

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521-1704. Edited by Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/74k9z99h>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 19(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Green, Michael D.

Publication Date

1995-09-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

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

Despite its few shortcomings *First Nations Education in Canada* constitutes a contribution to the field of First Nations education by fulfilling a bibliographic function, not so much as a referenced work but because of its comprehensive content. Increasingly First Nations philosophy is being perceived in its rightful place alongside other world philosophies. In this volume, valuable additional insights of that epistemology are shared and applied. In addition, the language of the book is lucid, the type is visually pleasing, and the cover is rather attractive. To educators who have any kind of contact with First Nations education, I would say, "Buy this book!"

John W. Friesen

The University of Calgary

The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521–1704. Edited by Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994. 472 pages. \$50.00 cloth; \$25.00 paper.

Ethnohistorians have realized for a long time that to understand the Southeast in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we were going to have to put the work of archaeologists and historians together in a systematic way. The opportunity to do so occurred in 1989, thanks to an NEH summer institute for college teachers at the University of Georgia entitled "Spanish Explorers and Indian Chiefdoms." Directed by editors Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser, the institute invited many of the leading students of the early Southeast to present papers and engage in discussion with participants. This book of seventeen essays grew out of that institute. While each essay stands on its own, together they form a remarkably coherent and comprehensive record of a very dimly understood period in Southern history.

The early sixteenth-century beginnings of the Spanish penetration of the Southeast were followed in 1539–43 by the spectacular march of Hernando de Soto and an accompanying army of close to one thousand Europeans and Indians. The three eyewitness accounts of the De Soto *entrada*, plus the reports of a handful of other, less ambitious Spanish explorations, combine to tantalize with their descriptions of native chiefdoms and to frustrate with their brevity and incompleteness. Furthermore, the descriptions

of towns and villages, of ceremonies and conflicts, of political and social interaction were of little use to scholars who could not connect the descriptions to actual people and places. Only recently, after some fifteen years of research, have Charles Hudson and a cadre of associates successfully reconstructed the route of De Soto's march. This reconstruction, much more carefully and accurately done than that of the mid-1930s conducted by John Swanton and the U.S. DeSoto Commission, depended in large part on the detailed local knowledge of archaeologists working in the field. Having located and, in many cases, described and analyzed sites, they supplied the necessary evidence to verify Hudson's research. Combined, the result is the connection of archaeological evidence with the documentary record of Spanish observers. This means that, for the first time, we can put real names to sites, learn much about their economic, political, social, and military relations with the people of other sites, test archaeological theories, and dramatically increase our understanding of both pre- and postcontact Southeastern Indian history. For the first time in five hundred years, the chronicles of the sixteenth-century Spanish intruders can be given life.

The introduction by Hudson and Tesser elaborates on this and charts the path. What follows are four sections. The first, on Spanish exploration, begins with an excellent overview essay by John Scarry on the mainly Mississippian Southeast on the eve of European contact. Essays by Paul Hoffman, Charles Hudson, and John Worth describe the Spanish *entradas*. Hudson on De Soto recounts, in summary form, the newly identified route.

The second section, on "Southeastern Chiefdoms," begins with an extremely informative and well-written essay by Randolph Widmer on "The Structure of Southeastern Chiefdoms." Based on a rapidly expanding literature on Mississippian political organization, this is one of the best recent introductory descriptions I have seen. It is followed by ethnohistorical essays on Apalachee (John Scarry), Oconee, (Mark Williams), Cofitachequi (Chester DePratter), and Coosa (David Hally). Using archaeological research and interpretive theory as well as Spanish documentary sources, each of these scholars explains the histories of their chiefdoms at the time of the Spanish arrival.

The nature of Indian-Spanish contact is the theme of the third section, "Structural Change." Here Marvin Smith restates his argument that native depopulation in the Southeast is attribut-

able primarily to Old World epidemic diseases introduced into America by the Spaniards. Along with secondary causes such as warfare and famine, disease, Smith believes, caused the chiefdoms to shatter and drove their survivors into new areas and new, less complex organizations. The essays by Jerald Milanich on Franciscan missions and Joel Martin on the English fur and slave trade complete this section. Both show that sustained interaction with Europeans drew native Southerners into Spain's and England's New World empires as producers of raw materials.

The final section, "The Formation of New Societies," contains essays that seek to explain more long-term native adaptations to European goods and people. John Hann's discussion of the "Apalachee of the Historic Era" builds on Milanich's history of the Franciscans by showing, in detail, the relations between the Apalachee people and the missionaries. He suggests that adaptation occurred in both groups and the Apalachee retained substantial control over their lives and culture. Helen Rountree and E. Randolph Turner, in "On the Fringe of the Southeast," discuss how the Powhatan Empire in Virginia both resembled and differed from the Mississippian chiefdoms further south. Noted for its much briefer history and more rapid rise, the Powhatan Empire—"a grand political organization"—was destroyed by the European invasion of people and disease. The two final essays, Vernon James Knight's "The Formation of the Creeks" and Patricia Galloway's "Confederacy as a Solution to Chiefdom Dissolution," blend documentary and archaeological evidence with rare insight to demonstrate that both the Creek and Choctaw Indians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries developed political organizations that drew together and maximized the power of surviving remnants of the Mississippian chiefdoms that had succumbed in the sixteenth century. They represent, in other words, the successors to the groups De Soto's chroniclers saw and described.

This book is a marvelous example of ethnohistorical synthesis. All the contributors are highly published scholars actively engaged in producing much of the best scholarship on the early Southeast. As summaries of their own work, these essays encapsulate a massive amount of material, present complex ideas clearly, and suggest interpretations of a period that, even ten years ago, remained opaque. Their success is largely the result of their mastery of ethnohistorical methodologies. As such, *The*

Forgotten Centuries stands as an example of a difficult job well done.

Michael D. Green
University of Kentucky

Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism. By Gerald R. Alfred. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995. 220 pages. \$24.95 paper.

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy has been at the forefront of Native American assertions of sovereignty for many years. Even during the 1920s, a time that some commentators called "the era of the vanishing race," Deskaheh (Levi General) took the case for Iroquois sovereignty to the League of Nations, where diplomats from the United States, Canada, and Great Britain excluded him from the floor of that body. In the 1950s, the activism of Standing Arrow, Wallace (Mad Bear) Anderson, and others presaged nationwide campaigns by the American Indian Movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. Today, the Haudenosaunee issue their own passports and license plates. The history of Iroquois nationalism draws its inspiration from the traditions of the Great Law of Peace, which Gerald Alfred characterizes as the philosophy underlying "the first genuine North American federal system [of government]" (p. 78). Alfred details the attention paid at Kahnawake to incorporating the traditions of the Great Law of Peace into decision-making.

As in other parts of Indian Country, sovereignty and nationalism have many interpretations in Haudenosaunee (and especially in Mohawk) Country. Some Mohawk people have interpreted these terms to mean the right to transport large amounts of liquor, cash, cigarettes, and semiautomatic weapons between the United States and Canada. At Akwesasne, a short drive from Kahnawake, sovereignty has been used to justify the operation of casinos that New York State law maintains are illegal without a state compact.

Gambling has never done much at Kahnawake, but a large number of Canadians buy tax-free cigarettes there. As Gerald Alfred, himself a Kahnawake Mohawk, points out in his richly detailed study *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism*, this reserve near Montreal offers native nationalists much more than cheap smokes.