviewed for this study had attended Puerto Rican public schools and were able to comment on their own experience in Puerto Rican Indigenous education that dated back to the nineties. Individuals including Dr. Rodriguez-Ramos remembered that Puerto Rican indigenous education was often limited to being taught one month out of the year and that provided material served only to perpetuate the myth of the noble savage:

Original: “Los estudiantes leen sobre los indígenas y se aprende una serie de palabras, de conceptos, una cronología pero no se problematizan en aspectos de las sociedades indígenas como, por ejemplo, las relaciones de género, de la importancia de los avances de esa sociedad, de cómo se pudieron haber dado las interacciones con otros grupos.”

Translation: “Students read about Indigenous peoples and learn a series of words, concepts and a chronology but aspects related to, for example, gender relations, the importance of advancements made by those societies, and how they came to interact with other groups.”

Dr. Rodriguez-Ramos spoke at length about the differences in descriptions that are utilized when describing indigenous peoples and communities. He highlighted that while the Taíno of Puerto Rico are seen as passive and kind, the Caribes, who have been determined by some as being a separate indigenous community from the Caribbean, are depicted as barbaric

and cannibalistic. The caricaturization of indigenous communities does not serve to educate individuals but to maintain a hierarchical structure within which colonial influence can persist. Many scholars and educators believed it was no surprise that Indigenous and African histories are often minimized but believed that there needs to be a change in how indigeneity is taught about so that it can be properly contextualized for students.

According to educators like Olga and Jessica, who were interviewed for this study, students and educators are no longer limited by having to utilize only books to receive valuable information regarding newer work that is being done and that can be incorporated into the classroom. Unfortunately, an issue identified by public school educators was that students often learn the same things from one year to the next. Students learn about the Taíno in elementary and high school. Within the context of elementary school, students learn about how the Taíno are Puerto Rico's first inhabitants but are limited in the detail that is used to describe them. Dr. Laguer Diaz of Valencia College noted her experiences in public school during times when they would learn about indigenous and African histories in Puerto Rico:

“We are taught that we are these three monoliths together and then only the Spanish side is being reinforced. This was pretty much the case throughout the 90s, at least when I was in the K-12 system. But at the same time, being portrayed, you know, during March for the abolition of slavery, it was like we're going to do a pageant and we need kids that look African-ish. And so it's like you go. And then in November, we need kids that look at indigenous. Blow dry your hair and you go. So having that sort of constant back and forth.”

The pageantry that still occurs in elementary schools throughout Puerto Rico may be well intentioned but serve to provide an improper context to students during a critical time in the

formation of their own identities. Dr. Laguer Diaz went on to describe an experience that her own niece had within the context of Puerto Rican public schools:

“She wanted to be part of the African group, but she has, like, really straight hair and they didn’t let her. And she was frustrated that she couldn’t. And so she started trying to ask her mom to curl her hair so she could be more African and... that was frustrating. She shouldn’t feel that way, so I started sending her pictures of African women with straight straight hair and just basically told her it doesn’t matter. You feel how you feel because... I remember that moment of a teacher saying ‘You’re in this group because of this’.”

An improper contextualization and utilization of the racial triad that has been popularized in Puerto Rico can serve to do more harm than good by complicating student self-identity. Dr. David-Chavez, who has done work with indigenous-identifying Puerto Rican communities, worked directly with Yarey Melendez and the Naguake Indigenous Education Program. During her time working with Yarey, Dr. David-Chavez helped conduct surveys with students to identify whether they knew what words commonly used in Puerto Rico to refer to animals and plants had an indigenous (Arawak) origin. To her surprise, students identified that they did not know of any words that had such origins. Once Dr. David-Chavez shared a few of the words that she had listed as having an indigenous origin, students shared that they were never told. Many of the words that are typically utilized in Puerto Rico, including words like “mamey” and “huracán,” have roots in indigenous linguistic practices. Student knowledge is often limited to what they learn within school, leading to an emphasis on Spanish culture that is not just observed within schools, but seeps into the daily lives of individuals. A more appropriate contextualization of information that is provided within schools would serve to best meet the needs of students.

