



## **Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands**

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This sweeping, richly evocative study examines the origins and legacies of a flourishing captive exchange economy within and among native American and Euramerican communities throughout the Southwest Borderlands from the Spanish colonial era to the end of the nineteenth century.

Indigenous and colonial traditions of capture, servitude, and kinship met and meshed in the borderlands, forming a "slave system" in which victims symbolized social wealth, performed services for their masters, and produced material goods under the threat of violence. Slave and livestock raiding and trading among Apaches, Comanches, Kiowas, Navajos, Utes, and Spaniards provided labor resources, redistributed wealth, and fostered kin connections that integrated disparate and antagonistic groups even as these practices renewed cycles of violence and warfare.

Always attentive to the corrosive effects of the "slave trade" on Indian and colonial societies, the book also explores slavery's centrality in intercultural trade, alliances, and "communities of interest" among groups often antagonistic to Spanish, Mexican, and American modernizing strategies. The extension of the moral and military campaigns of the American Civil War to the Southwest in a regional "war against slavery" brought differing forms of social stability but cost local communities much of their economic vitality and cultural flexibility.

## **Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands Details**

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# From Reader Review Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands for online ebook

## Ess Kay says

James E. Brooks explores geographic and economic determinism as it plays out in three distinct areas of the southwestern borderlands: plains, pasture and mountain. Each area of interaction between the Spanish and indigenous populations utilized the exchange of women and children to shore up labor need and in the process created a complicated web of kinship between communities. For Brooks, “[n]ative and European men fought to protect their communities and preserve personal repute yet participated in conflicts and practices that made the objects of their honor, women and children, crucial products of violent economic exchange” (3). That exchange would create an often complicated relationship between and within the societies intermingling. Brooks charts the changing nature of the relationship between unfree labor and kinship as bordering communities continued to intermingle culturally and genetically, creating complicated relationships that no longer tied into a caste system, nor could be relegated outside of it. Captives became the unifying, if paradoxical, force behind frontier societies, and a necessary redistribution of labor, goods and genetic variation.

Brooks provides a nuanced examination of the political, economic and social blending that was made possible through this redistribution of labor. Not only were kinship ties expanded, but so were lines of communication, which enlarged trade networks throughout the southwest. Coerced labor went beyond the black/white division of the southeast, creating the vehicle by which conflict and reconciliation would play out between the Navajos, Comanches, Kiowas, Apaches, Utes, Pueblos, and New Mexico colonists. This social interaction would have been impossible had the Iberians and the Indians not had a similar convention of shame and honor predicated upon the ability to both protect and control their familial units, sharing “a particular resonance between indigenous and European notions of honor and shame, of male violence and exchange imperatives” (9). Brooks suggests, and makes great effort to substantiate, that without the underlying scaffolding of this code of honor, kinship groups would not have developed between societies and slavery in the southwest would have been more akin to that of the southeast; rather than a community building enterprise it would have simply been labor exploitation. Gender and class inequality was exacerbated by this redistribution, but the southwest did not develop the racial divide that the southeast did. The honor code was necessary as they “negotiated interdependency and maintained honor by acknowledging the exchangeability of their women and children” (40).

This theory seems to hold until the nineteenth century, when additional consumer markets in the expanding United States required exponential increase of labor and redistribution of unfree labor. This issue was exacerbated by small pox epidemics in some tribes, which further escalated the need for captive taking in order to shore up population numbers in addition to the increase for labor. It is at this juncture in Brooks’ exploration that the honor code upon which this exchange hinged is eclipsed by economic need. There are still opportunities for the “other” to be assimilated into the group, but greater violence and abuse of the captured labor force begins to enter Brooks’ narrative. Whether this is simply a result of the scale increasing or a per capita increase in violence is hard to determine. The kinship ties that once connected markets and communities seem to disappear and are replaced by exploitation of skills, be it language or craft, as a central determining factor of assimilation opportunity. The complex social world was beginning to come undone as it tried to take advantage of emerging commercial markets and navigate between political states, further exacerbating gender inequality among the captured and increasing bloodshed, “especially if Mexico or the United States attempted to subsume them within state-regulated markets and political authority” (257). As Brooks eloquently states, “in subduing the pastoral borderlands, the American and Mexican states sundered

long-term connections of kinship and community and superimposed new, 'state-sponsored' ethnic identities upon a complex mélange" (368).

