

Indigenous Passages to Cuba, 1515–1900. By Jason M. Yaremko. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016. 242 pages. \$79.95 cloth and electronic.

Scholars of the Atlantic world have long treated Cuba as Spanish conquistadors did—namely, as a jumping-off point for other adventures. In *Indigenous Passages to Cuba, 1515–1900*, Jason M. Yaremko seeks to correct this historical sidelining. Tracing the voluntary and involuntary migrations of Native peoples to Cuba in the four centuries after European contact, Yaremko demonstrates that indigenous communities “long possessed a diasporic dimension as part of an array of adaptive responses to threats to their existence” (4). They were able to deploy these adaptations, he notes, despite the imperial powers’ reliance on cultural stasis within indigenous communities in order to perpetuate modes of labor such as indentured servitude and slavery. In making these claims, Yaremko challenges conceptions of indigeneity as being tied to a single place or locality.

This study additionally sheds new light on labor practices in colonial Cuba, revealing how administrators turned to Native workers and created a multifaceted Cuban labor system that featured indigenes alongside enslaved Africans and indentured Chinese. Colonial Cuba needed laborers, and in the Americas it found them. Some, such as Florida Indians, came willingly. Others, such as Apache prisoners of war, were forcibly relocated. Others, like the Yucatec Maya, inhabited a “middle ground” between the two.

Divided into two parts, the first two chapters of *Indigenous Passages to Cuba* center on Florida Indians, who often migrated to Cuba of their own volition. As Yaremko illustrates, in the sixteenth century Spanish strategy regarding Natives had to evolve following a series of failed conquests on the Florida peninsula. Unable to secure the submission of indigenes, Spain authorized Jesuit missions among the Calusa and Tequesta. However, the failure of the Florida missions led Spain to bring children and adults directly to Havana in order to educate and acculturate them. But for Florida Indians who wished to reconnoiter the power of their new neighbors, the desire for education was a useful alibi. Yaremko demonstrates how Havana, instead of a center of acculturation, “both for the Spanish and the Indians, became a venue of conference and diplomacy but also for reconnaissance, political positioning, and gain” (24).

The second chapter demonstrates the agency of Florida Natives, who often appeared in Havana without invitation, as well as illustrating the precarious position of the Spanish Empire, which was desperately in need of North American allies and could not risk alienating its indigenous guests. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Creek Indians, and later Seminole, also maintained relationships with Cuba and continually visited the island. Cuba represented an alternative partner and a potential check to the British Empire, especially following the Seven Years’ War. For over two centuries Havana remained a site for geopolitical maneuvering and economic exchange between Florida Indians and the Pearl of the Antilles.

While Creeks and Seminoles traveled freely to Cuba, this was not the case with all indigenous North Americans. Yaremko relates how by the late eighteenth century Spain “desperately reverted to a carrot-and-stick policy” in Southwestern presidios

(68). Cuba was also conceived of as an ideal location for Apache prisoners of war; the island's geographic isolation was believed to diffuse additional hostilities while, simultaneously, Apache employment in needed public works projects and in Spanish households would accelerate acculturation. Multiple cases of open resistance, however, illustrate that not all Apaches agreed to serve willingly, cases that are also used to highlight American Indians' defense of their self-interests. Despite resistance, prisoner relocation to Cuba continued due to the significant labor demands on the island, even after Mexican independence in 1821.

Yaremko's strongest work is found in the fourth and fifth chapters' portrayal of the Yucatec Maya diaspora in Cuba. Mayan migration to Spanish Cuba began shortly after the empire occupied the island in the early 1510s. While far from the only Mesoamerican people to move to the island, Yaremko claims that Yucatec Mayan migrations "exemplify continuity with the past and are consistent with precolonial indigenous passages between the island and the peninsula" (93). There they worked alongside Arawak Taíno remnants and the nascent slave population to build the city of Havana. Unsurprisingly, Yucatec Mayas came into contact with other Native peoples on the island, such as the aforementioned Florida Indians and Apaches. Often forced to work against their will, Maya workers occasionally partnered in multicultural alliances to challenge the imperial labor system in violent uprisings. Despite these uprisings, violence in Mexico such as the Caste War and the increased production of Cuban sugar led to an increase in Cuba's Mayan population. The demise of the legal slave trade only reinforced the need for Maya indentured labor.

As indentured workers, the greatest challenge to Yucatec Mayas were the *patrones*. As Yaremko points out, in the nineteenth century the traffic and treatment of Maya laborers increasingly resembled slavery. While Mayas did resort to bloodshed and revolt to challenge elites' authority, Mayas often successfully invoked colonial laws to their advantage. The author reveals that a number of factors were behind Maya legal success: the "culture of negotiation" developed over centuries in Mesoamerica; a Cuban colonial government seeking to balance political and economic stability; and a long-standing series of laws designed to give indigenous peoples hope of reprieve. Although these laws failed following Mexican independence, Cuba's continued status as Spanish colony guaranteed their preservation (132).

On the island, Native Americans found themselves part of a system that simultaneously employed and exploited their labor and bodies. Colonial Cuba tells two stories: one of the perpetuation of ancient labor laws over subaltern populations, and one of the limits of those attempts and the indigenous adaptations to European colonialism. *Indigenous Passages to Cuba, 1515–1900* offers a fresh perspective on American Indian and Cuban history, as well as that of the Atlantic world. It should find a home in the libraries of scholars of all levels.

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