In the past decade or so, scholars and activists have focused their lenses anew at Latin America’s indigenous populations. Sparked by the 1992 quincentennial, studies not only delved into the archaeology, anthropology, and history of Amerindian populations throughout the hemisphere, but also sought to show how these populations had resisted and survived from European contact to the present. The often politicized context of the 1992 commemorations has led to scholarship about cultural survival through the centuries that is sometimes fabulously creative and insightful and at other times is little more than lamentable polemical nonsense. The Indigenous People of the Caribbean is, thankfully, mainly in line with the former.

Any consideration of the Western Hemisphere’s Amerindian peoples and their survival after contact must begin with the indigenous of the Caribbean—the first native peoples encountered by Europeans. In this edited collection, the noted Caribbean scholar and University of Texas anthropologist Samuel M. Wilson adds a significant work to the growing interest in pre-contact cultures and post-contact survival of the archipelago’s first peoples. Organized by the Virgin Islands Humanities Council, the work brings into one volume overviews of recent scholarship from nineteen scholars, activists, and museum curators. Non-Caribbeanists and Caribbeanists alike will be thankful to have a single source to which to refer for the latest findings on pre-contact Caribbean migration patterns, material culture, and religion of the Carib and Taino, and interesting perspectives on cultural and linguistic survival of indigenous peoples in the region.

In his introductory chapter, Wilson concludes that the goal of the work is “to provide an introduction to what is known about the indigenous people of the Caribbean. We know that we have barely touched upon some topics, but hope that the reader can use this study as a starting point in a search for information about Caribbean peoples” (p. 8). The overall impact of the study easily meets this modest goal. Thanks to being largely free of social science jargon, scholars and students alike will readily be able to grasp significant historical and ethnographic debates. Readers
should come away from this volume with a well-rounded understanding of societal evolution in the pre-contact indigenous Caribbean and the lingering issues of cultural survival. This is facilitated by the books' broad cultural and social foci with four chapters alone focusing on material culture and economics, two chapters specifically on religion, and three chapters on language. However, its "strength" may also be its "weakness." In short, by cramming twenty-two chapters on diverse topics into just over 200 pages, most chapters unsatisfyingly lack depth and leave the reader wanting more—which maybe is the goal of the study after all.

The Indigenous People of the Caribbean is divided into six parts. Part One, "Background to the Archaeology and Ethnohistory of the Caribbean," consists of two useful essays on the types of evidence scholars have used to investigate pre-contact peoples in the region: European first-hand accounts and archaeological evidence. This introductory discussion of sources leads naturally to Part Two, "The Encounter," consisting of three chapters on biological impacts of the encounter, European literary images of Amerindians resulting from contact, and a seemingly out-of-place chapter that focuses on ball courts on St. Croix and has nothing to do with the encounter per se. Richard Cunningham's "The Biological Impacts of 1492" is a very useful chapter in this section. Cunningham's five page chapter lists the reduction in flora and fauna since 1492 with a special reference to Haiti. Cunningham helps us remember that European arrival did not bring, but rather expanded, the process of biological destruction. "When humans arrived in the island about 4500 years ago, their use of the fauna as food accelerated the depletion [already caused by climate change], increasing the extinction rate to about one species every 122 years" (p. 31).

Following the opening discussion of the encounter, the book goes back in time to examine "The First Migration of Village Farmers, 500 B.C. to A.D. 800" (Part Three), "The Taino of the Greater Antilles on the Eve of Conquest" (Part Four), and "The Island Carib of the Lesser Antilles" (Part Five). Rather than a chapter-by-chapter examination, I will address some of the more interesting discussions arising from these three sections. In Chapter Nine, "Religious Beliefs of the Saladoid People," Miguel Rodriguez examines the diversity of sources utilized to determine pre-Taino religious beliefs and practices. Rodriguez concludes the section noting how certain Saladoid religious practices and images like the dog, legends of creation cycles, and "Pre-Tainan and Tainan construction of large plazas and ceremonial centers above ancient Saladoid cemeteries" illustrate the historical continuity in religion between pre-Tainan and Tainan peoples. A possible shortcoming of the chapter that reflects the problem of chapter brevity concerns Rodriguez's discussion of how these people made wide use of animal symbols in their artifacts. It would have been interesting to draw Cunningham's discussion of pre-contact biological destruction and species loss into this issue of animal symbolism and whether or not such biological change is reflected in these symbols over time.

Another particularly interesting chapter from Part Three is David Watters' "Maritime Trade in the Prehistoric Eastern Caribbean" (Chapter 10). Adopting what he calls "an archipelagic viewpoint," Watters helps the reader envision Caribbean migration as more than the popular "forward movement" northward and westward through the islands. By remembering that Caribbean people were primarily sea-going people, Watters effectively illustrates how maritime trade also included trade between the islands and the South American mainland. Thus, there was back and forth migration, leading to strong cultural, economic, and social ties between the Antilles and the mainland. As later contributors note, such contact and migration over time blurs our understanding of the actual origins and relationships between the Carib and the Taino—the region's two
largest populations at the time of European contact.