Moving into middle and high school, students learn slightly more regarding indigeneity in Puerto Rico and beyond. Students gain some further context regarding Puerto Rican indigenous history and culture but, according to Olga and Jessica, students become bored of the material. While some new context is added to the Indigenous history that students had been learning from a young age, students become bored because they are presented with the same material they have already seen. As such, the incorporation of newer works would allow for a potentially more engaging curriculum. The only challenge that Dr. Joaquin Faria of the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico saw in relation to the incorporation of newer research into mainstream classrooms was the burden of bureaucracy and current misinformation. Dr. Faria described that one lie he has heard time and again is that Columbus arrived in Puerto Rico during his first voyage when in reality he arrived in the Dominican Republic and not Puerto Rico at all. According to Dr. Faria, the second trip was a “a trip for conquest” due to Columbus’ arrival with seventeen ships. Dr. Faria believes that minimizing the actual intentions of Columbus during his second voyage only serves to undermine truth. Puerto Rican political discourse has become so tightly interwoven with the educational system and the Puerto Rican cultural identity that information changes every few years in accordance with shifting political powers while it takes ten or more years for textbooks to play catch up with new research. Fortunately, a variety of ways to engage students with indigeneous history exist in Puerto Rico.

Indigenous Spaces Outside Of the Classroom

The National Park Service has 27 listed historical sites that individuals can go to free of charge including colonial architecture and indigenous sites. On top of the many Indigenous Ceremonial Centers that are available to the public within many parts of the island including

places like Tibes, Puerto Rican educators can make use of physical hands-on learning and familial ties to stories of Indigeneity. For example, both Dr. William Keegan and Jorge Estevez have both used a suitcase or box as a teaching tool containing key elements of indigenous culture from the Caribbean in the Bahamas and the National Museum of the American Indian respectively. Within these boxes, they have been able to engage students by putting them in conversation with Indigenous primary source materials. For Jorge, something as simple as connecting the yuca root and the use of conch shells to indigenous culture was enough to engage students. Educators may find it increasingly difficult to find the appropriate materials to use for such hands-on learning but may rely on other sources including historical sites, museums, or activist presentations. A number of historical sites are available to better tell the story of Indigeneity and Puerto Rican history as a whole. Museums allow for students to be in conversation with the past in a way that can help to activate their critical thinking, allowing students to achieve better historical understanding.⁵⁹ Presentations once done by Carlalynne Yarey Melendez would also allow students to engage with history through the use of Indigenous instruments⁶⁰, allowing students a hands-on experience that is afforded by the box/suitcase concept. The box/suitcase which Dr. Keegan utilizes to create a more “hands-on” approach to learning about indigeneity in the context of the Bahamas containing over fifty items. Some of the items contained therein are related to food, tools, and artifacts from the indigenous populations of the Bahamas. While hands-on boxes create an environment in the school setting in which students can physically engage with materials related to questions of indigeneity, students may also benefit from applying concepts of Indigeneity to their own personal context. Having the

⁵⁹ Wunder, Susan. “Learning to Teach for Historical Understanding: Preservice Teachers at a Hands-on Museum”, *The Social Studies*, 93:4, (2002) 159-163.

⁶⁰ Coto, Danica. “In Puerto Rico, a Push to Save Culture from Long Ago.” *Smithsonian Tween Tribune* (2015).

capacity to interrogate identity without thrusting students into an unfamiliar space would be valuable in the context of Puerto Rico.

Conducting interviews is another technique students can use to connect to Indigenous heritage. During her time in Puerto Rico and when determining the most effective manner to conduct community-based research, Dr. David-Chavez had students engage in conducting interviews to gain experience speaking with community elders. Oftentimes, the only individuals who have ancestral knowledge concerning a relation to Caribbean indigeneity are community elders. As such, it is beneficial for students to speak with them so that they can, for themselves, learn about the lived experiences of others and the reasons for their identification. In this way, Indigeneity is not minimized to a remnant of the past and students engage with material that may be vital in their own identity formation. Even if one is against Taíno or indigenous self identification, there is a benefit to having students learn from individuals who may have knowledge connected to an indigenous present, rather than past, in Puerto Rico. Schools tend to teach that the indigenous inhabitants of Puerto Rico no longer exist, likely leading students to become bored of material that is not relevant to their day to day lives. By speaking with members of their community who may identify in a number of ways, students can learn to interrogate information that they are receiving even if not done in what would be considered an academically rigorous manner.

