

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Columbian Consequences, Volume 3: The Spanish Borderlands in Pan-American Perspective. Edited by David Hurst Thomas.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8tt0t6cc>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 17(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Kessell, John L.

Publication Date

1993

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/>

Satz provides stronger coverage of the historical forces that shaped the modern claims than does Doherty. A lay audience will receive a crash course in the early history of the Great Lakes and the dispossession of the Chippewa tribes that may make them more sensitive to the real issues motivating the litigation. Students and scholars of modern Great Lakes Indians have gained a second useful reference resource on the twentieth century Great Lakes Chippewa.

James M. McClurken
Michigan State University

Columbian Consequences, Volume 3: The Spanish Borderlands in Pan-American Perspective. Edited by David Hurst Thomas. Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991. 592 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

At the coming together (a term I prefer to *encounter*) of Old World and New, the Fates gathered great numbers of dice from each, shook them together, and rolled them out in infinite combinations. So many were the consequences that our descendants five hundred years from now will still be sorting them out. Hence, this fat and fascinating interim report is a very mixed bag.

On the midway at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, can that really be chiefs Rain-in-the-Face, Red Cloud, and Kicking Bear gleefully astride painted ponies, floating up and down on the merry-go-round? In 1693, at Tuxtla, in extreme southern Mexico, have race relations deteriorated to such an extent that Zoque Indians are, in fact, stoning to death don Manuel de Maisterra y Atocha, their avaricious Spanish district officer? And around 1520, are invisible Old World microorganisms borne northward from the Valley of Mexico to strike down native peoples and alter their cultures decades before Spaniards ever meet and describe the survivors?

The inspiration of David Hurst Thomas, curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History, the completed, three-volume *Columbian Consequences* takes its place on schedule as "A Contribution from the Society for American Archaeology in Recognition of the Columbian Quincentenary" (p. ii). The series presents in print a string of symposiums held at the annual meetings of the SAA in 1989, 1990, and 1991 for which Thomas drew from an interdisciplinary stable of scholars sixty-four archaeologists, eleven

historians, nine physical anthropologists, nine ethnohistorians, six cultural anthropologists, five art historians, and three geographers.

Pledging cubist perspectives "to view past events from multifold directions concurrently" (p. xx), the three volumes address the Spanish colonial frontier in North America, i. e., the Spanish Borderlands West, the Spanish Borderlands East, and the Spanish Borderlands in Pan-American context. This last volume, the least integrated, is three books in one.

Part 1, "Retrospective on a Century of Borderlands Scholarship" (shortest, with six chapters), sets about, in Thomas's words, "decoupling intellectual inquiry from its associated mythologies" (p. xvii), a good trick anytime but easier with hindsight. Between graceful essays on the writers of Borderlands history (David J. Weber) and California's mythical mission past (Thomas), we attend the World Columbian Exposition, or Chicago World's Fair, of 1893.

Columbus-as-hero, symbol of progress and white supremacy, of course, presides. We are made aware (by Don D. and Catherine S. Fowler, Raymond D. Fogelson, and Ira Jacknis) of the tension between early anthropologists, anxious to display authentically the curious customs of Native Americans before they are lost forever, and progressive friends of the Indians, confident that natural man must shed such customs and embrace Western civilization swiftly or perish. What comes as a surprise to me is the importance of the exposition in the development of anthropology as a discipline in this country.

In "The Native Context of Colonialism in Southern Mesoamerica and Central America," part 2 (longest, with fourteen chapters), editor Thomas invites comparison. It is the reader, however, who must compare and contrast; the authors do not. Virtually nowhere in their fourteen lists of references do we find important studies of the northern frontier—for example, Philip Wayne Powell's works on the Chichimeca War. Whether one admits smug self-satisfaction or disappointment, the fact is that Central Americanists are just as parochial as we in the Spanish borderlands.

