

Guest Editor's Introduction

Autumn Quezada-Grant, *Roger Williams University*

These articles examine relations between indigenous and nonindigenous actors through their pointed negotiations and thoughtful contestations in North America and the Caribbean between 1500 and 1885. By focusing on peripheral areas, each of the articles uncovers interesting pluralities in these frontier regions that demonstrate dynamic societies actively engaging one another. Depicted in history as the vanquished and dominated, indigenous people present in their engagements with nonindigenous people a more complicated and nuanced reality for all actors during these periods in history. The typical characterizations of indigenous peoples in the Americas as passive, reactive, or dangerous often belie the rich complexities that developed within these interethnic and cross-cultural relations. These articles attempt to offer new depictions of relations throughout the Americas based on deeper understandings of actions that included moments of contestation, negotiation, and engagement among people with competing views and intentions.

To begin, Erin Woodruff Stone, in her article, “America’s First Slave Revolt: Indians and African Slaves in Española, 1500–34,” offers interesting insights into an unexplored slave uprising. The revolt is significant as the first in the New World and the first in which Africans and Indians united against their Spanish overlords, and it provided future African and Indian slaves a template for revolt. It also presents as unique in its duration, lasting several decades. Colonization of the American Caribbean initiated a destabilizing process, according Woodruff Stone, that fractured previous local relationships and diplomacy, as upon arrival Spaniards made alliances with local Taíno caciques that facilitated fissures in the Caribbean populations. Yet as the Spanish shifted from gold mining to a sugar plantation economy

two decades after arrival, so too did the relations of power shift. Spaniards favored African, particularly Wolof, slave labor on the sugar plantations. This preference for African laborers disrupted the nature of power on the islands, which had before rested on cacique leadership. Labor recruitment through Taino caciques became less of a necessity, and the growing plural society—a mixture of foreign indigenous peoples brought to the islands, Africans, and Spaniards—diminished the cacique position. In addition, increasing abuses and growing slave unrest created an environment ripe for a slave uprising and creation of maroon colonies. This lengthy contestation of power and the ensuing ties of engagement shed light on the greater complexity of the first decades following the arrival of the Europeans in the Caribbean and the initial process of colonization.

Andrew Sturtevant, in “Inseparable Companions’ and Irreconcilable Enemies: The Hurons and Odawas of French Détroit, 1701–38,” challenges Richard White’s notion of disempowered native groups against an onslaught of colonization. The Huron and Odawa living in the French post of Détroit inhabited a world of complicated relationships and alliances among native groups in the Great Lakes region. The nexus of conflict by 1738 between the French, the Huron, and the Odawa speaks more to inherent problems stemming from the plural nature of the region than to overarching effects of colonization. The dominant narrative holds that the French amalgamated these peoples into the new mosaic called Algonquin; however, Sturtevant finds that the splintered identities of the Huron and Odawa survived colonization. Notwithstanding contested relationships, these groups maintained their distinct identities through trade and political negotiations with the French.

Matthew Babcock, in “Roots of Independence: Transcultural Trade in the Texas-Louisiana Borderlands,” addresses the plurality of this frontier area and challenges the tired notion of it as a region steeped in stagnation and despair. Babcock uncovers an intricate story of economic vitality in a mixed Indian, African, Spanish, and French economy based on Indian trade routes. By decentering assumptions associated with periphery studies, Babcock reimagines the Texas-Louisiana frontier as a dynamic space based on economic participation from multiple parties through trade negotiations. Commercial studies reveal a world of intermingling peoples, challenging the argument that the space only experienced intensified interest after the rush of Americans.

Taking up the topic of shattered political economies and the inevitable results in difficult periods, Blanca Tovias revisits an example of intertribal conflict in Montana in her article, “Diplomacy and Contestation before and after the 1870 Massacre of Amskapi Pikuni.” She revisits this massacre in particular to consider the deployment of diplomacy on the part of the Blackfoot in the days leading up to the massacre—a view that has yet to be

explored. This lack of attention to diplomacy on the part of the Blackfoot in the historiography obfuscates the real complexities of the period prior to 1870. The Pikuni attack on the Clarke family, begun as an intertribal grievance over horse thievery, exploded into a movement that was decidedly anti-Indian in Montana. The larger issue that arises from Tovias's research is that the Blackfoot had no legal mechanisms to redress grievances or even to express dissatisfaction within the legal structure of the American system. In this case, when one tribe wronged another and only one of the groups in the alliance held a treaty to uphold American law, there remained the question of redress. This reexamination of the Massacre of Pikuni challenges the previously privileged non-Blackfoot views and places the Blackfoot as actors in a complex environment and not just as victims. It also sheds light on the inequities of the legal system at the time, which, because of these flaws, failed to provide practical alternatives to violence.

My article, "Indians, Ladinos, and the Resurrection of the *Protector de Indios*, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, 1870–85," examines the question of legal engagement in an atmosphere of inequity. In the Mexican period, jurisprudence demonstrated that Indians continued an understanding of the legal system as a means of resistance and in obtaining justice over maltreatment. The surfacing of the office of *protector de indios* for a brief period between 1870 and 1883 appears as an anomaly. It was a moment in which the government exerted the classic caudillo attitude. In order to prevent more Indian uprisings, the judicial branch came into the highlands of Chiapas to regulate and assimilate Indians through reconstituted paternalism in the form of an Indian protector. The state as advocate took on the veneer of protection in the face of violent upheaval. Indian populations worked to live within the ascribed boundaries, yet a closer study of legal culture during this period paints a picture of Indians actively engaging with power structures. Concerns over the Indian condition masked deeper anxieties regarding the economic position of highland elites—in particular, access to labor. Giving Indians equal access to justice helped to calm Indian as well as ladino fears. What becomes evident is that Indians had long-held frustrations stemming from their lack of ability to litigate in the national period. A study of litigation in nineteenth-century Chiapas sheds light on a dynamic period of change in Mexican history and demonstrates the ways in which power was held through evidence of contestation, negotiation, and participation in legal processes.

Indigenous peoples were not passive participants in their worlds; neither were they wholly immune to the hegemonic processes acting around them. They were active agents interacting within the confines of their circumstances as individuals with individual stories but also as groups who were creating their own histories.