Creating materials that engage students with questions of Puerto Rican indigeneity may allow students a path towards being more informed and avoid passing on misinformation. A misrepresentation of Indigenous populations could unintentionally, or intentionally, promote the continued use of a monolith, as is currently seen with the term Taíno. As Dr. Antonio Curet states:

“We have to protect the archeological record and we cannot misrepresent the people where we're talking about or investigating. We cannot misrepresent them.”

An interrogation of all materials that are being provided to students and building habits that promote critical thinking would aid in mitigating the issues of misinformation aforementioned. Dr. Rodriguez-Ramos believes that bringing truth to Puerto Rico's indigenous history would help to undermine some of the potentially harmful beliefs that individuals hold. For example, many individuals believe that the cacique (leader) of all indigenous tribes were males and that males played the largest role in the sustenance and maintenance of a tribe. In reality, Dr. Rodriguez-Ramos described that indigenous women in Puerto Rico were the real tribal leaders. According to him, it has been found that relationships between individuals in a tribe were determined via their maternal line. Indigenous women were also found to be warriors, caciques, and even navigators. A more accurate depiction of indigenous women and colonial emergence in Puerto Rico were only made possible through the interrogation of materials that were previously sold as fact. As such, students should learn to critically engage with materials so that they can become experts in detecting, analyzing, and critiquing any misinformation that is provided to them.

Curricular Models

Several individuals interviewed and present organizations offer inspiration for how to provide students with an accurate, appropriate, and contextualized model for teaching Puerto Rican Indigenous history. In order to properly critique provided materials and information, students must have the time to properly digest the information that is being presented. Across all

interviews, the problem that became clearest in relation to indigenous education within Puerto Rico was the lack of time that was allocated to the topic. In seventh and tenth grade, students take Puerto Rican history. In tenth grade, the information that was provided to students beginning in seventh grade is meant to be contextualized further. Unfortunately, there is only one month in the fall, typically October, for teaching indigenous history. Similarly, only one month is allocated to the African history of Puerto Rico in the month of March. One month, in the eyes of interviewees, is not enough to cover the five thousand years of precolonial history that are present in Puerto Rico.

Some individuals like Jorge and Dr. David-Chavez believe that some linguistic components should be incorporated into public education if at all possible, even as an elective course (as is seen offered in some US high schools through Ethnic or Indigenous studies courses), so students have increased opportunity to engage with topics that matter to them. Alternatively, some individuals like Dr. Laguer-Diaz believe that the entire curriculum may benefit from restructuring altogether. For example, she suggests that students should begin by first learning about Puerto Rican Indigeneity and then moving into an elaboration on the colonization period of Puerto Rico and its effects. Regardless of what changes are made in the future to Puerto Rican public school Indigenous education, students are not benefiting from the current curriculum in achieving an accurate and inclusive representation of Puerto Rican Indigenous history and culture.

A number of individuals interviewed, including Po, highlighted some of the ways that indigenous knowledge can be used to the benefit of all Puerto Ricans. Po, specifically, told a story that relates to some of the issues individuals were facing when Hurricane Maria hit the island in 2017. Po spoke of a diabetic woman who he heard had passed away due to a lack of

access to insulin. Po stated that the diabetic woman could have utilized a number of plants that he had been studying to effectively combat her issue. Similarly, a number of individuals made mention of Puerto Rico's tendency towards natural disaster as a result of its tropical climate and geographic location. Dr. Nieves Colon, an anthropological geneticist from the University of Minnesota, suggested that maybe indigenous traditions could provide a way for Puerto Ricans to combat issues that they will have to continue facing while still living on the island. She made mention of utilizing indigenous knowledge to potentially combat or mitigate damage from hurricanes that ravage the island every year. She also stated that there may be a potential means of combating rising sea levels since it is an issue that indigenous populations likely had to face as well in the past.

The Naguake educational program ran in the central and southeast regions of the island in 12 schools. The Naguake program could serve as a model for incorporating the work of some Caribbean-Indigenous identifying activists to effectively utilize oral histories and emerging research (such as linguistic research) to provide students a wider breadth of knowledge they can interrogate. An inclusion of indigenous research could allow for a better incorporation of research methods that can go towards validating the informal work that individuals are doing. While much of the work that is being done is deemed as "non-academic," the work that individuals have done regarding aspects of indigeneity, including the linguistic work of individuals such as Dr. David-Chavez and Jorge, could allow for a means to jointly collaborate with schools to ensure an effective incorporation of new data.

