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REPORT ON THE JOINT WORK SESSIONS ON ETHNOHISTORY AND THE CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF AMERIND AND EUROPEAN CONTACT

Report prepared by Dean R. Snow

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The sessions entitled "Ethnohistory: Methods in Search of a Theory" and "Cultural Dynamics of Amerind and European Contact" were combined when it was discovered that neither had a sufficient number of participants to proceed productively alone. The morning was spent in a freewheeling discussion of specific research problems of mutual interest. This discussion, which was largely anecdotal in nature, was allowed to define the scope of contemporary research interests. It is significant that the overall thrust of research interests as represented by those present would appear to be diachronic, with special emphasis on the dynamics of culture change. There was a notable lack of expressed interest in structural-institutional analysis, symbolic analysis, the study of ideology and related synchronic topics. However, this may have
been the product of the dynamics of our discussion or the chance absence of researchers with such interests.

The very general issues of source criticism and the definition of valid heuristic terms were discussed at length. Discussion then turned to topical subjects, within which there was considerable overlap. Initially this discussion concentrated upon subjects that can be lumped under the general heading "dynamics of culture change." The major points of that discussion follow in outline form.

**PROCESSES OF CULTURE CHANGE**

1. Acculturation: Simplistic models were condemned. The common denominators of Amerind and European cultures must be better defined. Attempts must be made to separate actions from reactions in initial contacts, and to identify instances of modification, syncretism and rejection.

2. Settlement pattern and community studies: Multi-disciplinary approaches are necessary. Old models must be made more explicit and new ones generated.

3. Fur trade, wampum and native exchange systems: A world-system perspective is needed for a proper understanding of the dynamics of our specific cases. The flexibility of the pre-contact native systems and the degree to which they accommodated and facilitated trade expansion must be examined more closely. Various processes must be abstracted from the larger systems and examined separately. We must examine the ways in which the exchange of goods was used to maintain or expand economic and social networks. Pre-existing networks must be distinguished from those that arose with contact; just as the items that moved through the networks must be distinguished as to their contrasting origins.

4. Land acquisition and locational analysis: Ceci's keynote address was seen as a model for future work. Specific mention was made of the examples of Indians creating lineages and other structures as a means to expand their own systems.

5. Epidemics and demographic change: The probable impact of disease in the sixteenth century was discussed at length, the point being that we cannot work upstream into prehistory (or downstream from it) until the historic baseline is established. The mechanisms of disease transmission were discussed along with the social and medical implications of European colonization and residence patterns.

6. Native social and political networks: The ways in which native inter-community interactions might be perceived by the ethnohistorian in contact interactions were discussed.
7. Factionalism: Factionalism as a consequence of contact was discussed. Examples of ways in which factions manipulated one another or were manipulated by third factions were presented. Europeans as well as native factions need to be examined more closely.

8. Religious conversion: We need comparative studies of the differing consequences of Dutch, French, English, Spanish, Protestant, Jesuit, etc., contacts; the nationality and religious perspectives of each Old World group were significant to the outcome. We must also study Native American motives in the conversion process and the consequences of native cultural variation.

9. Archaeological baseline: An archaeological, as well as ethnohistorical baseline, must be established for precontact native communities. Archaeological studies of later prehistory should ideally include reconstructions of cultures that stress variability in site function. The centuries postdating AD 1000 need special attention. The impact of sixteenth century contacts needs special attention with pre-contact demography being particularly crucial. Efforts should be continued to locate both items of material culture and documentary sources in European/American museums and archives. Some resolution of the differing perspectives of archaeologists and ethnohistorians should be sought.

10. Politics and warfare: The nature of warfare changed for Amerinds with European contact; the ramifications in native political, social and economic systems needs closer examination. Archaeology and ethnohistory can be used together as a means to reconstruct patterns of pre-contact interaction, as well as interactions of the contact period. There exists considerable interest in the study of native alliance systems and other networks of interaction.

Discussion then turned to practical and contemporary issues. These issues tended to cluster with some more traditional research priorities under the general heading of "culture history."

