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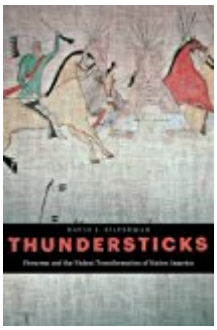

David J. Silverman. *Thundersticks: Firearms and the Violent Transformation of Native America.* Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2016. 400 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-73747-1.

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Commissioned by F. Evan Nooe (University of North Carolina, Charlotte)

Native American leader Red Shoes of the Choctaw thought he was properly leading his followers and promoting himself as the true leader of his people when he broke with the French alliance and courted the English colonists of South Carolina. David J. Silverman in his well-crafted and timely *Thundersticks: Firearms and the Violent Transformation of Native America* relates the stories of Red Shoes and Indian and colonial (later American) leaders like him from across the continent through the lens of the European and Indian arms trade. From a fresh persective, Silverman analyzes the colonization of North America and the "violent transformation" of Native societies in the New World.

Silverman organizes his text on a regional basis, largely at the expense of chronology, which has the advantage of presenting a more readable and coherent volume given its in-depth and wide-ranging nature. Beginning with an engaging account of Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull surrendering to the US Army after a victorious career against them, Silverman then returns to the Iroquois Confederacy's adoption of flintlock firearms. The Iroquois used flintlocks to great effect in all directions from Iroquoia. These sometimes large-scale campaigns, which historian Jon Parmenter and others have termed the "Beaver Wars" (*The Routledge Handbook of Diplomatic and Military History,* 2014*),* sought not only to dominate trade lines for muskets and other goods, but also to replenish Native group members who were lost to war and disease. The "Mourning Wars," as historian Daniel Richter has named them (*The Ordeal of the Longhouse,* 1992), had the consequence of integrating whole communities into the Iroquois nation, while emptying Native Americans from broad swaths of territory east of the Mississippi.

Thundersticks then moves on to the American Southeast, where Silverman smartly connects the exploding weapons' trade with burgeoning Indian and then African slavery. This is one of the most cogent sections of the book and important for early American studies of slavery. The volume passes further west to consider the frontier during Ponti-

ac's War and beyond and then to the Pacific West, where the author continues his exploration of other European colonial policies toward Native groups--in this episode, Russian colonial expansion in Northwest America. Silverman returns to the South in a detailed account of the Seminole Wars and the first time before the Vietnam War that the United States experienced defeat. ***Thundersticks*** marches west again to detail the Indian wars of the Plains and the Mountain West. The epilogue integrates nicely with the introduction by considering the modern Native American use of weaponry and its iconography in the 1970s rebirth of the Indian sovereignty movement.

Silverman's sweeping account sows the seeds of the text's weaknesses. Regional sections suffer from a few historical shortcomings, which is not always a result of writing these types of extensive volumes, as historian Geoffrey Parker has definitively shown in ***Global Crisis*** (2013). Although Silverman cites his argument about the overestimation of the impact of disease on Native communities from ***Edge of the Woods: Iroquoia, 1534-1701*** (2010), Parmenter's conclusion is largely unaccounted for in ***Thundersticks***. To be sure, European diseases killed many Indians, but as Parmenter makes clear, a better indication of Native agency was how effectively Indian communities responded to outbreaks, lessening losses. In terms of the Iroquois' enemies, Silverman refers to a "Mohican" group of James Fenimore Cooper's fictional ***Last of the Mohicans*** fame (p. 25), instead of "Mahican," the usual term employed for these Indians. In one battle account, Algonquian, the Native ethnic grouping, is confused with Algonquin, a Native group from Canada (pp. 45-46).

Patrick Malone's ***The Skulking Way of War*** (1991) should have been first cited with the introduction of skulking warfare (p. 23). As Malone makes clear, it was not just the adoption of firearms, of which ***Thundersticks*** captures the violent results exceedingly well, but the Natives' incorporation of these into existing tactics. This does not come across as clearly. Availability of advanced weapons systems is one thing, knowing how to employ them quite another, as any number of military history examples illustrate. Although books published later than ***Connecticut Unscathed: Victory in the Great Narragansett War*** (2014) were cited in the volume, Silverman's section on King Philip's War misses an opportunity to consider this reviewer's ideas about the conflict. This although he adopts one of my themes—the necessity of Connecticut's Indian allies for the defeat of the anti-English Indian coalition.

Silverman might have offered a fuller accounting of the violence of the pre-contact era along the lines of anthropologists Kevin McBride's studies (McBride is cited in a number of places) and Lawrence Keeley's ***War Before Civilization*** (1996). The arms trade exacerbated tensions already existing ***before*** European contact. McBride estimates a large percentage of Native noncombatants were killed in one pre-contact episode, while attackers often spared this group for adoption in post-contact warfare ("War and Trade in Eastern New Netherland" in ***A Beautiful and Fruitful Place***, 2013). Episodes like this are necessarily at odds with the idea of violent transformation due to European weapons.

In a couple of cases, Silverman might have chosen more appropriate examples for his examination of firearm-induced violence on Native communities. The author omits the potentially worthwhile discussion of Virginia's Bacon's Rebellion (1676), where the English colonists dispersed the Occaneechis, who previously controlled the trade routes—including firearms—to the Cherokees of the Carolina Piedmont and beyond (Ian Steele's ***Warpaths***, 2000). He discusses The French and Indian War in only a few places, but ultimate French defeat in America was a watershed moment for Native American groups, as Indians lost the most competent and erstwhile European ally on the continent.

Even with some omissions, this is a highly readable volume and offers new insight into colonial warfare in the New World. Ethnohistorians, early Americanists, and military historians should definitely read it, as well as those interested in the basis of the current American empire. As colleges and universities in the United States, in the main, continue to shy away from topics of war and technology, Silverman succeeds in showcasing the necessity, and indeed, utility of such studies. In a world awash in conflict and tribalism today, what better way to educate college students about the dangers of the world they will soon influence than the study of these issues? This especially so as fields in the humanities continue to shrink and play second fiddle to STEM courses. Although Silverman does not make the connection explicit, it does not take too much reading between the lines to understand the relevance of his volume. In this alone, Silverman has rendered a solid public service. There are no safe spaces in Silverman's recounting, and those with delicate sensibilities should steer clear of this work.