New Outlooks on Old Ties: Reanalysis and the Historiography of European and Indigenous Alliances in North America

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European colonialism in North America resulted in many alliances and conflicts with the indigenous population. Each relationship had a profound impact on those involved, and understanding each of these interactions is necessary to determine the causes and effects of European ambitions. Colonial records can provide a broad description of these relationships, but a further examination of circumstances is necessary to solidify their veracity. Through a methodology known as reanalysis, historians can analyze readily available sources to glean new insights.

Due to a discrepancy in written records, available sources have long favored the European side of the story.[1] With the addition of other disciplines historians have been able to improve their methodologies and examine sources with more precision. In the case of European colonial documents, this often involves the use of archeology and anthropology to verify the content of written documents. Relationships between Europeans and their indigenous counterparts generated many of the sources historians work from.[2]

Prior to European discovery and colonization of the Americas, indigenous groups had a complex network of communication and trade. This meant that long before certain indigenous groups dealt with Europeans, they were discovering and obtaining European goods through these networks.[3] Following the paths and final destinations of these goods has been very valuable in constructing an idea of what these relationships were like prior to Europeans.[4]

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[1] Susan E. Ramirez, *The World Upside Down: Cross-Cultural Contact and Conflict in Sixteenth-Century Peru* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 1-2.
[2] Andrew L. Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680: Conquest and Resistance in Seventeenth-Century New Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), xiii.
[3] Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus.* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 36-37.
[4] Mann, *1491,* 22.

With the growth of European presence in the Americas between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, indigenous groups and Europeans alike became connected in complex alliances and rivalries.[5] Both Europeans and their indigenous counterparts began to maneuver around the intentions of the other deciding when to avoid, fight, or work with each other. During that time, records of these encounters were kept and speak to the nature of the interactions.

Perhaps the most famous of these alliances were those of the French. While there is a popular belief that France sought to only trade and not conquer, this is not entirely accurate. It is true that when compared to the colonial ambitions of other powers, France generally preferred mutually beneficial relations with the indigenous population. Conversely, this generalization is true of the conventional reputation of the Spanish for violence and forced compliance.[6]

Whereas the French did not have an entirely peaceful coexistence with the indigenous population, Spain did not always rely on coercion and violence to induce indigenous submission.[7] [8] Traditionally, the general supposition has been that Europeans intended to wage war and annihilate or subjugate the indigenous population to make way for their own use of the land.[9] Hence, both generalizations omit the importance of European and indigenous exchanges in determining the intentions of both.

Awareness of this has allowed historians to recognize that these relationships also generated more primary sources and archeological evidence. These two forms of evidence often

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[5] Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous & Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 10.
[6] Mann, *1491*, 36-37.
[7] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 78-82.
[8] Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680,* 96-98.
[9] Heather E McGregor, "Exploring Ethnohistory and Indigenous Scholarship: What is the Relevance to Educational Historians?" *History of Education* 43, no. 4 (July 2014): 446. https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2014.930184

link because of the exchanges and contacts that occurred thereby corroborating each other.[10] Methodologies such as this can challenge some of the previously held beliefs about the nature of European and indigenous relations. Using the colonial documents as a statement of what happened and archeological evidence to challenge or support it can provide clearness of an event or time period.[11]

Historians have tended to focus on European and indigenous urban centers in their search for sources or evidence. While this is logical and can certainly generate information because of the large populations that interacted there, it excludes important contacts made in outlying areas. In the case of the French, traders and trappers tended to venture deeper into indigenous territories than other Europeans and in some cases assimilated to their culture.[12]

French attitudes and policies regarding their conduct in New France often led to an incorporation of indigenous practices with their own culture. This was less common with other Europeans and can provide unique information in the form of French accounts other than those of colonial officials in their more formal urban strongholds.[13] France's double standard with race and slavery is another aspect of their colonialism that deserves examination.

