UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Native Insurgencies and the Genocidal Impulse in the Americas. By Nicholas A. Robins.

Permalink https://escholarship.org/uc/item/07h621p4

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 31(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Sandos, James A.

Publication Date

2007-03-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <u>https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/</u>

eScholarship.org

Sheridan's historical research is exemplary. The publication dates of his references range from 1852 to 2003, and he uses many primary sources. The authors of his other referenced works are some of the leading scholars in their fields of history, anthropology, law and policy, economics, geography and ecology, linguistics, and so forth.

He divides this work into two parts: "Landscapes of Community" (based on O'odham people) and "Landscapes of Fraud" (the others who followed). It is interesting to note that he chose the latter for his main title, with the subtitle, "Mission Tumacácori, the Baca Float, and the Betrayal of the O'odham," actually being a précis of the book. Other scholars have studied indigenous people–land relationships, such as Basso, Cronon, and Nabhan (all of whose works are referenced in this one), yet Sheridan's work here offers a more complete view of this Sonoran space over a longer period of time.

This is the kind of book that should be incorporated in Native American studies courses because its holistic interdisciplinary format is the natural lens through which Native people have viewed their environment. The case study is a general recapitulation of relations between indigenous populations and European colonizers, yet this offers a very intimate view. The authenticity of this work, however, could have been even further enhanced had the author incorporated more direct voices from the O'odham people. If Westerntrained scholars speak from their disciplines then Native voices should be heard from within theirs. Sheridan notes that over the years, as the National Park Service obtained the lands around the mission at Tumacácori (first as a national monument now as a national historical park), they did so without input from the O'odham, the original inhabitants. He asks, "Did any of them (federal officials) bother to ask the O'odham about their connections to Mission Tumacácori or its land grant?" If so, perhaps the outcomes might have been different. Sheridan's oversight is nowhere comparable to the egregious actions of those selling and buying the mission lands, yet it should stand as a reminder to all scholars working in a primary way with Indian people to include them in the discourse.

The preceding comment is not meant to detract or belittle the excellent scholarship and writing craftsmanship that went into this work. This is an excellent choice for those interested in following how land influences people and how people in turn influence land.

Jeffrey M. Sanders Montana State University–Billings

Native Insurgencies and the Genocidal Impulse in the Americas. By Nicholas A. Robins. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. 288 pages. \$39.95 cloth.

Nicholas A. Robins has tackled a large and important question. In the convoluted worlds made by Spanish conquest and subsequent colonization in the Americas, Native peoples frequently suffered defeat and genocide at

the hands of their oppressors. Is it possible, however, that in Indian uprisings against Spanish rule that they, the former victims of genocide, could, under certain circumstances, become perpetrators of genocide against those who had oppressed them? Could the victims of bigoted tyranny become bigoted tyrants? The very question makes some observers uncomfortable, especially those who prefer to view the Indian as part of a sad but ultimately romantic past in which victimization was largely their lot endured in anguished but stoic silence interrupted periodically by spontaneous rebellions that were quickly and ruthlessly crushed. Robins will have none of that.

Robins examines three instances of table turning in the colonial and early national periods in Latin America, uprisings in which Indians won, punished their former tormentors with exterminatory violence, and, in two instances, earned a measure of autonomy as well. Chronologically these eruptions began with the Pueblo Uprising of 1680 in New Mexico and the Pueblos' twelve succeeding years of Spanish-free life; followed by the Great Uprising (*la Gran Rebelión*), which began in Upper Peru (today Bolivia) in 1780 and spread throughout the Andes, which was crushed two years later only at the cost of more than one hundred thousand lives; and finally the eruption of the Caste War in Yucatán, Mexico in 1847, wherein Indians initially conquered most of the province and then within a year were displaced deep in the jungles of Quintana Roo to a village they called Chan Santa Cruz, the site of the Speaking Cross (Cruzob), a place where they lived freely until crushed nearly sixty years later by Mexican military forces in 1903.

Robins examines these episodes seeking to identify and compare, where possible, their causes, course of events, leadership, movement goals and divisions, and ultimately their nature. Consequently, he identifies an archetypal "genre of social uprising in Latin America, that of indigenous exterminatory millennialism," and he accomplishes this "through examining the links that may sometimes be found, but are not inherent, between genocide, millennialism and nativistic movements in this region" (2). Robins knows that the colonial world he studies is full of contradictions. The leadership of these movements to return to an idealized Indian past, for example, consisted of mixed bloods of all colors including those of fair skin, as well as blacks. Indians could assimilate some Hispanic values and yet still seek a revolution back to the future. Robins insists that "our ability to understand such movements is enhanced by the recognition of antinomy, or the idea that two things can be both in opposition and true" (3).

Robins's analytical edifice rests on the twin pillars of deep primary-source research and social science theory. His archival work has been most extensive in the Archivo Nacional de Bolivia and in the Archivo General de las Indias in Spain, and that work has been richly supplemented by a wide variety of published primary sources. Robins' published interest in these matters originated with his *El mesianismo y la semiótica indígena en el Alto Perú: La Gran Rebelión de 1780–1781* (1998) and continued with *Genocide and Millennialism in Upper Peru: The Great Rebellion of 1780–1782* (2002) indicating that he has been thinking about the connections between millennialism and genocide for some time. His new book expands his thinking to two other instances of what

he sees as indigenous exterminatory millennialism, and he has relied heavily upon published primary sources to inform his analysis.