Brooks' scholarship is immense, encapsulating ecclesiastical records, folk lore, statistical evidence, legal documentation, linguistics, ethnography and anthropology. His narrative style brings his subject into easy focus, balancing the scholarship with the story. His recounting of ceremony is both elucidating and moving. What he teases out of these documents to support his thesis is an amazing reexamination of a societal practice that is generally overshadowed by the Mission system abuses and genocide. He challenges us to see beyond the looming shadow of atrocity and casts light on the interconnectivity of the cultures and peoples of the southwest. He pushes the dialog beyond one of Indian adaptation for survival into one where they have a decisive hand in the shaping of their evolving world by pushing the boundaries of identity and kinship into new, complex relationships that go beyond stratification, creating the melting pot that America strives to be. Even if it starts with Spanish interaction rather than the preferred British one that dominates the American scholastic institution.

Brooks eloquently and systematically breaks down the historic convention that proposed New Mexico colonials and indigenous populations existed in two culturally separate spheres, coming into limited, primarily violent contact. The interconnectivity, "that knitted diverse peoples in a social fabric at once intimate and distant" is fascinating, and surely must have played out in other borderland communities (103). Brooks challenges us to go beyond the façade of violence, beyond the easy binary of colonized and colonial and to see the complicated array of possibilities that change creates. It is an important reexamination of borderlands history and the history of slavery in New Mexico that entices historians to expand the scope beyond New Mexico and reassess the relationships between colonials throughout Latin America.

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### **Eric says**

Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands is full of detail. It is a superb sociological survey of the southwest borderlands and is quite scholastic in nature. I picked up the book to read out of subject interest and had a little trouble getting though it as the topic was so much more than I'd ever would have imagined. I would have loved to have had an entire university course with professor's lectures using this book. Not the greatest for a 'casual read' but an **amazing** resource for academic endeavors.

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### **David Nichols says**

The 2003 Bancroft Prize for best book in American history was shared by two pathbreaking studies of a long-neglected subject: the enslavement of Native North Americans. Of the two prize-winners, James Brooks's **CAPTIVES AND COUSINS** is perhaps the more difficult to follow (compared with Alan Gallay's straightforward narrative of the **INDIAN SLAVE TRADE**), but also richer in ethnographic detail and analysis. Focusing on slavery in the southwestern American borderlands, Brooks argued that the institution was as much a social and gender construct as an economic system. Slavery grew out of Pueblo, Athabascan (Apache and Navajo), Comanche, and Spanish ideas about shame and hierarchy, and strengthened patriarchy in all of the participant nations, turning women into exchange objects and emblems of male honor. Perhaps it goes without saying that Indian slavery generated more violence than any purely European intrusion did, but

the employment of captives as translators and their exchange as hostages also allowed rival nations in the southwest to maintain long-term diplomatic and commercial relationships with one another.

The Indian slave trade, Brooks observes, pre-dated the Spanish entradas in the southwest; Spain did not introduce violence and social inequality into western North America. However, Spanish guns and goods fueled slavery's expansion to what was probably an unprecedented degree. Pueblo Indians, previously the prey of their more nomadic neighbors, joined with Spanish raiders in the 17th century to capture and enslave hundreds of Utes and Athabascans. There were at least 500 of these "genízaro" (non-Christian) slaves in New Mexico on the eve of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt. This number grew to 5,000 during the two centuries after the Spanish re-colonized New Mexico (1700-1880), when they, the Pueblos, the Utes, and Navajos continued to raid across the colonial border for captives. New Mexican land-owners and Indian herdsmen kept many of these captives as bound laborers, sometimes nominally free but slaves in all but name; they also used them as diplomatic pawns, whose exchange people allowed neighboring nations to maintain a shaky peace and the profitable commerce that accompanied it.

Slavery also flourished on the southern Plains, where the Kiowas and Comanches took between 5,000 and 10,000 Indian captives between 1540 and 1820, and another 3,000 Mexican and Anglo-American hostages in the 1850s and '60s. Slaves served the same purposes for the southern Plains Indians as for New Mexicans and their Indian neighbors: they were captive laborers, concubines, emblems of male honor, and diplomatic instruments. Slavery not only enriched the Comanches and Kiowas, it made them into one of the most important commercial entities in the mid-continent. It also helped New Mexico transform itself in the 19th century from a Mexican dependency into a semi-autonomous commercial entrepot, trading in Comanche bison hides, Pueblo textiles, Navajos' and Hispanic settlers' sheep, and human beings. It was not until the 1870s and '80s that the United States brought this slave-based economy to an end, banning the sale of bound laborers and confining the Navajos and southern Plains Indians to reservations.