That, of course, is no excuse. While I am not convinced that lessons learned in Central America were, in Thomas's words, "ultimately taken northward to the borderlands" (p. xviii)—any more than they were from Chile or the Philippines—I am reminded how the strategies and counterstrategies employed in the cradle areas of the Caribbean and New Spain recurred all over the place.

The essay on Indian riots and rebellions in colonial Central America (Murdo J. MacLeod, whose other works are cited by the authors of seven more contributions) prompts thought-provoking contrasts with the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and parallels with the Yaqui and Maya Revolts of 1740. The Pech (Paya) of northeastern Honduras, hanging on in a rugged area peripheral to permanent Spanish settlement (William Van Davidson), rival the Seris of Sonora as survivors. While the theme of nativism, resistance, and innovation is common to most of the articles, the discussion of the uses of writing among the Cakchiquel Maya (Robert M. Hill II) has specific implications for the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, a people who did not have writing. At the very least, one is impressed by the similar variety of the southern region's human and physical environments and what has been written about them (Grant D. Jones and David M. Pendergast).

The volume's heaviest doses of theory are saved for last, in "Portents for the Future of Borderlands Scholarship," part 3 (nine chapters), where they are administered in the hope of improving contact period studies. Looking back, the issue of cultural continuity or discontinuity between postcontact and precontact conditions is critical. If Old World diseases did thin New World populations before Europeans wrote their earliest biased and fragmentary descriptions, how and what can we truly know about precontact cultures? If such thinning was drastic and disruptive (David E. Stannard, Henry F. Dobyns, Robert C. Dunnell), then how useful is the postcontact ethnological record, and what relationship does it bear to the precontact archaeological record?

If the problems posed by the contact period are daunting, none of the authors in this last section advocates giving up in despair. All appeal for greater sensitivity and sophistication. We must embrace promising theory—"historical science," for example (Ann F. Ramenofsky)—"to explain the differential persistence of variation" (p. 438). We must "excavate" historical texts to get at the meanings they held for their writers and intended readers (Patricia Galloway). And we historians, to better understand the implications of protohistoric trade (William R. Swagerty) or anything else, must dare to be interdisciplinary.

One conclusion (Marvin Harris) "is that we need to be skeptical about any one kind of knowledge—be it historical document, ethnographic monograph, or archaeological site report; that as much as ever, we need all three kinds of studies; and perhaps most important, that we need theories about the probable trajectories of

sociocultural evolution that conform to a consistent nomothetic explanatory paradigm" (pp. 583–84). And of course, we need to avoid jargon.

The *Columbian Consequences* series is a triumph of the quincenary. Still, the decision to hurry each of these richly detailed and diversified reference volumes through to publication within a year, while keeping costs down, required a very great sacrifice. None has an index. So obvious is the need, I hope some enterprising indexer will submit a proposal to the Research Tools Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities and list me as a reference.

In the end, editor Thomas takes stock of the contributors to his series and concludes that "the final result remains biased toward white, Anglo, male scholarship" (p. xx). Obstacles still stand in the way of minorities and women. All royalties from *Columbian Consequences*, therefore, have been assigned to the Native American Scholarship Fund sponsored by the Society for American Archaeology. This, Thomas admits, is a small beginning, "[b]ut we hope that it sends a message to upcoming generations that those of us in the existing scholarly community are indeed serious about encouraging a diversity of opinion from a wide range of constituent groups" (p. xxi).

Looking toward the Columbian millennium in 2492, such a spirit could be the most encouraging consequence of all.

John L. Kessell
University of New Mexico

Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions 1630–1900. By Carol Devens. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992. 185 pages.

Carol Devens's *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions 1630–1900* is an excellent, carefully detailed and documented analysis of the responses of Native American women and men to missionary activity in their communities. It begins with the earliest periods of Catholic missions under the Jesuits' direction and continues through several periods of Protestant missionary work, in both Canada and the United States.

Devens's principal emphasis is on the differing reactions of women and men to the missionaries and their messages and on the