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Peer reviewed

The Comanche Empire. By Pekka Hämäläinen. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Pekka Hämäläinen's *The Comanche Empire* is a political, economic, and cultural history of the eponymous nation and its effects on the history of the modern Southwestern United States. Hämäläinen is arguing for the very idea that a native empire could have had agency and been actors, rather than just victims, in the history of North America. He also uses his analysis to view the history of the Southwest as individual towns and tribes, rather than borders and nation-states – in short, to view the world as the Comanche empire did to better understand them.

Chapter 1 is the story of the Comanche's rise to power, starting with their arrival in New Mexico from the Great Plains in 1706 as the Numunu. Their background as refugees made them exceptionally hardy and adaptable, and by the middle of the century they had turned the northern Mexican frontier into fertile raiding and trading grounds.

Chapter 2 deals with Spanish colonial policy in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, and how Comancheria took advantage of it. Spain's obsession with the threat of Britain's empire left them open to the Comanche's, who, via a comparatively huge population and a flexible foreign policy, maneuvered themselves into a position capable of resisting expansion by the Spanish.

Chapter 3 deals with Spain's response to the power of the Comanches – an alliance, albeit one only possible due to a smallpox epidemic decimating Comancheria and the independence of the United States radically altering the balance of power on the continent. However, Spain treated the Comanches poorly and failed to aid them, and Comancheria resumed its assault on New Mexico.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with Comancheria's height in the mid-19th century: how its focus on hunting, trading, and raiding instead of territorial control enabled it

to thrive in an area being steadily colonized by the United States, and how its conflict with Mexico enabled American expansion. By blunting efforts to colonize north of the Rio Grande and leaving these areas depopulated, Comancheria indirectly forced Mexico to let American settlers into them, leading to both Texan independence and the Mexican-American War. The depredations inflicted on New Mexico by the Comanches were so thorough that American forces faced virtually no resistance in those areas, and were sometimes welcomed and aided. The Americans were aware of this, offering protection from Comancheria that Mexico was unable to provide.

Chapter 6 breaks the chronological trend of the book and discusses Comanche society, how it influenced their foreign policy, and how expansionism altered it from the 18th to 19th century. The overall structure and gender roles did not change greatly, but herding operations grew exponentially, as did the number of slaves. Comancheria developed a proto-capitalist economy and a growing wealth gap, but a cultural emphasis on generosity helped alleviate the negative effects, and a “warrior cult” helped channel male aggression outwards, aiding the empire and society simultaneously.

Chapter 7 details the collapse of this system, as a drought in the mid-1840's decimated the Comanche bison herds, sending their economy into a free-fall. American settlers and soldiers whittled down Comancheria, although the Civil War brought a short resurgence of the empire. Chapter 8 is the short, brutal story of Comancheria's final fall after the Civil War, and the Comanche nation's confinement on an Oklahoma reservation.

Hämäläinen's book is an enlightening history of a forgotten empire and a necessary read for anyone with a sphere of study remotely related to the Southwestern United States, although I feel that Hämäläinen should have used the term South-Central United States for total geographic

accuracy, as Arizona, which has always been considered part of the Southwest, is not part of the story of Comancheria. That minor complaint aside, the text makes the case for the agency of Native-Americans masterfully, and provides a historical perspective that should be made standard throughout academia.

Michael Luneburg

Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940. By George Chauncey. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

The homosexual struggle is often linked to "the closet" concept. The closet sectioned the homosexual from the rest of the "normal" world. Chauncey argues in *Gay New York* that the three myths of homosexual culture (isolation, invisibility and internalization) are all embodied in the image of the closet and that this concept did not exist before the 1960s. He states that "gay people in the past did not speak or conceive of themselves as living in a closet" (p.6), however this does not prevent historians from using the concept of the closet, but it does "suggest that we need to use it more cautiously and precisely, and to pay special attention to the very different terms people used to describe themselves and their social worlds" (p.6). The various terms as well as the various locations that men would meet helped shape the gay world.

Chauncey combines informal records and public records to create an image of New York's gay culture in reference to the different time periods he covers. Gay male culture was not concrete and adapted accordingly not only to the time period, but also to outside forces that attempted to prevent their existence. Gay culture also had different appearances depending on the men that embodied them, for instance a "normal" married man who had sexual experiences with other men did not have the same experience as an effeminate "fairy."

Chauncey structures his book as a reaction to the three myths of isolation, invisibility and internalization. He first gives reports of successful police raids on gay locales such as bars, parks, and bath houses as well as the concept of vigilantes against homosexuality and then asserts through personal stories that the anti-gay culture did not prevent homosexuals from interacting and creating a culture of their own.

The next myth contests that gay men remained invisible to both the "normal" people and other gay men, preventing gay men from interacting with one another. Chauncey proves that this is untrue because "fairies" remained openly effeminate allowing both "normal" and gay men to know that they were gay. Besides this he also reveals that gay men had mannerisms, dress, and other indicators that kept them hidden from non-gay men. In addition to secret techniques, the private bath houses served as the social and sexual hubs for gay men to feel safe with their sexuality. This is not to say that there were not unsafe ways for men to satisfy their sexual needs. Tearooms, which were just public washrooms, were dedicated to impersonal sex between strangers and were often more dangerous.

The chapter "Internalization" contested that gay men did not resist their oppression. The "fairies" flamboyance and openness about their sexuality contests the myth of internalization. Not only this but other gay men would continue to frequent bath houses, parks and other gay establishments in spite of the possibility of police intervention. In general interference was fairly uncommon.

Chauncey's text is a useful look at the homosexual world. He does meet his goal of creating an image of homosexual culture before the 1960s revolution. His use of personal reports and public records creates a vivid description of the world that homosexual men were allowed to create due to being men. Without the use of personal stories and other personal primary sources the text would not have been able to dispel