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## Review Essay

### American Indian Historical Demography: A Review Essay with Suggestions for Future Research

Russell Thornton

Sherburne F. Cook. *The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. 522 pp. \$6.95

Sherburne F. Cook. *The Population of the California Indians, 1769-1970*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. 222 pp. \$13.95

Sherburne F. Cook. *The Indian Population of New England in the Seventeenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. 91 pp. \$5.75

The year 1976 might very well be considered a landmark in the study of historic North American Indian populations. It was the publication date of Dobyns' *Native American Historical Demography: A Critical Bibliography*<sup>1</sup>, Denevan's *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492*<sup>2</sup> and a special volume of *Ethnohistory*<sup>3</sup> devoted to American Indian historical demography, as well as of various journal articles<sup>4</sup> related to this topic. It was also the year of the posthumous publication of the three books by Sherburne F. Cook discussed in this essay: *The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization*, *The Population of the California Indians, 1769-1970*, and *The Indian Population of New England in the Seventeenth Century*. Surely, no other past year has yielded so many significant publications on historic American Indian populations.

*The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization* reprints in one volume six of Cook's essays published initially between 1940 and 1943 as separate volumes in the Ibero-Americana monograph series. The publication is significant simply by making these out-of-print essays available once again, and available widely as a single publication. The six essays forming the book are: "The Indian Versus the Spanish Mission," "The Physical and Demographic Reaction of the Nonmission

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Indians in Colonial and Provincial California," "The American Invasion, 1848-1870," "Trends in Marriage and Divorce since 1850," "Population Trends Among the California Mission Indians" and "The Mechanism and Extent of Dietary Adaptation Among Certain Groups of California and Nevada Indians." The first four essays focus on various aspects of Indian-white relations and conflicts and are more or less a subunit themselves; the last two essays may be seen as another subunit, complementary to the first four essays but not related directly. To varying extents, all of these six reprinted essays had achieved notoriety as pioneering efforts long before this recent publication. All should prove of interest and importance to contemporary scholars.

Cook's monograph *The Population of the California Indians, 1769-1970* is a virtual wealth of useful demographic information and analysis. In it, he considers numerical changes in the American Indian population in California to 1970 as well as changes in its age distribution, vital events of birth and death, "degrees of blood" and geographical distribution, particularly urbanization. Of paramount importance is a description and analysis of changes in age distribution and vital events. These indicate strongly that since "favorable" conditions were established in the late 1800's the California Indian population has experienced rather explosive increases in fertility and decreases in mortality, particularly at the younger ages, and resulting increases in size. This is seen as a reversion to an early phase of demographic transition with high birth rates and decreasing mortality rates in contrast to the pattern prior to the late 1800's of lower fertility and higher mortality and a declining population. Particularly important to the tradition of estimates of original American Indian populations, Cook considers in detail the size of the pre-European population of California. His resulting figure of 304,400 is well above Merriam's of 260,000,<sup>5</sup> Kroeber's of 125,000,<sup>6</sup> and Mooney's of 260,000.<sup>7</sup> (Cook's figure, however, may be considered conservative in light of other recent estimates of the total North American pre-European native population discussed below.)

*The Indian Population of New England in the Seventeenth Century* was not a totally complete manuscript at the time of Cook's death in 1974 but was finally edited and completed for publication by Woodrow Borah. In the work Cook seeks to establish the size of several New England populations during the 1600's and compares resulting figures with those of Mooney.<sup>8</sup> The book is introduced by brief discussions of family size, estimates of occupants per house and of village size, and estimates from subsistence levels. Each discussion represents a concise statement of issues and is recommended to interested readers. Particularly important is the discussion of family size as it is one of the few discussions of family size among very early Indian populations to be found in the scholarly literature.

The "New England" area of focus only partially coincides with the six New England states of today. Maine is all but excluded as the Abnaki

who resided there were, according to Cook, distinct from other peoples of New England. Northern New Hampshire and all of Vermont but the eastern portion are excluded because of little existing information on historic Indian populations there. A portion of New York is included; however, it is all of the state east of the Hudson River and south of present-day Albany and, also, Long Island. Using virtually the same date as Mooney, the beginning of the seventeenth century, and many of the same sources of information but with some additional, more contemporary ones, Cook arrives at the population estimates: Pennacook Confederacy, 12,000; Wappinger Confederacy, 13,200; Narragansett, 7,800; Long Island, 7,500; Nipmuck-Connecticut Valley, 5,300; Massachusetts, 4,500; Wampanoag, 5,000; Nauset (and the islands), 8,100; Mohegan-Pequot, 3,500; and Mahican, 5,000. The total of 71,900 is more than double Mooney's figure for comparable tribes and area of 34,100. (As is the case with the California population figure, however, Cook's New England population estimate may be seen as conservative in light of other, total North American population estimates.)

