

Reviews

Pekka Hämäläinen. *Lakota America: A New History of Indigenous Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. Pp. ix, 530. \$35.00.

The people gathered in 1776 to celebrate. They had come together to witness an act of creation – the establishment of a nation and formal homeland. There were prayers and songs; music and pageantry; speeches and tales told about the land and the future that they hoped would bring prosperity. They came to pay respect for those in the past who sacrificed and built their nation, and, in the end, they concluded that the nation's founding was the “heart of everything that is” (93). These individuals stood on ground they found sacred and believed needed protection from global forces of ruin – empires, economies, and politics that threatened their ability to be independent. Their modern history started in that place, and they marked it with documents recounting the origin. It is where their lives were to forever have meaning. 1776 was their birthright as a people.

It might seem that this description fits the origin story of the United States of America. And, in many ways it does. But this is the story of the Lakota Nation – a Lakota America – as told by American Horse (1840-1908), the Oglala elder, warrior, and count keeper who told this story to the U.S. Army officer, William Corbusier. It was American Horse's explanation for the centrality of Pahá Sápa – the Black Hills – to his people and his nation in 1879. He told it just as the other nation born in 1776 determined that it was its right to take Lakota land and imprison Lakota people in reservations.

It is this twin beginning and twin struggle on the North American continent that animates Pekka Hämäläinen's sweeping history, *Lakota America*. Two nations occupying a large land mass with imperial dreams and military power; two nations who organized sacred places and sacred texts that defined themselves as people and nation. These two nations determined the structure and history of North America from the early eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century. *Lakota America* brilliantly tells the story of Lakota nation-building. Hämäläinen reshapes how historians and history teachers might approach indigenous worlds and complicates the traditional ways that the U.S. national narrative has been told.

Hämäläinen is already well-known for his excellent *The Comanche Empire*, which tells the story of Comanche empire building in the Southern Plains alongside European nation states (especially Spain) and the United States before and after the Mexican-American War. But he goes even further and deeper here in tying indigenous power, indigenous nation building, and indigenous modernity to the building of the United States as a modern national power. No review can truly do justice to the complex, detailed, and often thrilling story that Hämäläinen weaves in *Lakota America*. But there are two main contributions in this well-written tale that stand out immediately: the effective use of winter counts throughout the book as sources of Lakota world views and Lakota understanding of their nation; and the focus on the Lakota ability to change – or shapeshift, as it were, like the trickster character Iktómi.

First, and most importantly, is that Hämäläinen uses source material that has not been fully integrated into other narrative histories of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries: the Plains winter counts that tell the story of peoples throughout the region. Although these accounts have been saved, displayed in museums of history and art, and discussed as indigenous forms of cultural expression, they have rarely been so fully utilized as forms of narrative. Hämäläinen uses these sources throughout his work. His focus remains as much as possible on what Lakota people thought, believed, understood, and explained. And he constantly comes back to these (often providing the pictographs themselves) to demonstrate Lakota ways of thinking about events large and small. As he argues, the winter counts are “[at] once a record of the past and an act of remembering, of giving meaning to the past... they open an alternative, counterhegemonic window into the American past, allowing us to observe Native motives and meanings directly, without a foreign filter” (8). By using these sources as narrative histories as well as artistic expression, Hämäläinen opens up the Lakota as historical actors, and he opens up the process of historical thinking for students confronting these for the first time. By offering a narrative that does not privilege the written word alone – a written word generally in the hands of Euro-Americans – he gives us fully human indigenous people shaping and organizing their world.

The second contribution, and a leading theme throughout the narrative, is the Lakota ability to change, react, and reconfigure themselves given the broader structures of economics, politics, national interest, war, environmental considerations, and cultural norms. These were not a “homogenized,” traditionalist people stuck outside of time and confronting a rapidly changing, modernizing world that they cannot understand and do not embrace. Instead, they were shapeshifters – adaptable and creative theorists of an indigenous modernity throughout their history and, in particular, in their relationships with the U.S. government/military from the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. Hämäläinen uncovers the complex ways that Lakota people interacted with U.S. government officials for their own interests in creating an empire of their own. Sometimes they behaved as simple trading partners seeking goods; sometimes as partners against Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara peoples in both military and economic terms seemingly to United States’ benefit. But they always sought for their nation’s advantage and were never passive supplicants for U.S. hegemony – though the United States often did not recognize this particular Lakota ability. For example, at Horse Creek in 1851, the United States wanted to bring together Indian nations to engineer an agreement over reservations in the Great Plains that would allow free land for railroad building, overland trails, and a great settler migration westward. Americans thought they might cajole, force, and domesticate Indians by identifying friendly “chiefs” and providing incentives for these chiefs to accept personal gain while giving away large swaths of indigenous territory. It was a tactic used many times throughout colonial occupation. But the Lakota actually commanded the negotiations – entering Horse Creek with great fanfare, meeting in private council to decide who took the lead in negotiations, and forcing smaller nations to submit to their overall authority. As Hämäläinen suggests, the Lakota “thought in terms of geopolitics and, like, Americans, they had grown to command the world around them like an imperial power” (218). The Lakota always were and still remain Lakota.

