

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Cahokia: Domination and Ideology in the Mississippian World. Edited by Timothy R. Pauketat and Thomas E. Emerson.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/26h5h66j>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 23(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Beery, John Richard

Publication Date

1999-03-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

and to be “myself the evaluator and classifier.” Blaeser chooses to break out of the binomial, linear, either/or classification, and instead she uses her own paradigms of “maps,” “migrations,” and “mazes.” These tropes represent her life more accurately, and through them she takes the power into her own hands.

Penn’s collection leads to other First Nations issues that need discussion. What about the person of all Native ancestry who is not enough degree of any one nation to be enrolled? What about people who were adopted by non-Natives and raised in other cultures, and who try to return to their birth families? Or do not? Penn states in his introduction that his bias was for “New essays by new writers . . . [and] usual writers [are] excluded by someone like me because everybody knows their names” (p. 9). The stories of William Apess (especially as Scott Manning Stevens discusses identity in “William Apess’s Historical Self,” *Northwest Review*) and Leslie Marmon Silko are not irrelevant because they are familiar. Perhaps the real problem is the need for Penn to edit another volume. *Speaking for the Generations*, edited by Simon Ortiz (University of Arizona Press, 1998), is another new collection that gathers similarly useful personal essays by well-known Native writers. An accumulation of individual voices can define a community, even in the flat pages of a book.

In *As We Are Now*, Penn does the service of bringing together a number of remarkable essays, in accessible narrative form, that are appealing works of art as well as persuasive arguments that the Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood should not define authentic Indian identity. The writers all raise critical questions and suggest answers. They deconstruct academic politics, Proposition 187, and Indian politics; and they subvert internalized colonialism. The fact that many of these stories are from United States residents of Latin origin does not make the tenets any less important to indigenous North Americans. Penn does the service of removing the five-hundred-year-old line between the Spanish-speaking *indios* and English-speaking Indians. It is about time.

Denise Low

Haskell Indian Nations University

Cahokia: Domination and Ideology in the Mississippian World. Edited by Timothy R. Pauketat and Thomas E. Emerson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. 360 pages. \$55.00 cloth.

This study consists of thirteen chapters covering all major topics related to Cahokia. The work, while outstanding, is too technical for readers other than students and scholars, anthropologists especially. Nine anthropologists have contributed selections.

Cahokia refers to several related archeological sites in the vicinity of St. Louis, Missouri that existed between approximately 1000 A.D. and 1400 A.D. The people who inhabited this region are known as mound builders. Although other similar societies existed in the Southeast at the same time, Cahokia was the most dominant. It was a complex chiefdom, and through

trade and expansion its religion and culture spread widely. The authors suggest that it gave birth to numerous Siouan-speaking societies, as well as communities in the Southeast. This, no doubt, continued after Cahokia itself disappeared.

In the second chapter, Timothy Pauketat examines the position that politics held in Cahokia. He maintains, based upon new evidence, that the central complex, itself not that large, was able to gain a great amount of political power in the St. Louis region by forcing outlying groups, in what the author terms the American Bottom, to pay homage to it beginning in 1050 A.D. Cahokian leaders then appropriated labor from these outlying groups to build the great earthen temples, the mounds. Social differences, between the haves and have nots, became more pronounced.

Neil Lopinot analyzes the yield obtained from agriculturalists. He makes an important point—a tiered society must have food producers or it will not remain a united community for very long. As production increased, so did Cahokia's political, religious, and cultural dominance.

Lucretia S. Kelly adds to Lopinot's discussion of food resources when she examines animal husbandry. Deer was the primary animal consumed, and she attempts to prove that the elite ate better cuts of meat than the rest of society did, citing the varied refuse pits as evidence. She hedges her bet, however, when answering the question about different animal parts and different garbage sites, stating that there *may* have been a difference. The author uses evidence to back up her hypothesis then walks away from it; therefore, this selection is difficult to understand.

Rinitia A. Dalan discusses how the Cahokians built their habitations. Without a doubt, the elite had better accommodations than the balance of the population. The author makes an important point—through the archeological evidence one can see the rise, domination, and decline of both the elite and of Cahokia itself. During its heyday the community was divided into two sections primarily, one for the elite and the other for the people, the laborers and agriculturalists. This enabled the politically powerful to situate their offices in one central area, where the great mounds were built.

In discussing the size of the Cahokian population, Pauketat and Lopinot explain how, over time, many people moved in and out. The largest population of Cahokia was approximately 15,000, during the Lohmann phase, sometime between 1050 A.D. and 1100 A.D. After this date the population declined as more and more people settled in the hinterlands.

James M. Collins examines in depth how Cahokia became stratified. At first there were no visible differences between dwellings, but as time passed this changed, with the elite, as noted above, living in the central complex. For the most part, they had larger homes than the masses, befitting their superior status. Eventually many of the common people, fed up with elite pretensions, moved away. Thus, Cahokia began its decline.

John E. Kelly analyzes the sociopolitical aspects of the society, stressing that one can understand Cahokia's stratified social relations by looking at the great mounds. According to the author, beginning about 1100 A.D., the elite were capable of demanding labor from the lower classes who built the

mounds for their rulers. Unfortunately, Kelly does not explain how and why this happened.

Emerson examines life in the country, away from the central complex. From the archeological remains one can understand how the elite subordinated the lower classes. The well-to-do had more goods, and goods of greater value, than the country folk who produced these items. A large proportion of the lower classes lived in communal dwellings, while the political and religious elite lived in single households. Emerson also analyzes how religion and ideology are reflected in religious ceremonies associated with certain places, for instance, the central mounds, and attributes of sacred power. One can identify Cahokian and Southeastern mound-building cultures by the presence of the serpent manifested in the shape of the mounds, as well as in tattoos and elsewhere. The representation of plant and agricultural motifs set Cahokia off from early Southeastern sites. In addition, religion played a large part in Cahokia lifeways; one can see this in numerous excavations. The elite controlled access to these goods through several cults, and thereby were able to keep their position of authority in religion. If one wanted religious items, one had to deal with the elite.

Vernon James Knight Jr. shows how Cahokia helped create southern cultures. This should not have happened because most of the people who left Cahokia went to the Plains where they became Siouan-speakers. Yet the record shows that Cahokia-dominated ideals migrated into the Southeast.

David G. Anderson explains how and why Cahokia influenced Southeastern communities. When Cahokia began its decline, which included the loss of political power of the chiefdom, leaders in the Southeastern societies also lost much of their authority. One can see this not from archeological evidence alone, but from reports compiled by early Spanish explorers. Before this occurred, however, Cahokia rose because, in addition to factors listed above, it controlled interregional trade.

Emerson and Pauketat bring together all the works of the scholars mentioned above. When Cahokia fell apart, its peoples moved away, directly influencing what is referred to as later Mississippian communities. Each of the authors builds on the work of other scholars, and each also offers suggestions for further research. For example, to understand Cahokia and other Mississippian sites better, one must find correlations between these societies and what historians know about them. In this way it will prove easier to understand how Cahokia influenced historic groups.

This study proves that Cahokia was, with the evidence available, dominant politically, ideologically, and religiously. The study is replete with graphs, maps, and tables that make it easier to understand what happened in the region. An excellent and up-to-date bibliography is included. Remember, however, that this book, which some reviewers say is for the layperson, was compiled by anthropologists for anthropologists and their students. This makes it a fairly specialized work.

John Richard Beery
University of Toledo