

Book Review: F. Todd Smith, *Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest*

Charles A. Flowerday

Abstract.

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Recommended Citation

Flowerday, Charles A. (2009) "Book Review: F. Todd Smith, *Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest*," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1: Article 10.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol4/iss1/10>

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Book Review

F. Todd Smith, *Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. Pp. 320, cloth. \$59.95 US.

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In *Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859*, F. Todd Smith does an exemplary job of documenting the origins, migrations, and deprivations—as well as the depredations—of the Indians of Texas and western Louisiana. In doing so, he does a thorough and outstanding job of meticulously amassing and narrating his voluminous compilation of detail. Smith, an associate professor of history at the University of North Texas, has written extensively on Texas Indians.¹

Dominance to Disappearance provides the first detailed history of all Texas Indians, their tribal neighbors, and the eventual (Indian) immigrants from western Louisiana, ranging from the late eighteenth century (the end of the colonial period) to the mid-nineteenth century (the run-up to the Civil War). As the title suggests, Native Americans dominated the region, holding numerical superiority, a factor that Smith says constituted a social and economic fulcrum, until halfway through the period explored. By the end of that period, they were gone. Essentially, this is the story of three-quarters of a century of refugees in time-lapse migration.

Smith divides his book into the following periods: “Dominance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest to 1786”; “Tenuous Coexistence: The Indians and Spain, 1786 to 1803”; “Contested Boundaries: The Indians, Spain and the United States, 1804-1810”; “The Indians and the Breakdown of Spanish Texas, 1811 to 1822”; “Destruction: The Indians, Mexican Texas, and the American Intrusion, 1823 to 1835”; “Defeat: The Indians and the Republic of Texas, 1838 to 1845”; “Desperation: The Indians and the United States, 1846 to 1853”; and “Disappearance: The Indians and the Texas Reserves, 1854-1859.”

The volume’s epilogue begins following the tense and genocide-like pressure applied by ethnocentric Texans, which forced the withdrawal of virtually all Texas Indians to reservations in Indian Country (present-day Oklahoma). Particularly for the formerly agricultural tribes, but also for some of the former nomads, this removal marked the beginning of a fairly successful adaptation to farming and ranching livelihoods. It also marked the beginning of the adaptation that has characterized many of the tribes since: a viable cultural mix that preserves much traditional culture, and reclaims some of the rest, while adopting many aspects of Euro-American schooling and commerce. The relative resilience of most of these tribes is remarkable; and, even if most of the legacy constituted loss, there was muted good news at the end.

With the Spanish return to the area during the first part of the eighteenth century (after Southwest Indians had acquired horses), we are introduced to a period during which emigrant tribes entered the region from parts east, having been pushed aside by

Euro-American settlers, particularly after the Seven Years' (French and Indian) War, when the area to the east passed from French to English hands. During this period, the region's Indians, more settled in the east and more nomadic in the west, dominated the region and fended off most Spanish territorial (and military) aggression, as well as the many attempts at Christianization.

Spain saw that most of the province's Indians had not responded to attempts at conversion and sedentary living; so, in 1772, having won the region from the French, it instituted a new system that mirrored that used in Louisiana, dealing with the Indians solely via trade and gifts. This change offered the region's indigenous groups a respite from cultural, political, and military harassment and eventual domination by Euro-Americans—a brief interlude during which the Spanish to the west, the Americans to the east (following the Louisiana Purchase), and illegal French traders in the middle vied for their trade and friendship.

But by the 1820s, especially after Mexican independence in 1823, their fortunes were eclipsed by land-hungry Euro-Americans pressuring them on all sides. This period was characterized by a shift from Spanish to American intermediaries and eventual opposition, and from an emphasis on trade to an emphasis on driving Indians off their land and using it for real-estate speculation as settlers poured in.

Except near the end of Indian residence in Texas, and during the tenure of some unsympathetic Texas presidents (or governors), this extirpation never involved a policy of outright eradication. Many conciliatory moments occurred; peace councils were held, or treaties signed—only to be quickly broken by one side or the other. The situation was exacerbated by leaders who could never completely control those for whom they ostensibly spoke. And so the fire smoldered, like a many-sided guerilla war, for nearly seventy-five years.

In addition, the Indians, whose social organization and government were never close to unified, hurt themselves through numerous raids, "wars," and skirmishes amongst themselves. Significantly, the outsiders imposed a nation-state, or two or three, on countless tribes and bands that had never before been disposed, or needed, to join together.