A basis for a totally new curriculum may not even be necessary due to the work of scholars and activists alike. Tai Pelli shared that she had created a curriculum with friends from Fajardo, Puerto Rico on Taíno history and culture for a magnet school. She stated that students

enjoyed the material so much that her team went on to teach about Afro-Caribbean history in Puerto Rico at the same school. Utilizing already created curricula and simply adapting it to the appropriate setting in which students are learning would allow for an easier curricular transition since no reinventing needs to occur, only an incorporation of relevant and accurate materials. Materials related to indigeneity within the Caribbean are becoming increasingly available. Dr. Keegan is currently developing a teaching module for The Bahamas Ministry of Education that directly links DNA and archeology in an accurate yet interesting way for students in sixth through ninth grade. Similarly, Dr. Schroeder's work with ancient DNA has been crucial in developing educational materials as part of the University of Leiden's NEXUS 1492 project. NEXUS 1942 made a utilization of data from their research to create fun educational materials for students including pot reconstruction simulations and a boat navigation simulator based on modern conceptions of how Caribbean-Indigenous individuals navigate across the islands of the Caribbean. The information that is necessary to build an effective curriculum is already out there and simply needs to be incorporated into the current system of Puerto Rican education. Unfortunately, I will be placing a heavier focus on best practices that can potentially be utilized to most effectively tell the Indigenous story of Puerto Rico with the limits placed on teachers by the system within which they are functioning.

Limitations

Some of the individuals interviewed wrote a number of the texts that are being utilized for this project, potentially leading to an overrepresentation of their ideas that would have been better highlighted in contrast with opinions from other scholars. Unfortunately, a large number of texts directly related to the area of research in question (indigenous education in Puerto Rico)

were not found. To combat this issue, and potentially leading to the aforementioned potential overrepresentation of some opinions, many of the individuals who were selected for interviews were some of the most prominent figures or emerging figures in their field.

Another limitation that can be described is the lack of research that there has specifically been on how indigeneity is taught about in public schools. As part of this project, only three educators were interviewed due to the difficulty of attaining contacts. If a larger number of current educators were interviewed, the suggestions and recommendations provided would be better backed. Since scholar opinions are so well represented, a follow-up study could be completed wherein only public school educators are interviewed. A greater number of educators representing a variety of school years and places in Puerto Rico would allow for a better look at grade-specific trends to determine sets of best practices for each grade level rather than a general list of recommendations related to teaching Puerto Rican indigenous history.

Conclusion

The current ways in which Puerto Rican Indigenous history is taught serve the goals of the Puerto Rican government and have closed the door to the incorporation of emerging academic research concerning the Indigenous history of Puerto Rico. Education is one of the institutions through which a negotiation between identity and state occurs and has the ability to mold the identity of individuals through subjects such as history and social studies. As such, students should be provided with an education that allows them the space for identity formation through the incorporation of new research that can make history and social studies more connected to the lives of students.

The above content has spanned literature, interviews, and interrogations of both forms of data in relation to Puerto Rican Indigenous education. Through the work, it has become clear that there is a need for change in the ways that students are currently learning about Indigenous populations (past and present). Below I will provide and support three best practices in relation to how Puerto Rican indigenous education should be taught:

1. Move beyond the noble savage narrative by incorporating new research into current curriculum
2. Incorporate new teaching techniques
3. Allocate more time to teaching about Puerto Rican Indigenous history

Incorporate New Research into Current Practices

To begin, the incorporation of new research related to the history, culture, and traditions of Caribbean-Indigenous peoples would aid in challenging a colonial narrative that still dominates Puerto Rican cultural identity. As such, the only individuals within Puerto Rico who were present prior to colonization were Caribbean-Indigenous peoples whose history can be traced up to five thousand years before first contact with Spain and the subsequent occupation that took place by the United States. Current Puerto Rican Indigenous history is taught statically, as if many of the practices that were once utilized no longer exist. Public education in Puerto Rico is currently limited in its retelling of its Indigenous story due to a lack of incorporated research.