Laws intended to regulate or even outlaw slavery within French territories varied in enforceability and were often subject to the discretion of officials in a particular area.[14] Caribbean slavery had a much different form and legal status than the indigenous slavery France found itself enmeshed in.[15] Historians who understand these geographic, legal, and racial

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[10] Michael E. Harkin, "Ethnohistory's Ethnohistory: Creating a Discipline from the Ground Up," *Social Science History* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 118-119. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0145553200011184
[11] Ramirez, *The World Upside Down,* 7.
[12] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 64-65.
[13] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 254-255.
[14] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 369-370.
[15] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 371-373.

boundaries can establish a better context of sources based on who created them and where they were created.

Looking for evidence and information in these lesser established areas can allow historians to gather information that has not been examined as heavily as those in better known areas. Given the complexities of European and indigenous relations, new evidence often plays a key role in grasping the extent of these interactions. For many Europeans, the directives and laws decreed from their headquarters across the Atlantic were not applicable to the circumstances they faced in their colonies.[16]

Examining the evidence and information from beyond urban areas provides a much greater picture of what actually occurred. Due to a generally heavy use of colonial documents, historians run the risk of assuming that those generating the documents were entirely truthful in their chronicling of events.[17] British, French, and Spanish colonial officials frequently pushed the bounds of the orders given by their superiors in Europe. In many cases they either distorted or excluded certain specifics in their communications to avoid penalties and maintain provision.[18]

Studying what happened beyond these major areas of contact is important for establishing what occurred in the "middle ground" or areas that were not specifically held by a particular group. Because these areas were on the fringes of both European and indigenous influence, both often took liberties which would have normally been forbidden by their leaders.[19] Understanding

[16] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 355-356.
[17] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 358.
[18] Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680,* 88-90.
[19] Camilla Townsend, "Burying the White Gods: New Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico." *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (June 2003): 662-666. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/529592

the discrepancy between these actions and those reflected in colonial documents generates a more accurate representation of events.[20]

Translational problems are another major obstacle for historians in consulting colonial documents. Spanish documents in particular contain errors of interpretation due to differences between Spanish and indigenous understandings of literal translations. Since religion and proselytization played a major role in Spanish-indigenous contact, Spanish documents are often reflective of indigenous understandings of religion that were different from those of the Spanish.[21]

Not unlike some French accounts, these sources can contain information about the overlap in culture that was experienced firsthand. Since the Spanish were some of the first Europeans to experience these encounters, Spanish documents can also reflect the challenges of communication and interpretation. These sources can provide information about the problems of communication but when examined further, can also shed light on the motives of those involved.

Sometimes indigenous languages did not contain words equivalent to those in Spanish thereby prompting the Spanish to assume or include translations that were not necessarily reflective of indigenous beliefs or viewpoints.[22] Historians can offset this through reanalysis by examining indigenous responses to the events mentioned in the documents, or by searching for physical evidence to support it via archeology or other methods.

Spanish documents provide some of the earliest accounts of indigenous contact with Europeans. However, as with French documents, Spanish ones can often reflect some of the liberties taken by colonial officials in violation of their superior's wishes. Some Jesuits and

[20] McGregor, "Exploring Ethnohistory."441
[21] Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680,* 92.
[22] Ramirez, *The World Upside Down,* 42.

priests were able to permeate the established boundaries between Spanish and indigenous societies and gain a better knowledge of their culture than those who acted from their European dominated havens.[23]

Differences in conceptualization of religion or the meaning and significance of deities were frequently recorded by missionaries and colonial officials.[24] Depending on what group of Europeans were inquiring, their motives ranged from curiosity to coerced proselytization. Knowing what the probable intentions of the document's author were is important for establishing the likelihood that translations were altered or falsified. Treaties are a similar type of source containing some of the same problems in sincerity and context.[25]

Since many treaties were conducted under the European structure of formality and protocol, they often were not fully understood by the indigenous participants. However, the recorded contact between the two groups usually resulted in a large amount of written records and documents that can be scrutinized through reanalysis. They can also indicate what the general attitudes and reactions of participants were thereby giving historians a better picture of the actual events and consequences.[26]

Though rare, there were some indigenous people who were literate and spoke or wrote European languages. Written records from these individuals are highly valuable because they have already achieved what reanalysis intends to.[27] Sources written in European languages directly from the indigenous perspective reflect the attitudes and perceptions of their authors

