



*William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 81, no. 3 (July 2024): 531–66

Contesting Indigeneity in Colonial Cuba

*By John Paul Paniagua*

This article analyzes the differing trajectories of two Indigenous pueblos—Guanabacoa (outside Havana) and Jiguaní (on the outskirts of Bayamo)—to explore the persistence of Native communities in colonial Cuba and various contestations of indigeneity across the *longue durée*. Though protected Indigenous pueblos were grafted into a larger patchwork of unequal and overlapping republics that formed the building blocks of legal pluralism across the Spanish Americas, they were virtually nonexistent across the Greater Antilles because conquest and colonization had destroyed Native chiefdoms. Consequently, surviving Native communities in the Greater Antilles were suspended between their own claims to Indigenous ancestry and how those with power defined them as an incoherent population. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, Spanish officials repeatedly dismissed the authenticity of Native communities on the island, suggesting that they were frauds from the Atlantic world or the vestiges of Indigenous communities that had long ago lost their “Color.” Charting these contestations and attending to the formation, composition, and litigiousness of these pueblos demonstrates that indigeneity in Cuba was neither extinguished nor static; it was actively (re)created by a diverse community of indios who used histories rooted in the island’s past and legal strategies routed across the Spanish American colonies. This article is accompanied by an appendix on the OI Reader ([https://oireader.wm.edu/open\\_wmq/contesting-indigeneity-in-colonial-cuba/](https://oireader.wm.edu/open_wmq/contesting-indigeneity-in-colonial-cuba/)).