New material cannot be provided to students without their proper and appropriate contextualization. Due to the improper contextualization of Dr. Juan Martinez- Cruzado's 2001 mtDNA paper, many who once did not believe they could claim Indigeneity are now claiming it

on the basis of DNA alone. Although mtDNA serves the purposes of activists by providing some evidence of ancestry as well, many believe that DNA is not the only thing that can allow an individual to claim Caribbean-Indigenous ancestry but that individuals must better inform themselves so they can better lay claim to an Indigenous identity, as previously described. As has been revealed throughout a number of interviews, some Puerto Ricans who are seen as points of authority, like educators, might be acting as gatekeepers without intending due to an improper contextualization of what is being taught. As such, a proper contextualization of newly incorporated material would allow for students to properly interrogate their own identities in a safe space, altogether avoiding the “identity crises” that Dr. Curet stated that many Puerto Ricans today are facing due to an American influence on Puerto Rican racial definitions.

Indigenous education can be made more engaging by incorporating hands-on and experiential learning in Puerto Rican public schools. As a result, a more engaging means of tackling the materials that students are learning may serve to benefit educators that are looking to re-engage their students. The National Park Service has 27 listed historical sites that individuals can go to free of charge including colonial architecture and indigenous sites. Historical sites could provide students with a physical context for learning about the interactions between Indigenous peoples and colonial powers on the island throughout history. At Indigenous historical sites, students would have the ability to view how the Indigenous peoples of Puerto Rico once lived and the variety of cultural features that have been passed down to modern-day Puerto Rican culture. In a similar way, Dr. David-Chavez has enabled a connection of the past and present by allowing students to utilize real-world interview skills to gain knowledge from individuals in their communities. If one is unable to go to historical sites or engage students with their elders, one could utilize some of the activities organizations like NEXUS 1492 have created

based on the research such as their rowboat and pot reconstruction games to begin discussions related to Puerto Rican Indigeneity.

Students must be asked to engage critically with the material they are being given or they will find little reason to retain the information that is being provided to them, meaning they will likely forget what was taught to begin with. A student will likely forget learning something that is simply told to them in a history or social studies classroom without a proper contextualization of the history they are learning through the incorporation of physical and research-based materials. Knowing that in seventh and tenth grade Puerto Rican Indigenous history is almost covered the same, it is clear that students within these different stages will require different ways of learning and engaging with the material to better serve their increased capacity for engagement as they grow older. Students who are older may require more rigorous work to better engage with material through activities such as the interviewing activity described previously or through presentations. Regardless, students would benefit from being asked to engage critically with the materials they are being provided through a variety of activities.

Students cannot begin to build an appropriate understanding of Puerto Rico's Indigenous history and present without having the appropriate allocation of time to fully interrogate all available resources in a manner that is respectful towards telling the story of Indigenous Puerto Rico. A quick glance at Puerto Rico's Department of Education website shows a limited amount of materials that are provided within the one month period of Puerto Rican Indigenous education in the fall. According to scholars and educators interviewed for this project, one month is not nearly enough time to gain a comprehensive understanding of the legacy and history of Indigenous peoples in Puerto Rico. Considering the opinions of interviewees, schools may benefit from dividing Indigenous, African, and colonial histories in Puerto Rico across the three-

year period that cycles through Puerto Rican history, American history, and world history. The three-year cycle described, which repeats after ninth grade, may benefit from not being cyclical altogether. A consideration may be to place a heavier emphasis on Indigenous, African and colonial histories after ninth grade once students are better able to grasp and interrogate information that is given to them. More of an emphasis should be placed on Indigenous, African, and colonial interactions in Puerto Rico to allow students to better determine their own forms of identity. An essential component to proper identity development will not be possible if an appropriate amount of time is not allocated to education, leading to a populace that will only continue highlighting whiteness as an essential component to the Puerto Rican identity while diminishing the contributions of African and Indigenous ancestors.