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[23] Ramirez, *The World Upside Down,* 8.
[24] Townsend, "Burying the White Gods," 663.
[25] Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 104.
[26] Ramirez, *The World Upside Down,* 152-153.
[27] Kansteiner Wulf, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies." *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (May 2002): 182-184. https://doi.org/10.1111/0018-2656.00198.

without the inherent risks of presumption. Historians should continue to be mindful of the condition under which the source was created, but it can be taken much more literally.[28]

Reanalysis also creates an opportunity for historians to explore the relationship between indigenous groups. Whereas European documents contain unambiguous information about their relations with each other, the lack of written sources from the indigenous perspective has resulted in a less definitive concept of indigenous relations.[29] This does not disqualify colonial documents in establishing these relationships, but they should be combined with other information to strengthen them.

Similar to the discrepancies in language resulting from inconsistencies in translation or context, differences in European and indigenous social structures can have a profound effect on how they understood each other. These initial impressions are often reflected in common colonial sources and contain a great deal of bias.[30] In this case, reanalysis offers the ability to go beyond simply acknowledging the bias of source and creates an opportunity to extract specific details.

Speeches and dialogue with indigenous envoys are some of the most documented articulations found in European colonial records. Colonial officials had a strong interest in documenting what was said, and although the motives of those transcribing the dialogue should be considered, these sources can provide a large amount of information about the moments and events during which they were recorded. [31] These situations also reflect the clash that both groups experienced when trying to understand each other.

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[28] Wulf, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 186.
[29] Steven N Archer and Kevin M Bartoy, *Between Dirt and Discussion: Methods, Methodology and Interpretation in Historical Archaeology*. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2006), 61-64.
[30] Ramirez, *The World Upside Down,* 7.
[31] Ramirez, *The World Upside Down,* 84-86.

Understanding the more obvious motives of different European groups can be helpful in determining what their motives were. During encounters that were focused on obtaining something by force such as conversion, territory, resources or slaves it can be safely assumed that the authors of documents may have had ulterior motives. Whereas those who sought the most peaceful interaction possible like trade or alliances would have had less motivation to complicate the peace by deliberately altering translations or their record of events.[32]

All of the major European powers and their colonies encountered indigenous beliefs and practices that conflicted with their own.[33] These opposing views prompted a great deal of inquiry and documentation which can be tremendously useful for research. When combined with other sources and evidence to distinguish facts from prejudices, the colonial documents become a profusion of information. Reanalysis in this application enables historians to utilize commonly referenced sources in their own work while garnering different information.[34]

Opinions about how Europeans responded to their differences with indigenous populations varies. Consequently, a flawed spectrum developed which tended to depict France as benevolent and tolerant and Spain as brutal and oppressive, with others placed somewhere in between.[35] This is inaccurate not only because it excludes the fact that European and indigenous groups were equally capable of amity as well as violence, but it overlooks the role of interdependency.[36]

Every European colony in the Americas relied to some degree on indigenous abilities and knowledge. Whether it was military alliances, labor, slaves, or familiarity with the land,

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[32] Harkin, "Ethnohistory's Ethnohistory," 117-119.
[33] Steven N Archer and Kevin M Bartoy, *Between Dirt and Discussion*, 48-49.
[34] Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country,* 18-20.
[35] Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country,* 87-91.
[36] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 23-26.

Europeans inevitably relied on the indigenous population to advance their colonial objectives.[37] The same is true of the indigenous population, who became reliant on European goods, technology, and military assets to outmaneuver and overpower their enemies.

Knowledge of this interdependency not only places boundaries on the conqueror-conquered narrative, but through reanalysis can show where the limitations in diplomacy were actually situated. For instance, the French were heavily reliant on peaceful interaction with their indigenous allies to propel the fur trade.[38] Yet, due to indigenous conflicts they could not avoid being involved in the trading of war captives as slaves.[39] On the other hand, Spain's propensity for brutality was limited by their need for indigenous labor and knowledge of the harsh regions they intended to occupy.[40]

