H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Juliana Barr. *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. 416 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5790-8; $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3082-6.

Reviewed by Billie Ford (Independent Scholar)

Published on H-SAWH (January, 2008)

New Perspectives on Power

Traditionally, most research and literature on the Spanish settlement of Indian territories has focused on the Spaniards' perspective. After all, most historical sources related to Spanish exploration are in Spanish, written by Spaniards. In recent years, however, there has been more attention given to native points of view. Important authors like Peter Iverson, Theda Purdue, and Nancy Shoemaker give voice not only to Native Americans but to native women. They argue that many Indians were not victims, as they have been historically portrayed. Instead, Indians managed to persevere in spite of European hegemony and to adapt their cultures to changes brought about by Europeans. With *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands*, Juliana Barr adds considerably to our understanding of the Indian experience and how we view Indians' early contact with Europeans. Barr invites us to reframe our understanding of history by focusing on native Texans' behavior vis-a-vis Spaniards. In most regions of exploration, such as New Mexico and Arizona, Spaniards were able to subordinate and control the natives, using them as a work force and converting them to Catholicism. According to Barr, however, the Texas experience was vastly different. Her central argument is that the Indians of Tejas were not the victims of European hegemony as were other natives. Instead, she argues, the Spaniards in Texas were at the mercy of native rituals and controls. Texas Indians not only resisted Spanish domination but actually controlled the structure of relationships. It was Indians who had the power and Indians who determined how successful–or not–Spanish encroachment would be. Unlike native cultures elsewhere, Texas Indians were not easily colonized. Barr uses three specific chronological models of Indian-Spaniard interaction to show the context of native cultural and political rituals. Within each example, she also illuminates native women's crucial roles in these processes.

In part 1 of the book, covering the decades from the 1680s through the 1720s, Barr compares the French and Spanish experiences with the Caddo Indians. The French had a culture similar to that of the Caddos; they accepted Caddo hospitality and offered a reciprocal tolerance. They shared Caddoan values without expecting them to adopt French dogma. They allowed the Indians to continue their own sovereignty and attempted to participate in the native community as equals, even recognizing women's status and contributions. In contrast, Spaniards bumped into a gendered native culture that was unfamiliar and immediately tried to change it. They offered Christian salvation to inhabitants they considered heathen, expecting to convert and subdue them. They offered no reciprocal benefits and saw themselves as a superior civilization. They did not understand native values, especially the traditions of matrilineal kinship and the importance of women in native customs. Spaniards had little concept of a kin-based culture, or one in which gender, rather than race or power, determined status. The French enjoyed a successful coexistence with the Caddo people, establishing economic trade, political diplomacy, and even intermarriage into the kin-based intimate circles of society. Spaniards, on the other hand, failed miserably in their attempts to establish relations with the Caddos. Spanish soldiers and missionaries came to Texas with a show of military strength and religious intensity.

To the Indians, women were a valued part of life, and their culture could not maintain itself without women's

full participation and influence. That the Spaniards had no women and children with them signaled to the natives that the Spaniards were in Texas for aggression rather than peace. At first the Caddoans thought the Spaniards' customary use of the Virgin Mary was a symbolic portrayal of feminine presence, since no women physically traveled with them. They soon realized this was not so and that Spanish notions of women were not the same as their own. In the Spanish patriarchal system, women were not allowed public input or status. Spanish soldiers mistreated and abused Indian women, considering their openness and suasion to be evidence of the promiscuity of so-called savages. Spanish missionaries tried to convert Indian women and mold them into the ideal of Spanish womanhood. Caddo Indians finally tired of Spanish lack of respect and insolence and drove them southward into central Texas.

In part 2, covering the decades between the 1720s and the 1760s, Barr shows the Spaniards in a different light. Interactions with the natives of south-central Texas were unlike those with the Caddo Indians. Rather than going into the area to live among the Indians and convert them, the Spanish military and religious presence determined to draw the natives to them. They established a network of mission-presidio complexes, attempting to bring the natives within their walls for conversion and utility. Interestingly, Barr asserts that there were few actual Indian conversions during this time. Most baptisms were either of babies or dying natives.

Since local natives and Spaniards alike were being threatened by a common aggressor, the Apache Indians, they often joined forces within the complexes. They pooled resources but never intermingled cultures. They may have been allies, but they never became friends. The Coahuilteco-, Tonkawa-, and Karankawa-speaking Indians continued their semi-nomadic lifestyles, seasonally migrating as usual. When they were in the area, they would utilize the Spanish complexes but had no intention of permanently joining them or of settling in one area all year. As Spaniards attempted to ally with south-central Indians, Apaches increased raids and declarations of war against them all. Spaniards began raids in retaliation, often taking Apache women and children as prisoners of war, refusing to come to a peaceful settlement by returning the captives to their families. Women and children became bartering tools, which further alienated the kin-based Indians.

Part 3 of the book covers the 1760s through the 1780s. Barr argues that it took years of negotiating for the Apaches and Spaniards to reach a military alliance, and it was only accomplished by diplomatic terms that necessarily included Spanish recognition of female efforts. As unwilling captives, Indian women and children learned Spanish and could often translate and mediate between the negotiating groups. Women and children were bartered and exchanged between the Indians and Europeans, becoming a kind of currency for trade. Women were also exchanged as symbols of alliance and emissaries of peace, as Spaniards came to recognize their importance in the Indian community. Through intermarriage, the kin-based Indian culture opened to Spaniards, and they were finally allowed to mingle with the Indians. Through the women, Spaniards gained some political power, and the Indians realized an economic gain. Thus native women became not only *negotiators* in diplomacy but full participants in Texas history.

Barr leads readers to view the Indian-European encounters from native perspectives. With an atypical construction of power, she demonstrates how Texas Indians dictated the rules of engagement. She uses this approach quite successfully, but some questions do arise. There are no original native sources, so Barr makes heavy use of Spanish sources, which is ironic. It requires a delicate balance, and possibly some presuppositions, to translate the Spanish documents of Spaniard aggressors in order to understand Indian perspectives on power and peace. To her credit, Barr does an excellent job, given this limitation of resources.

As with all of her work, Barr's *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* is well researched and extensively documented. She uses primary sources when possible and secondary sources as needed. The book is clearly written and logically organized, although Barr could have varied sentence length to avoid so many long and weighty sentences. This book is not for the faint-hearted but is an engaging study for both professionals and students. It is an excellent resource for the classroom, especially a graduate course requiring more systematic study and closer examination of the native cultures of Texas.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-sawh

Citation: Billie Ford. Review of Barr, Juliana, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands*. H-SAWH, H-Net Reviews. January, 2008.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14043

Copyright © 2008 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.