Lastly, students need to be capable of connecting what they are learning about the past with the present. Throughout the many interviews conducted, something that continually became apparent was that much of the Indigenous ancestral knowledge that could be utilized in Puerto Rico to aid all individuals on the island, regardless of identity, is being lost as a result of ignorance. While some individuals who claim Indigenous identity have been described as “fanatics” by others, many have a deep connection to the ancestral knowledge that was once present throughout the island in precolonial times. For example, Po had an extensive knowledge of the many plants that are in Puerto Rico and could be utilized to heal the ailments of individuals. Similarly, many individuals spoke of how knowledge from the past can be utilized to combat hurricanes since indigenous peoples had to deal with similar weather conditions in pre-colonial Caribbean. If students can begin to connect the past and the present, they will be able to push Puerto Rico forward. Students will only have the ability to gain a more accurate and inclusive representation of Puerto Rico’s Indigenous history if Puerto Rican Indigenous

education begins to incorporate new research and teaching methods while also allocating more time for the subject.

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Sample Interview Questions

Activists:

1. How did you get started in Taíno activism?
 - a. Do you identify as having Taíno heritage?
 - b. What organization do you currently work with on the island and where is it located?
 - c. What have been some issues that you have worked on during your involvement in activism?
2. What educational work has your organization been involved with?
 - a. What does outreach from your organization to the general public look like?
 - b. What does outreach from your organization to K-12 students look like?
 - c. What is the impact of the educational work that you have done?
3. How would you characterize what Puerto Rican students learn in K-12 schools about the Taíno people?
 - a. What differences, if any, have you observed in the way younger students learn about the Taíno compared to older students?
 - b. What change have you seen over time in the way students learn about the Taíno?
 - c. What do you believe is missing from mainstream curriculum concerning the Taíno?
4. How do you think current Taíno education can be improved upon?
 - a. What requirements should there be for Taíno language instruction?
 - b. What should students be learning in school about the Taíno?
 - i. Should they be learning elsewhere? Why?
 - c. Would your ideal curriculum be standardized across the island? Why?
 - i. Should curriculum be limited to students who are Taíno identifying? Why?
5. Tell me about what you think regarding the connection, if any, that exists between educating students on Taíno history and Puerto Rico's future?

Scholars:

1. How did you get started in research surrounding Taíno Indigeneity?
 - a. Do you identify as having Taíno heritage?
 - b. Are you for or against Taíno self-identification? Why?
 - c. What have been some questions concerning Taíno Indigeneity that you have focused on through your research?
2. How would you characterize what Puerto Rican students learn in K-12 schools about the Taíno people?
 - a. What differences, if any, have you observed in the way younger students learn about the Taíno compared to older students?
 - b. What change have you seen over time in the way students learn about the Taíno?
 - c. What do you believe is missing from mainstream curriculum concerning the Taíno?
3. How do you think current Taíno education can be improved upon?
 - a. What should students be learning in school about the Taíno?

4. Tell me about what you think regarding the connection, if any, that exists between educating students on Taíno history and Puerto Rico's future?

Educators:

1. How did you get started in teaching social studies/history?
 - a. What grade level do you currently teach?
 - b. Do you identify as having Taíno heritage?
 - c. Where is your school located in Puerto Rico?
2. How would you characterize what Puerto Rican students learn in K-12 schools about the Taíno people?
 - a. What differences, if any, have you observed in the way younger students learn about the Taíno compared to older students?
 - b. What change have you seen over time in the way students learn about the Taíno?
 - c. Has the way you have been required to ask students to engage with material concerning Taíno Indigeneity changed over the years?
 - d. How have your students been asked to engage with material concerning Taíno Indigeneity in recent years?
 - e. What do you believe is missing from mainstream curriculum concerning the Taíno?
3. How do you think current Taíno education can be improved upon?
 - a. What should students be learning in school about the Taíno?
 - i. Should they be learning elsewhere? Why?
 - b. Would your ideal curriculum be standardized across the island? Why?
 - i. Should curriculum be limited to students who are Taíno identifying? Why?
4. Tell me about what you think regarding the connection, if any, that exists between educating students on Taíno history and Puerto Rico's future?