On many occasions, Europeans relied on alliances with their indigenous neighbors and these alliances generated a large number of written records. They also contain accounts of certain individuals who were elevated in the eyes of Europeans to positions that were normally not possible for indigenous persons. These individuals were often responsible for conveying the feelings and attitudes of their communities and sources by or about them are important for gathering information contrary to the European outlook.[41]

Awareness of these complexities is necessary not only for an accurate understanding of events, but also to identify potential points of source generation. Historians who are cognizant of these interdependencies can locate sources or evidence to strengthen them. Operating in this manner goes beyond supporting existing data and develops a broader scope. Developments in

[37] Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country,* 24-27.
[38] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 138.
[39] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 119-121.
[40] Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680,* 124-126.
[41] Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country,* 61-63.

methodology such as this contribute to current knowledge and provide opportunities for new discoveries.[42]

Though reanalysis developed as a methodology through the combining of disciplines such as history, anthropology and archeology, technology has contributed greatly to its effectiveness. Advancements in science have allowed for the use of DNA, satellite imagery, and other technological developments to be incorporated in reanalysis.[43] Again, consideration for the indigenous perspective is invaluable because as these resources become more accessible and sophisticated, they can be applied to indigenous sources and evidence more effectively.

Prior to the advent and inclusion of these technologies in the examination of artifacts and other evidence, discoveries such as these usually furthered the confusion regarding their significance.[44] After these were effectively implemented in reanalysis, they became considerable assets to the historian and other professionals studying the past. Communication between multiple disciplines such as archeology, anthropology and history has led to the fueling of discoveries in this area.[45]

Anthropological studies have long been a starting point for establishing the overlap of European and indigenous societies. While these early attempts to grasp the traditional indigenous lifestyle and reality may seem archaic, they actually can provide historians with a strong starting point for the use of reanalysis. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries anthropologists and historians observed indigenous groups in the southwestern United States in attempt to better understand the Pueblo.[46]

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[42] Harkin, "Ethnohistory's Ethnohistory," 119.
[43] Mann, *1491,* 17, 158.
[44] Mann, *1491,* 192-193.
[45] Steven N Archer and Kevin M Bartoy, *Between Dirt and Discussion,* 34-35.
[46] Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680,* xiii-xvii.

Although the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were much later than the events involving the Pueblo and Spanish, examining their culture and customs provides ideas about what specific archeological, cultural, and geographic aspects to pursue with modern methods.[47] This is just one example of how reanalysis allows different fields such as archeology, anthropology and history to complement and advance each other.

Other European and indigenous relationships can be looked at through a similar lens. Areas inhabited by indigenous groups engaged in the fur trade can be searched for physical evidence that supports information contained in French written documents.[48] English and later British sources can be checked against indigenous reactions when French territory was eventually ceded to their control. Mixed reactions from indigenous groups would have likely peaked when this occurred offering an increase in information.[49]

Changes in the European circumstance had a profound impact on their relations with indigenous groups in North America. Once Spain no longer had its conquest-based empire in Central and South America, those living under their rule experienced drastic changes.[50] When the fur trade had essentially ended and French territory was lost to the British, the relationships in those areas were changed.[51] Then when Britain had established itself in eastern North America, the exchanges from within its own empire again determined the nature of its relations with indigenous groups.[52]

However, it is important to consider what the indigenous perspective was in these situations. As European powers waged their own imperial wars, they created opportunities for

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[47] Mann, *1491,* 42-44.
[48] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 139-140.
[49] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 156-157.
[50] Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680,* 169-170.
[51] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 175.
[52] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance,* 369-371.

indigenous groups to ally themselves with Europeans who seemed to have similar interests.[53] This presented an opportunity for indigenous groups to assist Europeans in exchange for their help in fighting other indigenous rivals. Conflicts originating in Europe, moved into North American colonies becoming intertwined with the indigenous conflicts already occurring there.[54]

These instances also present a strong opportunity for historians to contribute to the historiography by forging new paths with conventional sources. Whether a historian is studying the Pre-Columbian era, or looking at the collateral damage of European conflicts, the reanalysis of sources is a strong approach which provides context to existing information. This methodology has been valuable to many disciplines focused on the past, and its continued use greatly contributes to each field.

[53] Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country,* 152-154.
[54] Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country,* 154-160.

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