Each of the three books by Cook is an important contribution to American Indian historical demography and is certainly recommended for any individual interested in the topic. The books, moreover, contain examinations of issues and problems of long-standing interest and debate. As we see below, these issues and problems continue to be important avenues for future investigations.

The issue of initial European contact population sizes considered by Cook has been and currently is important in the study of historic Indian populations. There has always been considerable divergence of native population estimates for the total Western Hemisphere at first European contact. Until recently, however, most scholars arrived at a figure for North America very close to that of Mooney's landmark work asserting a grand total of 1,152,950<sup>9</sup> as an estimate of the American Indian population north of the Rio Grande River at initial European contact. In the past few years, though, scholars have questioned seriously the accuracy of Mooney's total estimate for North America<sup>10</sup> and have offered new estimates ranging from Ubelaker's of 2,171,125<sup>11</sup> to Dobyns' of 12,250,000.<sup>12</sup> Viewed in this context, Cook's figures for both California and New England are conservative. More estimations of the pre-European North American Indian population, of either specific tribes as accomplished by Cook or of the total United States and Canada as accomplished by Dobyns, certainly seem desirable.

A major difficulty in estimating early population sizes (to say nothing of any of their other characteristics) arises from the lateness of most written accounts containing population figures. They date from one hundred to several hundred years after first European contact until these written accounts by a variety of "explorers." This time gap coupled with probable very early and exceedingly devastating epidemics among American Indian populations of the number of diseases brought by Euro-

peans creates an extremely important problem area. Studies of the prevalence and history of these early epidemics are needed.

Numerical (as well as other) changes in American Indian populations from initial European contact until today is a related topic. It is well-documented that the total Indian population in the United States declined drastically from European contact until around the turn of this century when a nadir population of from 250,000 to 300,000 was reached.<sup>13</sup> Primary reasons for this decline were sharp increases in mortality from diseases (most notably smallpox), warfare, genocide, population relocation, and social and cultural destruction. Certainly, Cook's consideration of the numerical changes in the California Indians are important but much more could be done. It does not seem unreasonable that at some point in the future there may be numerical population histories of *all* North American Indian peoples. Ideally these histories would arrive at a reasonable pre-European contact population (even a pre-European population *history*) and then trace changes to the present.<sup>14</sup>

Issues of historical fertility patterns among American Indians and, particularly, fertility change and population change also warrant study. Cook's examinations of California Indians include fertility change and several other studies of fertility are reported in the literature<sup>15</sup> but the topic is far from exhausted. Particularly interesting would be continued examinations of "demographic transition" theory as applied to population histories of American Indians, as was done by Cook in his California Indian population history. Also interesting would be studies of the relationship between fertility and other variables such as family structure and social and cultural disorganization. The drastic decline in numbers of American Indians from initial European contact until around the turn of this century is, as mentioned, generally placed in the context of tremendous mortality. This is correct but accompanying changes in American Indian families and fertility patterns yielded further population reductions. The issue here is not one of only increased mortality or of only decreased fertility paralleling decreased fertility within larger society. It is an issue also of family disruption, fertility decline and possible fertility curtailment (for a variety of speculative reasons) accompanying social and cultural disorganization of American Indian populations. Similarly, the recent population recovery by American Indians is not only an issue of decreasing mortality but also of increasing fertility as circumstances have become more favorable and American Indian families partially renewed.

McLoughlin and Conser's recent analysis of the 1835 Cherokee Census<sup>16</sup> contains a variety of demographic and social descriptions of the Cherokee of that period. Included in the analysis is a brief description of Cherokee family structure. This analysis and Cook's brief consideration of family size previously mentioned are two of the very few discussions of American Indian families available. A detailed study of the history of the American Indian family would be extremely important as a facet of

American Indian demographic history specifically and American Indian history generally. It would also prove invaluable as a comparative view of the history of the American family, a greatly developed area of scholarship during the past fifteen years but one which has grossly neglected American Indian families (as well as other minority group families).

