New Mexico and the Pimería Alta

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Graves, William and John G. Douglass.
New Mexico and the Pimería Alta: The Colonial Period in the American Southwest.
John G. Douglass and William M. Graves, the editors of this volume, have told me that the *Columbian Consequences* project served as a catalyst for the initial symposium entitled “Transformations during the Colonial Era: Divergent Histories in the American Southwest,” subsequently published as this volume. They also asked me to write a few words about the *Columbian Consequences* effort, from a quarter-century perspective.

The roots of *Columbian Consequences* run back to the late 1980s, a time of considerable stress and not a little self-reflection in the Americanist archaeological community. A decade of repatriation and reburial debate would culminate in the 1990 The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) legislation. Competing paradigms of processual and postprocessual archaeology generated lively conversations about future directions of archaeological theory. The rapid growth of applied archaeology (in the form of cultural resource management) tested the conventionally academic structure of the archaeological profession. Long-standing issues of gender bias clouded archaeological interpretations of the past and the practice of archaeology in the present.

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With the Columbian Quincentenary just a few years off, the Society of American Archaeology (SAA) puzzled its role in anticipating the inevitable events that would surround the 500th anniversary of European–Native American interactions. I was a member of the Executive Committee of the SAA at the time, and the president asked me spearhead the society’s efforts for observing the Columbian Quincentenary.

Thanks to the support and encouragement of key SAA officers Don Fowler, Prudence Rice, Bruce Smith, and Jerry Sabloff, we were able to develop a plan. After exploring a number of options with the board, we settled upon a series of topical seminars that we dubbed *Columbian Consequences*.

These nine public seminars, to be held over a three-year span, were designed to generate an accurate and factual assessment of what did—and what did not—transpire as a result of the Columbian encounter. We specifically tasked ourselves to probe the social, demographic, ecological, ideological, and human repercussions of European–Native American encounters across the Spanish Borderlands, spreading the word among both the scholarly community and the greater public at large.

Although sponsored by the SAA, the *Columbian Consequences* enterprise rapidly transcended the traditional scope of archaeological inquiry, drawing together a diverse assortment of personalities and perspectives. We invited leading scholars of the day to synthesize current thinking about specific geographical settings across the Spanish Borderlands, which extend from St. Augustine (Florida) to San Francisco (California). Each overview was designed to provide a Native American context, a history of European involvement, and a summary of scholarly research.

The structure was fairly simple. Each of three consecutive SAA annual meetings (in 1988, 1989, and 1990) hosted three *Columbian Consequences* seminars. The resulting three volumes were published by the Smithsonian Institution Press, which remarkably published each volume less than a year after the seminar papers were presented.

The initial book, entitled *Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands West* (Thomas 1989), tackled the European–Native American interface from the Pacific Slope across the southwestern heartland to East Texas, from Russian Fort Ross to southern Baja California. The archaeologists involved addressed material culture evidence regarding contact period sociopolitics, economics, iconography, and physical environment. Other authors attempted to provide a critical balance from the perspectives of American history, Native American studies, art history, ethnohistory, and geography.

In the intermediate volume—*Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands East* (Thomas 1990)—nearly three dozen scholars pursued a similar agenda across La Florida, the greater Southeast, and the Caribbean.
Volume 3 of *Columbian Consequences* (Thomas 1991), entitled *The Spanish Borderlands in Pan-American Perspective*, explored Borderlands processes in action—past, present, and future. The volume began with a look at previous Columbus-related “celebrations,” particularly the Columbian Quatercentenary, manifest as the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, which heavily impacted the next century of Borderlands scholarship. Several authors explored Spanish mission strategies across the Borderlands, particularly addressing various Native American survival strategies. Some participants also examined then-revolutionary approaches to the demographics of European contact.

The *Columbian Consequences* enterprise was grounded in what I termed a “cubist” perspective (Thomas 1989), an argument for approaching the contact-era past from multiple directions simultaneously. I believed that an analogy to the early twentieth-century cubist movement was appropriate because of the way the cubists deconstructed and invalidated the restrictive conventions that had come to dominate Western art. Conventional canons of Renaissance art held, in effect, that reality is best perceived from a single, time-honored perspective, tasking artists to perfect their craft for abbreviating three-dimensional visual realities into artificial, two-dimensional art forms.