Theoretically Robins is indebted to Anthony F. C. Wallace's ideas on indigenous revitalization movements, Tedd Gurr's writings on relative deprivation, and Jack Levy's and Robert Jervis's prospect theory. Readers of this journal need no introduction to ideas on revitalization movements. Relative deprivation stems in large part from the need to respond to Leon Trotsky's observation that if immiseration were sufficient to provoke revolution then the poor would be continually engaged in it. For Trotsky it was the role of his/ the political party to enable the masses to identify the cause of their plight, and the course they should take to redress it. Relative deprivation posits that it is not so much what people have lost that provokes them to social violence but their perception of what they have lost vis-à-vis their current or former status or what others have gained at their expense. Prospect theory argues that people are more willing to run the risk of committing social violence to prevent further loss of their economic, social, or cultural position sooner than they would do so to try to achieve new status.

Robins's explication of the "mazeway" of relative deprivation theory is challenging for the reader because the issue "is not the difference between what people have and what they want but between what they have and what they reasonably believe that they can achieve" (96). When "[a] bilities drop and while expectations remain the same" then decremental depredation obtains (97). Robins introduces issues of "moral economy" to argue, for example, that when taxes suddenly are increased the prevailing accommodation between subject and ruler is thrown into imbalance and can contribute to social violence by those exploited deriving from their sense that the new behavior is unjust. Robbins describes several forms of relative deprivation and identifies "decremental, progressive and divergent deprivation" as the agents "most likely to spur social unrest in less developed areas" while prospect theory, in a nearly circular fashion, permits us to understand these various roles that relative deprivation plays in prompting subaltern violence. Whether the reader agrees or disagrees with Robins's ideas for the causes instigating millennial exterminatory violence, he offers us something to ponder.

The arguments in Gurr's famous and sexist title *Why Men Rebel* (1971) have tended to classify millenarian movements as religious and their goals as eschatological and hence impracticable in this world. Robins's research demonstrates to the contrary that religion can provide the ideology (a secular term for religious prescription) that Trotsky and others ridiculed religion for lacking. Robins shows that, despite the differences in cultures and religious, in these revitalization movements charismatic leaders claiming religious authority identified Hispanic society, culture, and people as the evils that needed to be exterminated to bring their followers into a new and better way of life consonant with pre-Hispanic ways and religions. Although few of the Indian participants possessed literacy, they had no difficulty in communicating their ideas through violence. Indians and their leaders killed Hispanics en masse, castrating and beheading them, taking their women as sex slaves, smashing the altars in their churches, smearing excrement on their

religious icons, and burning their symbols of occupation and rule. Robins has brilliantly traced these behaviors throughout his three examples, and the stereotype of the inarticulate Indian simply cannot stand. Millennial exterminatory violence succeeded in removing Hispanic presence for significant time periods in two of the three instances under study.

Robins's conclusions are bracing and thought provoking. "In the end, we must recognize," he writes, "that these are examples of retributive genocide, which erupted in response to the genocide of conquest and the persistent Hispanic policy of ethnocide against the native peoples. While nothing can justify the murder of innocents, genocide can beget genocide" (172). And what other instances of millennial exterminatory violence might we find if we redirect our gaze, with Robins's aid, to other parts of the Americas' past?

James A. Sandos University of Redlands

A Northern Cheyenne Album: Photographs by Thomas B. Marquis. Edited by Margot Liberty; commentary by John Woodenlegs. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. 286 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

Thomas B. Marquis, born in Missouri in 1869, moved to Montana in 1890 to work as a printer. After taking a medical degree in 1898 he practiced horse and buggy medicine in small towns while maintaining an interest in the law and literature. Service in the medical corps in France at the end of World War I honed his interest in military history, and after his return to Montana in 1919 he began to write short fiction and essays. Searching for a compelling theme he decided on the Indian, and on 30 June 1922 was appointed agency physician to the Northern Cheyenne. He did not last long-ten weeks to be exact-before he resigned and began to write up some of the interviews he had conducted with old-timers in the area. The Custer Battlefield, as it was then called, was located twenty-six miles west of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, and Marquis, like so many others, became obsessed with what happened there on a June Sunday in 1876. But, unlike most others, he enjoyed cordial relations with veterans on both sides of the battle, mainly Cheyenne, though Sioux, Crow, and white participants also figured in his studies. Marquis eventually settled in Hardin on the adjoining Crow Reservation where the battlefield was located, and there he pursued his research, publishing two books, Memoirs of a White Crow Indian (1928) and A Warrior Who Fought Custer (1931), the as-told-to accounts of, respectively, Thomas H. Leforge and Wood Legs. He operated a small museum that displayed battle trophies he had acquired through purchase and from 1933-35 self-published six pamphlets on his favorite subject, two of which were also first-hand narratives, She Watched Custer's Last Battle: Her Story, Interpreted in 1927 (Kate Bighead, a Cheyenne) and Two Days after the Custer Battle: The scene there as viewed by William H. White, a soldier with Gibbon in 1876. Marquis had his own theories to promote. He was persuaded that the Sioux War of 1876 was fundamentally a Cheyenne affair,