Preguntas de entrevista

Activistas:

1. ¿Cómo te iniciaste en el activismo Taíno?
 - a. ¿Te identificas con herencia taína?
 - b. ¿Con cuál organización trabaja en la isla y dónde está ubicada?
 - c. ¿Cuáles han sido algunos de los temas en los que ha trabajado durante su participación en el activismo?
2. ¿En qué labor educativa ha estado involucrada su organización?
 - a. ¿Cómo es el alcance de su organización al público en general?
 - b. ¿Cómo es el alcance de su organización a los estudiantes de K-12?
 - c. ¿Cuál es el impacto de la labor educativa que ha realizado?
3. ¿Cómo caracterizaría lo que los estudiantes puertorriqueños aprenden en las escuelas K-12 sobre el pueblo Taíno?
 - a. ¿Qué diferencias, si las hay, ha observado en la forma que los estudiantes más jóvenes aprenden sobre los Taíno en comparación con los estudiantes mayores?
 - b. ¿Qué cambio ha visto a lo largo del tiempo en la forma en que los estudiantes aprenden sobre los Taíno?
 - c. ¿Qué cree que falta en el plan de estudios general sobre los taínos?
4. ¿Cómo cree que se puede mejorar la educación taína actual?
 - a. ¿Qué requisitos debe haber para la instrucción del idioma Taíno?
 - b. ¿Qué deberían aprender los estudiantes en la escuela sobre los Taíno?
 - i. ¿Deberían estar aprendiendo en otro lugar? ¿Por qué?
 - c. ¿Su plan de estudios ideal estaría estandarizado en toda la isla? ¿Por qué?
 - i. ¿Debería el currículo limitarse a los estudiantes que se identifican como Taíno? ¿Por qué?
5. Cuénteme qué piensa acerca de la conexión, si la hay, que existe entre educar a los estudiantes sobre la historia taína y el futuro de Puerto Rico.

Académicos:

1. ¿Cómo se inició en la investigación sobre la indigeneidad taína?
 - a. ¿Te identificas con herencia taína?
 - b. ¿Está usted a favor o en contra de la auto identificación taína? ¿Por qué?
 - c. ¿Cuáles han sido algunas preguntas sobre la indigeneidad taína en las que se ha centrado a través de su investigación?
2. ¿Cómo caracterizaría lo que los estudiantes puertorriqueños aprenden en las escuelas K-12 sobre el pueblo Taíno?
 - a. ¿Qué diferencias, si las hay, ha observado en la forma que los estudiantes más jóvenes aprenden sobre los taínos en comparación con los estudiantes mayores?
 - b. ¿Qué cambio ha visto a lo largo del tiempo en la forma en que los estudiantes aprenden sobre los Taíno?
 - c. ¿Qué cree que falta en el plan de estudios general sobre los taínos?
3. ¿Cómo cree que se puede mejorar la educación taína actual?
 - a. ¿Qué deberían aprender los estudiantes en la escuela sobre los Taíno?
4. Cuénteme qué piensa acerca de la conexión, si la hay, que existe entre educar a los estudiantes sobre la historia taína y el futuro de Puerto Rico.

Educadores:

1. ¿Cómo empezaste a enseñar estudios sociales/historia?
 - a. ¿Qué nivel de grado enseñas actualmente?
 - b. ¿Te identificas con herencia taína?
 - c. ¿Dónde está ubicada su escuela en Puerto Rico?
2. ¿Qué piensas sobre lo que los estudiantes puertorriqueños aprenden en las escuelas K-12 sobre el pueblo Taíno?
 - a. ¿Qué diferencias, si las hay, haz observado en la forma que los estudiantes más jóvenes aprenden sobre los taínos en comparación con los estudiantes mayores?
 - b. ¿Qué cambio ha visto a lo largo del tiempo en la forma en que los estudiantes aprenden sobre los taínos?
 - c. ¿Ha cambiado a lo largo de los años la forma en que solicita a los estudiantes que se involucren con el material relacionado con la indigeneidad taína?
 - d. ¿Cómo se les ha pedido a sus estudiantes que interactúen con el material sobre la indigeneidad taína en los últimos años?
 - e. ¿Qué cree que falta en el plan de estudios general sobre los taínos?
3. ¿Cómo cree que se puede mejorar la educación taína actual?
 - a. ¿Qué deberían aprender los estudiantes en la escuela sobre los Taíno?
 - i. ¿Deberían estar aprendiendo en otro escenario? ¿Por qué?
 - b. ¿Su plan de estudios ideal estaría estandarizado en toda la isla? ¿Por qué?
 - i. ¿Debería el currículo limitarse a los estudiantes que se identifican como Taíno? ¿Por qué?
4. Cuénteme qué piensa acerca de la conexión, si la hay, que existe entre educar a los estudiantes sobre la historia taína y el futuro de Puerto Rico.