Rigorous demographic techniques and analyses will be important to the future of American Indian historical demography, as a complement to the rather specific research suggestions made above. Now that much of the groundwork of the history of American Indian populations has been laid, it is both possible and particularly critical for individuals with training and interests in demography *per se* to study past Indian populations. Most of the scholarship has been conducted, necessarily, by people not rigorously trained in demography. Certainly, individuals working in this area have contributed much excellent research but certain avenues of analysis and thought have not been pursued, at least partially because the many necessary foundations of ordering and evaluating data on Indian populations had not been accomplished. Some data bases have been provided recently by anthropologists, historians and others, as well as by Cook in his books discussed here. The time is particularly advantageous now for individuals with basic training and interests in demography to build on the existing studies of historic Indian populations. Such efforts can serve to increase tremendously knowledge of American Indian peoples of both yesterday and today, and to broaden the understanding of them by both Indian and non-Indian peoples alike.

#### NOTES

1. Henry F. Dobyns, *Native American Historical Demography: A Critical Bibliography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

2. William M. Denevan, ed., *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

3. Henry F. Dobyns, "Brief Perspective on a Scholarly Transformation: Widowing the 'Virgin' Land," *Ethnohistory* 23 (Spring 1976): 95-104; Virginia P. Miller, "Aboriginal Micmac Population: A Review of the Evidence," *Ibid.*: 117-27; Darrell A. Posey, "Entomological Considerations in Southeastern Aboriginal Demography," *Ibid.*: 147-60; Cary W. Meister, "Demographic Consequences of Euro-American Contact on Selected American Indian Populations and Their Relationship to the Demographic Transition," *Ibid.*: 161-72; and Richard W. Stoffle and Michael J. Evans, "Resource Competition and Population Change: A Kaibab Paiute Ethnohistorical Case," *Ibid.*: 173-97.

4. Included among these articles are Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 33 (April 1976): 289-99; Calvin Martin, "Wildlife Disease as a Factor in the Depopulation of the North American Indian," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 7 (1976): 47-62; Jeffrey Passel, "Provisional Evaluation of the 1970 Census Count of American Indians," *Demography* 13 (1976): 397-409;

Ronald L. Trosper, "Native American Boundary Maintenance: The Flathead Indian Reservation, Montana, 1860-1970," *Ethnicity* 3 (1976): 256-74; and Jane Riblett Wilkie, "The United States Population by Race and Urban-Rural Residence 1790-1860: Reference Tables," *Demography* 13 (1976): 139-48.

5. C. Hart Merriam, "The Indian Population of California," *American Anthropologist* 7 (1905): 594-606.

6. Alfred L. Kroeber, *Handbook of Indians of California*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 78 (1925).

7. James Mooney, *The Aboriginal Population of America North of Mexico*, Smithsonian Institution, Miscellaneous Collection 80 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1928).

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Douglas H. Ubelaker, "Prehistoric New World Population Size: Historical Review and Current Appraisal of North American Estimates," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 43 (1977): 661-66; Denevan, ed., *Native Population*; and Russell Thornton, "Implications of Catlin's American Indian Population Estimates for Revision of Mooney's Estimate," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 49 (July 1978): 11-14, all contain critiques of Mooney's estimate.

11. Ubelaker, "New World Population Size."

12. Henry F. Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal American Population: An Appraisal of Techniques with a New Hemispheric Estimate," *Current Anthropology* 7 (1966): 395-416.

13. H. E. Driver, "On the Population Nadir of Indians in the United States," *Current Anthropology* 9 (1968): 30.

14. Some recent works in this regard are John C. Ewers, "The Influence of Epidemics on the Indian Population and Cultures of Texas," *Plains Anthropologist* 18 (1973): 104-115; Martin Ira Glassner, "Population Figures for Mandan Indians," *The Indian Historian* 7 (Spring 1974): 41-46; and William E. Unrau, "The Depopulation of the Dheghia-Siouan Kansa Prior to Removal," *New Mexico Historical Review* 48 (1973): 313-28.

15. These include Sophie B. Aberle, *et al.*, "The Vital History of San Juan Pueblo," *Human Biology* 12 (1940): 141-87; Denis Foster Johnston, *An Analysis of Sources of Information on the Population of the Navaho*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 197 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966); Stephen J. Kunitz, "Factors Influencing Recent Navajo and Hopi Population Changes," *Human Organization* 33 (1974): 7-16; and Clark Wissler, *Population Changes Among the Northern Plains Indians* (New Haven: Department of Social Sciences, Yale University, 1936).

16. William G. McLoughlin and Walter H. Conser, Jr., "The Cherokees in Transition: A Statistical Analysis of the Federal Cherokee Census of 1835," *The Journal of American History* 64 (1977): 678-703.