Cubists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque broke with this European illusionist tradition by arguing that one’s perspective can (and should) be shifted at will. Questioning the pretense of absolute visual truth, cubists rejected classical norms for the human figure, refusing to paint their images as snapshots of objects as they appeared momentarily to the eye. *Columbian Consequences* was structured along cubist lines by approaching the past from multiple directions simultaneously. Traditional Borderlands scholarship was viewed like the works of the Renaissance masters. Both involved a snapshot-of-the-past approach, bent on capturing perceived reality from a single perspective. Just as the Renaissance masters used light, color, and texture to generate their single-view imagery, Borderlands scholarship had long championed special-interest groups, promoting and perpetuating their single-point version of the “truth”—the way it really was. While not rejecting most conventional Borderlands scholarship outright, we (like the cubists) argued that the past was best addressed by fresh, sometimes conflicting, perspectives as well.

With this cubist imperative in mind, we scanned the Borderlands for participants who represented both traditional and novel perspectives, attempting to augment conventional Borderlands scholarship with fresher insights from historical archaeology, Native American studies, historical demography, and ethnohistory. At its base, the *Columbian Consequences* seminars tried to serve as an overarching mechanism for balance, criticism, and synthesis—reassessing throughout the importance of recognizing multiple pasts and the necessity of decoupling intellectual inquiry from its associated mythologies.
The ninety-three chapters of *Columbian Consequences* enlisted a broad sweep of scholarly opinions from a diverse range of disciplines. In all, there were 64 archaeologists, 11 historians, 9 physical anthropologists, 9 ethnohistorians, 6 cultural anthropologists, 5 art historians, and 3 geographers. Included in this group were four archaeologists hailing from Latin America, two Native American scholars, one Franciscan historian, and one Jesuit ethnohistorian.

Today, of course, looking back at the roster from a quarter-century perspective, our “diverse range” was disappointingly narrow, even parochial. Even at the time, this shortcoming was apparent; as I wrote in 1992, “the results remain somewhat frustrating and dissatisfying. Any objective assessment of the *Columbian Consequences* inquiry . . . would point out that not only are the Native American, Latin American, and Hispanic perspectives seriously underrepresented, but less than one-third of the participants are women . . . despite our best efforts to elicit an extended suite of opinion and perspective, the final result remains biased toward white, Anglo, male scholarship” (Thomas 1992:615).

Further, like some of the cubist paintings themselves, the results of *Columbian Consequences* were not uniformly pleasing or universally accepted by the public. Conventional Renaissance scholars had, to be sure, produced exceptional artwork more pleasing to the eye than those of the cubists. Some readers of *Columbian Consequences* were disappointed that the series did not produce a “definitive history” of Hispanic–Native American interactions across the Borderlands. Grounded in the belief that multiple distinctive histories had played out during the Columbian encounters, we explored the range and evolution of Hispanic objectives, but also considered Native American counterstrategies for coping with European intrusions. Some critics, more personally comfortable with their own single-perspective histories, resented and protested the intrusion of such collateral, sometimes contrarian viewpoints. Choosing diversity at the expense of harmony, we broke ranks with traditional Borderlands historiography by exploring non-Hispanic, nonwritten records of the past (including archaeology, oral history, and tribal tradition). Some grumbled that arguments from oral history and tribal tradition were “out of place” in serious Borderlands scholarship.

The *Columbian Consequences* exercise highlighted some of the significant obstacles remaining for minorities and women seeking to pursue careers in scholarship—Borderlands or otherwise. The series sold pretty well, with *Choice* magazine selecting *Columbian Consequences* volumes 1 and 2 as Outstanding Academic Books of 1989 and 1990 (respectively). Recognizing the growing tensions over repatriation issues and acknowledging the acute challenges facing Indian people seeking higher education, all royalties from *Columbian Consequences* were earmarked to establish the Native American Scholarship Fund of the Society for American Archaeology. Since renamed the Arthur C. Parker Scholarship, these funds have been augmented by royalties from dozens
of additional archaeological books and continue to support archaeological training for Native American students.

The contributions in the present volume continue in the *Columbian Consequences* tradition. The editors emphasize that their intent was not an all-encompassing overview of the American Southwest. They argue instead that this book is the first since *Columbian Consequences* to address the broader themes of colonialism in a number of case studies from the Greater Southwest. In his overview, Kent G. Lightfoot (chapter 14) agrees these chapters underscore the promise of the American Southwest for new directions in the archaeology of colonialism, particularly in exploring the distinctive historical trajectories that unfolded there. He adds that the major advances in the archaeology of colonialism, as clearly demonstrated in this volume, set the stage for another *Columbian Consequences*-style synthesis and critique of the Spanish Borderlands.

**REFERENCES CITED**