Documenting the fits and starts of Indian resistance and Euro-American reprisals, punctuated by all-too-brief periods of relative calm, Smith charts the continual pressure of Euro-American settlement on Native populations. The former's relentless hunger for land drove the latter west into Texas, then north into present Oklahoma. Native populations were first caught in the cat-and-mouse game of colonial powers vying for control, sometimes worsening the situation with wars and raids amongst themselves and alliances with one and then another European power, which alienated unaligned tribes and those allied with other Euro-American groups.

In this period Indians were caught in conflicts between Spain and France; Spain and the United States; Mexico and the United States; Mexico, the United States, and the rebellious new nation of Texas; the United States and the state of Texas, which included, somehow, an autonomous Indian land policy (mostly a non-policy of no Indian lands); and between the US government and a Texas with a nearly genocidal intolerance of Indian presence, which the federal government was powerless to oppose. Often such policies were promulgated by the region's settlers themselves, rather than at the bidding of the state leadership. However, neither the people of Texas nor its legislature ever really owned up to any responsibility to, or for, the Indians.

All of this raises the question of what constitutes genocide, or ecocide, or ethnocide. Attitudes notwithstanding, apart from a mob of radical and violent ethnocentrists in

Texas near the end of Indian tenure in the region, little Euro-American behavior conformed to today's popular notions of genocide. That said, the Euro-American assault on the land base, life ways, and mental and physical health of Texas Indians did constitute a certain kind of genocide, one that includes various subcategories of the concept: more specifically, ethnocidal actions (destroying a culture to disenfranchise and destroy a people) and ecocidal actions (destroying a group's ecosystem, resources, or adaptation so as to destroy a people). In slow motion, and with occasional good intentions, it was this kind of oppression that, in this region, destroyed a number of tribes in their earlier forms (many had to consolidate with other, larger tribes) and nearly destroyed many others.

Smith deserves a great deal of credit for the tremendous service he has rendered to scholars and others by crystallizing the major demographic, economic, political, and military changes that occurred in the lives of Indians in the region studied during the seventy-three years he focuses on and in the 400 years leading up to them. His research involved consulting the Archivo General de Indias in Spain for Spanish accounts of this history; few studies before have extensively consulted so much Spanish archival material. French-language sources were also used. The use of extensive published and unpublished material lends even greater credence to Smith's study. This, then, is a work of copious detail and thorough documentation, and will be of great value to people working in any number of fields related to economic, environmental, or social history; frontier and agricultural history; economic, social, and ecological anthropology; human and economic geography; or human rights.

That said, there are so many major groups of Indians, so many tribal leaders and dissidents and so many lesser-known tribes, that keeping track of them in a narrative unbroken by subheadings or more than a handful of maps is a daunting task. At times, the narrative is too much a litany of raids and counter-raids, often stock stealing or reprisals for territorial incursions that led to greater violence, with few, if any, large battles, such that major events or processes become hard to isolate. Turning points surely existed, but here they sometimes are hard to locate. For these reasons, the book is in need of a master list that provides the names of groups and the names, lifespan, successes, and failures of individuals such as chiefs, major leaders, rebels, and vigilantes (the index lists seventy-nine tribes, 136 chiefs or headmen, and more than twice the latter number of notable Euro-Americans). Also needed are population charts for each tribe and band, showing their increase or decrease across time and space, perhaps indexed to the maps; and an annotated timeline at the beginning or end of the book that delineates significant developments and addresses their implications. This would not require or result in a "dumbing down"; rather, it would represent a "smarting up" for people who already lack time in every part of their lives. Indeed, it would be a great help to even those well versed in Native American history, social or environmental history, colonialism, and indigenous anthropology (or, for that matter, any branch of anthropology)—all of whom should find this book of interest. Any subsequent edition might take the following suggestions into account. This would make *Dominance to Disappearance* a truly outstanding resource.

While seven maps are included, that number is not quite enough for such a geographically precise and complicated history. What is needed are time-lapse diagrams with arrows showing stops and migration patterns, for Indians and Euro-Americans; ideally, these would be annotated with the following information: name of village, mission, town, camp, or agency; raiding and stock-thieving patterns; time

spent there, reason for being there, reason for leaving; numbers and groupings of Indians, and the same for settlers; major conflicts; and so on. The volume could include one diagram for each tribe (or, at least, for each major ethnic group) and each settlement (or territory) in each era. It would also have benefited from subheadings outlining the adaptations to environment and cultural modes (life ways) that evolved at each stop or movement of the groups and subgroups.

All in all, this book is recommended to readers for its detailed documentation of this little-explored area of Native American history.

Note

1. His prior works include F. Todd Smith, *The Caddo Indians: Tribes on the Convergence of Empires, 1540–1845* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995); F. Todd Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States, 1846–1901* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996); and F. Todd Smith, *The Wichita Indians: Traders of Texas and the Southern Plains, 1540–1845* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).