Moreover, in later negotiations with the Americans after the Civil War, the Lakota’s shapeshifted again creating a new political philosophy of *iwášteǵla* – articulated most effectively by Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and Red Cloud in the late 1860s through the 1880s. Essentially, they articulated a political ideal that they would “go slowly” toward white modernity: “[it was] a new political philosophy that recognized that Lakotas would have to gradually learn to live with wašíćus [whites], whose presence in their world had become an irrevocable fact...Confident as Lakotas may have been about their place in the world, they remained flexible and receptive. They would survive the wašíću version of modernity by selectively embracing it” (299-300). Rather than stick to old ways of thinking about their land, Lakota leaders recognized the need to shift slowly toward American versions of modernity – markets, consumption, education, etc... -- in order to protect their own.

The one possible criticism of *Lakota America* is where the main narrative ends. Hämäläinen winds down his central story with the events at Little Big Horn and the terrible massacre at Wounded Knee. It was at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890, that Spotted Elk’s band was brutalized and murdered by U.S. soldiers. It was a catastrophe for the Lakota people where “America’s indigenous civilization seemed to have died...turning more than two hundred thousand Indians into relics” (379). It might seem that this simply recasts an old story of Indian endings (the indigenous heart “buried” at Wounded Knee) in contrast to the rest of the narrative that centers indigenous power and authority. One longs to hear more than this ending. Hämäläinen does add an epilogue that carries his story through allotment, the remaking of Indian land in the Indian Reorganization Act, the loss of land again in reclamation projects such as the Pick-Sloan Dam, and onto the recent events at Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline. But this is a short account of these events of Lakota recovery and survival. Although the book is long, one would love to read Hämäläinen recount this story as well. Perhaps that will have to await another volume.

For teachers, *Lakota America* offers much to build upon in the classroom. The book certainly works in courses on Native America and even works well alongside traditional textbook accounts of U.S. history. It can be used effectively in both college and even upper level high school classrooms to counter dominant narratives of the United States, and show the interconnections between Lakota power and U.S. interests in building their continent wide empire. Moreover, the work can fuel a broader re-thinking for treating indigenous modernity

and indigenous views of statehood as serious visions for how North America might be imagined as a historical space and avoid overly deterministic accounts that assume an inevitable receding frontier of US authority across the continent. Highly recommended.

Edward C. Rafferty
Concord Academy (MA)

John Thelin. *Going to College in the Sixties*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 2021. Pp. 198. \$22.95.

In 1961, high school students anxious about entering college could read, *Preparing for College Study*, a new book by Norman A. Fedde, a faculty member at Yale University. Although Fedde warned his readers that teaching and learning in college would bring new challenges due to the promising changes in education in the postwar period, neither the author nor his readers could imagine much of what lay ahead in the 1960s. In *Going to College in the Sixties*, historian John Thelin provides a brief, accessible account of American higher education at the time that aims at a “reasonable reconsideration” of a topic often dominated by journalists’ accounts, nostalgic memoirs, and popular culture. (xiii) The result is an analysis that, despite the book’s title, include very little of the personal experiences of students and, instead, offers an instructive commentary on the largely overlooked aspects that nevertheless revolutionized higher education. Thelin spent the entire decade of the 1960s as a college student and his work illuminates the crucial features of the decade that few students, and perhaps even the general public, appreciated at the time.

Thelin’s analysis largely avoids the “pitfalls of nostalgia” and directly challenges more conventional accounts focused on student protests on well-known campuses. (6) He reminds readers that conservative student unrest at the University of Mississippi in 1962 belongs next to the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in 1964. “Volatile student demonstrations,” Thelin explains, “coexisted with intercollegiate athletics, fraternities and sororities, student government, and the ‘business as usual’ of a university.” (xiv) College life created both liberal activists and the conservative students eager to connect with the “states’ business and political establishment.” (xiv) This approach means that Thelin includes effective discussion of the first half of the decade and, with less success, the breadth of higher education that includes schools in the Midwest and the South as well as the expanding role of junior colleges.

If our collective memory often centers on dramatic student unrest and the counterculture, *Going to College in the Sixties* excels in its treatment of what Thelin identifies as the “vital statistics” of higher education. Thelin’s analysis weaves together demographic factors, budgets, the employment of faculty and staff, and tuition to portray an educational environment invigorated by postwar prosperity, the improvement of the nation’s public high schools, and unprecedented support from state and federal government. His treatment of college admissions during the period is especially strong as the author describes the increasing attention to public relations and the role of the media. With little concern for protecting the interests of students as consumers, colleges sold a romantic vision of college life and upward mobility while maintaining exclusionary practices. While Thelin’s discussion of racial, gender, and class discrimination is unfortunately limited, his account is clear that colleges modernized while perpetuating a “caste system across hundreds of institutions.” (50)

One of the more intriguing features of the book is Thelin’s description of the “knowledge industry,” the crucial role of an array of new forces that reshaped higher education at the time. The decade brought the growing influence of research centers and institutes, private foundations, state and federal agencies, enormous state systems, the Department of Defense, the Educational Testing Service, and international alliances that ranged from non-profit organizations to the Central Intelligence Agency. These aspects and large federal grants, 80% of which went to just twenty federal grant universities in 1963, fueled increased commitment to promoting