**CULTURE HISTORY**

1. Specific culture histories: Such traditional studies are defined by time-space units. They continue to be useful as beginning points for more sophisticated research. Basic historical facts allow one to assess both the physical and historical environment. Both are critical for understanding process.

2. Land claim cases: These cases have produced a large body of new syntheses that are problem oriented and often explicitly biased. They have at once led to the discovery of new data sources and themselves become the subjects of future study.
3. Ethnicity: The subject will become more important over time. Current group strategies for maintaining ethnic identity and the larger social pressures causing groups to exaggerate or suppress ethnic identities need continued study.

4. Refugee communities: Historic refugee communities and racially mixed communities need more attention. Traditional ethnographers and historians have tended to ignore them. Archaeologists have given them little if any attention.

5. Ethnic histories: There is a need for ethnic histories as a baseline for the understanding of wider social and cultural processes. There is also a strong popular market for such studies.

6. Historic preservation: The preservation movement has a momentum of its own. We need to foster and contribute to the movement in those ways that only we can. Ethnohistorians must make a strong case for the preservation of cultural resources irrespective of their "historical significance."

Further discussion was accorded the roles of biological anthropology and historical linguistics. There was only one biological anthropologist present and no linguists at all, so discussion was necessarily limited.

**BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

1. Hybrid communities: The potential of blood studies, osteology and anthropometry were discussed.

2. The social implications of and forces bearing upon biological patterns (read racism or bigotry if you wish) were briefly reviewed. The bio-cultural ramifications of group boundary maintenance clearly need investigation.

**HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS**

1. Interaction spheres: Linguistic units as indicators of spheres of intensive social interaction need more attention.

2. Ceramic analysis: The implications of William Englebrecht's keynote address were discussed. The historical linguistic components of such research efforts were mentioned.

3. Attention was paid to the possible correspondences between linguistic, political and other boundaries.

Although the discussion was exhausting, we make no claim that it was also exhaustive. Discussion was terminated by the practical matter of lunch. When we returned we turned to a discussion of practical research needs for the next five years. Our list of research priorities did not
flow from a lofty regard for ethereal strategy, but rather a shared sense that there were common impediments to our diverse research interests. The following points therefore are practical and above all attainable goals for the next five years.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

1. We must establish a sixteenth century demographic and cultural baseline without which efforts to either work back into prehistory or forward into colonial history will continue to be frustrated. The baseline data must include information on exchange networks, settlement patterns, population, alliances, socio-political organizations and seasonality. Stress was put on the need to uncover additional documentary sources as well as the identification and excavation of more sixteenth century sites.

2. We recognize that there is a long delay between research completion and publication. Further, there is often too little prepublication criticism. The practical matter of information exchange should be assisted by the exchange of papers prior to publication through a network of scholars sharing ethnohistorical research interests in the Northeast. Those with appointments in institutions will be responsible for copying and circulating their own work for comments. Students not having copy and mailing facilities will distribute their work through the network via the Department of Anthropology at SUNY/Albany. The network should facilitate the speed and volume of useful criticism. It should also serve to inform scholars of obscure data sources, whether archaeological or documentary. Scholars wishing to be added to the network, which now consists only of a core of active researchers, should send name and address to Albany.

3. Efforts must continue in the direction of model building, based upon sound theory adopted from anthropology and sound source criticism from history. Models of cultural systems that can be tested by either (or both) archaeological or ethnohistorical data are particularly relevant. The day's discussion suggested that most scholars share a systems perspective, a stance that stops short of theory but is beyond simple methodology.

4. The participants agreed that special efforts should be made to explore problems that have broad anthropological significance but that are uniquely soluble in the Northeast. For example, few areas of the world can provide data relating to the consequences of initial contact between Europeans and pristine non-European societies, and it is regarded as more important to address this issue than some other issue that might be studied as easily or more easily elsewhere. This research priority reinforces the first point, namely that every effort must be made to illuminate the events of the sixteenth century in the Northeast and along the Atlantic coast generally.
5. There is a need for more intensive training in historiography and critical source analysis in ethnohistorical studies, particularly for those researchers originally trained in anthropology.