The sections on the Taino and the Carib build from this discussion of early migration issues. The chapters in the Taino section are brilliantly laid out to naturally lead from one chapter to the next. In particular, readers should note chapters fifteen through seventeen on the Taino cosmos, Taino language and language survival, and how the combination of the Taino world view and language facilitated the mutual misunderstandings between the Taino and Columbus. Thus, besides the persistence of Taino words in Castilian (tabaco, hamaca, barbacoa, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, to name a handful), Taino cosmology actually worked toward creation of a dual misunderstanding: Columbus misinterpreted the Taino as subjects of the Great Khan due to his preconceptions and the Taino misinterpreted Columbus due to their cosmological preconceptions. Henry Petitjean Roget traces this second, lesser-known misunderstanding in "The Taino Vision: A Study in the Exchange of Misunderstanding" (Chapter 17). According to the author, the Taino interpreted Columbus' gift giving as "rich with magical, supernatural significance--objects validating the belief that the newcomers were otherworldly" (p. 170). The Spaniards' constant quest for gold and women drew the Taino squarely into their own creation myth. Consequently, believing that Columbus' expedition party had arisen from Coaybay (the land of the dead) and that Columbus constantly sought gold (which the Taino believed protected them against death and sickness), the Taino sent Columbus further south to the "land of the dead," and then directly sent the unfortunate Spanish occupiers there by killing them after Columbus sailed back to Spain.

Two brief chapters make up Part Five on the pre-contact Carib. The origins of the Carib and their language is central to these chapters and the jury is still out on whether or not the Carib in the Caribbean of 1492 were late arrivals from the mainland, an off-shoot of the Taino, or a little of both. Louis Allaire flatly rejects the claim that contact-era Carib "were in reality a group of Taino living under different socioeconomic conditions and mistakenly identified as a different race by the Europeans to justify their raiding them for slaves" (p. 181). Likewise, Allaire rejects the notion that Taino refugees fleeing the Spanish influenced Carib survivors (p. 185). However, he does accept that Carib identity was complicated at contact by the late arrival of mainland Carib (p. 185). Vincent Cooper's chapter on Carib language and gender illustrates the effects that captured Arawak-speaking women had on raising Carib children and thus on Carib language. These tricky issues of cross-cultural interaction complicate uncovering actual Carib cultural identity at any specific point in time.

The bulk of the discussion on the Carib consists of three chapters comprising Part Six, "Indigenous Resistance and Survival." In his opening to the section, Wilson asserts that "the indigenous people have played an important part in the emergence of distinctively Caribbean cultures" (p. 197). Following a fascinating chapter in which Nancie Gonzalez recounts how she came to realize that Central American Garifuna think that the real Black Carib culture is in St. Vincent and St. Vincent Black Carib think it is in Belize, Wilson attempts to illustrate "the role the conquered Indian people play in modern constructions of Caribbean identity" (p. 207). Wilson focuses on how indigenous agricultural forms, linguistic continuities, and the Amerindians as a "symbol of resistance to external domination" have shaped the region's culture over time. As a whole, this is one more example of what might be called "political elevation" of Amerindians to a questionable level. Is it really viable to use the Taino or Carib for such pan-Caribbean symbolism? After all, Caribbean peoples since the conquest have repeatedly rejected various pan-Caribbean initiatives for political and/or economic reasons. Is it really feasible to believe that these same peoples could tap into some "Indi-
an past” for unity, especially when there was similar widespread cultural diversity and lack of pan-Indianism in that past?

Ultimately, both the Carib and the Resistance sections suffer from little historical analysis. While the fifteenth and twentieth centuries are adequately addressed, the centuries in-between are rarely mentioned, let alone analyzed. What happened to the Carib in the intervening centuries? When Garnette Joseph addresses "Five Hundred Years of Indigenous Resistance" in the book's concluding chapter, the reader is misled by the title because the chapter only deals with the twentieth century—and that superficially. As one reads, one asks “what is surviving?” and “what is being resisted?” especially when Joseph lists modern social and religious Carib traits as including (though by no means limited to) cricket, dominos, and Christianity.

Scholars looking for an in-depth analysis of the Caribbean's indigenous history will be disappointed by this book. Likewise, those looking for an analysis of mainland Caribbean coast peoples or indigenous groups like the Ciboney in northwestern Cuba will find little discussion beyond the one chapter on the Central American Garifuna. Still, scholars and students can look to this volume as a jumping-off work to immerse themselves in the basic scholarship and utilize the useful bibliography. Ultimately, this volume should be of great interest to those studying Amerindian and Caribbean history for the simple utility of having a quick reference on central aspects of pre-contact migration, as well as Carib and Taino cultures. While not recommended for classroom use, this can be a useful source for lecture development, especially in Caribbean and Colonial Latin American History courses.

Finally, while so much attention is paid to pre-contact civilization areas in Mesoamerica and the Andes, this book should awaken readers to the importance of indigenous peoples in the largest region of the hemisphere where peoples and cultures were virtually eliminated, making any survival that much more incredible and worth knowing.

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