

Book Review

North American Indigenous Warfare and Ritual Violence. Edited by Richard J. Chacon and Ruben G. Mendoza. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2013. 283 pp.

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This volume explores the human and environmental variables that lead to pre-contact and colonial-era warfare and ritual violence among indigenous groups in North America, using multiple lines of evidence such as ethnohistorical and archaeological data. In doing so, the authors directly address a decisive debate occurring within anthropology between scholars who argue that indigenous warfare and ritual violence was endemic, and those who claim that violence was largely a result of colonial intrusion and exploitation. Examining the evidence on a case-by-case basis, the authors in this volume argue that native violence and conflict were important social practices for negotiating status and power among and between different groups, prior to and after European contact.

Using ethnographic data from indigenous informants and both colonial-era native and European accounts, Burch (Chapter 1) examines the causes and consequences of hostilities among native Inuit groups in Western Alaska during the early contact period (AD 1775-1850). He concludes that inter-societal conflict was a result of many factors, although native informants cited revenge as the primary motivation. Warfare and armed conflict was actually fairly frequent and lethal among these groups, often with deadly consequences. Bishop and Lytwyn (Chapter 2) reach similar conclusions when examining the violent interactions between the Lowland Cree and Inuit of the Hudson Bay and James Bay regions in subarctic Canada during the 17th and 18th centuries. They suggest that even with low numbers of individuals involved directly

in conflict, the consequences of warfare could be far-reaching for individuals and communities.

In Chapter 3, Lovisek critiques Helen Codere's classic work on Northwest Coast warfare, which proposed that the rivalry potlatch replaced warfare in 1849 as a result of the sudden influx of trade goods, population decline, and increased competition for rank following the amalgamation among the Kwakiutl. Ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence clearly demonstrates that Codere's thesis rests on faulty evidence and a preconception of pre-contact pacifism. Lovisek points to the Winter Ceremonial as the source for potlatch practices that was eventually replaced by the latter.

Chapters 4 and 5 also challenge other popular stereotypes of indigenous groups. Johnson (Chapter 4) explores the ethnohistorical data on the 18th and 19th century Chumash of southern California. As with many of the case studies, there is evidence for intervillage raids, ritualized battles, larger-scale hostilities among opposing allied groups, and even territorial conquest, with demographic consequences for the Chumash. Schaafsman (Chapter 5) takes on the "peaceful Pueblos" stereotype proposed by Ruth Benedict (1934), examining the osteological, artistic and ideological evidence for conflict from different prehistoric periods in the Southwest. He demonstrates that stress, hostilities and conflict did occur and was often circumstantial and historically contingent.

Looking at archaeological evidence, including weapons, defensive features, and skeletal trauma, for conflict and warfare in Cahokia and the North American midcontinent (AD 900-1400), Emerson (Chapter 6) proposes that the "institutionalization of intergroup conflict within complex hierarchical societies" was a major contributor to conflict and hostilities among Mississippian groups. The social consequences of war, he argues, can be directly observed in the destabilization of "subsistence strategies, political and social patterns, and general lifeways". Snow (Chapter 7) uses archaeological

evidence combined with oral traditions to discuss how colonial-era violence among the Iroquois had its roots in the interrelations between the Iroquois confederacy and other Amerindian nations in the Northeast. Warfare for the Iroquois was highly personal, with revenge cited as a common motive.

In Chapter 8, Dye and King look at the violent practice of temple desecration, primarily through burning, in the Mississippian-era (AD 900-1400) Southeast and Midwest. Current archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence suggests that this type of destruction by raiding forces occurred as early as the 13th century. Ancestor temples were targeted because they housed chiefly ancestral and cosmological connections. As in the case of Cahokia, conflict was an integral component of competition for prestige and political aggrandizement. Moving east, Milner (Chapter 9) uses material, architectural, and osteological evidence to look at temporal and spatial variation in the prevalence and conduct of intergroup conflicts between pre-contact groups living in the Eastern Woodlands region. Importantly, there are important social and geographic differences in the prevalence of conflict and how it was conducted between groups in the northern and southern Eastern Woodlands.

In the final case study, Lambert (Chapter 10) exclusively uses osteological evidence to compare the prevalence and degree of conflict among six different geographic regions in North America: California, the Western Great Basin, the Southwest and Periphery, the Great Plains, the Eastern Woodlands, the Northwest Coast and Plateau, and Western Arctic and Subarctic. Lambert identifies several broad patterns that are observable across all six regions. First, war is present and small scale engagements predominate. Mass graves or large numbers of unburied bodies are found in four of the six regions. Interestingly, there is a post-AD 1000 escalation in warfare that cannot be explained by external factors alone.

For the final chapter in the volume, editors Chacon

and Mendoza discuss more in-depth the schism surrounding pre-contact and Colonial-era conflict and warfare among native groups. As they explain, the revisionist argument states that anthropologists are exaggerating the scale of warfare and ritual violence and misrepresenting the past as part of a malicious colonialist legacy. While the authors acknowledge the violence perpetuated by European colonial powers towards indigenous Americans, they argue that it is disingenuous to deny the existence of indigenous conflict and violence prior to European colonization.

Based on the evidence presented by the authors in this volume, it is clear that conflict among indigenous North Americans was highly variable, inherently multi-causal, and though low in intensity by modern standards still presented deadly consequences for individuals and communities. In presenting their evidence, the authors in this volume argue for a middle ground between those scholars who see pre-contact warfare as nonexistent or insignificant and those who see it as socially endemic. While European influence certainly affected how warfare was conducted after contact, indigenous conflict had always been an important cultural practice through which individuals and communities could gain and lose social prestige.

Overall, the volume is an excellent examination of the motivations for and variance in conflict, warfare and ritual violence among North American indigenous groups. While at times the revisionist critique seemed to be a straw-man argument, nonetheless I appreciated the case-by-case approach to the evidence by the authors. Such an approach helps to avoid the risk of monolithic explanations for armed conflict and ritual violence. The present work should be of interest to a large audience, both academics and those interested in learning more about pre-contact and colonial-era North America.