It is hard to overstate this book's academic importance. I still remember hearing Catherine Clinton's excited recommendation of Brooks's book, which struck her and other historians (including myself) as that rarest of things, a book-length treatment of an entirely new subject. *Captives and Cousins*, along with the Gallay book mentioned above, paved the way for a succession of studies of Indian slavery, including Robbie Ethridge and Sheri Shuck-Hall's innovative *MAPPING THE MISSISSIPPIAN SHATTER ZONE* (2009), Christina Snyder's brilliant *SLAVERY IN INDIAN COUNTRY* (2010), and Brett Rushforth's magisterial *BONDS OF ALLIANCE* (2012). It also energized or inspired new scholarship on the colonial-era southwest and on the interrelationship between captivity, gender subordination, diplomacy, and power; award-winning books that owe a debt to Brooks include Ned Blackhawk's *VIOLENCE OVER THE LAND* (2006), Pekka Hamalainen's *COMANCHE EMPIRE* (2008), and Brian DeLay's *WAR OF A THOUSAND DESERTS* (2008). In the process Brooks dramatically expanded the new field of "continental history," which focuses on the long-neglected North American interior, its peoples, and the interactions between them. Apart from its occasionally meandering and difficult prose, the only significant flaw of *CAPTIVES AND COUSINS* is a product of its success: its conclusions are now beginning to seem a little old-fashioned. That this happened in only a decade is testament to the massive body of subsequent scholarship that this book, with its explosive intellectual force, helped to inspire.

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### **Kelly Bradford says**

Worth reading for all around New Mexico history and to add nuance to your understanding of slavery. Slavery is a very different practice in different cultures, and it is eye opening to read about an instance that

started long before Europeans came to the Americas, and unrelated to the Atlantic slave trade. This book won the Bancroft prize in American history, as did two other books on "Indian" matters in the 2000s: Indian slave trade in the South, and a political history of the "Comanche Empire". I don't read much in academic-authored/audience history, but I read these three books and this was the most readable and valuable of the lot.

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### **Singodsuperior says**

Brooks focuses on the intricacies of the captive economy in the Southwest.

Brooks analyzes the origins of this captive economy, in which he writes both Indians and Spaniards had similar captive exchange economies before European contact in the Southwest. Furthermore, Brooks emphasizes the thriving of this economy without American involvement until the late nineteenth century.

Moreover, women and children are analyzed to express their importance in the economy, as well as the how new forms of kinship were created with both sides integrating women and children in their societies in different ways.

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### **Michael says**

Captives & Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands by James F. Brooks tackles the cultural exchange that took place on the frontiers of European influence in North America. Brooks argues that the communities on these borderlands established this exchange ostensibly to navigate cohabitation, while simultaneously asserting the power of the men within these communities. He describes the world they created as "a mutually recognizable world of violence and retribution, of loss and redemption that drew the protagonists together while forcing them apart." (40) This new approach adds gender as a primary factor in the dealings between borderland cultures, especially in Brooks' understanding of the development of kinship through intermarriage. Through conquest marriages, slavery and kidnapping women are converted to interchangeable commodities like livestock. Brooks argues that the violent nature of the borderland subsistence was mediated by and at the expense of women. (26)

Brooks' stated purpose is to cast "shadows across a tenaciously sunny romanticism" characteristic of the popular conceptions of the relationship between indigenous cultures and Europeans. (365) In doing this Brooks re-evaluates the previously accepted model of assimilation that took place in this region, comparing it to the Moors and Spaniards in the Iberian peninsula as well as the relations between other tribes in the South West. Brooks paints a picture wherein survival, both corporeal and cultural, created a system of human trafficking that lead to mixed communities; specifically by slaves being adopted into the master culture.

Brooks begins his book with an enactment of los Comanches, a sort of festival that Brooks feels encapsulates the themes he intends to touch on. The first chapter then continues to talk about the context for cultural exchange in the borderlands and in the Iberian peninsula. Beginning with Native Americans in the borderlands, he details the role of sacred violence in facilitating "mutually productive" exchanges that traded women and children between cultures. (17) Brooks suggests it was possible for these exchanged individuals to be adopted by their host cultures. (18) Next, Brooks analyzes the European concepts of gender and honor as represented in the relations between the Moors and Europeans in Spain, pointing out conquest marriages and the gifting of women. Finally, he explores the beginnings of the relations between the Spanish and the indigenous people of the southwest to explain the themes for the rest of the book. From here, the book is

organized chronologically with each chapter broken up into smaller themes. Chapter two deals with the establishment of diplomatic relations forged over the system of human trafficking that developed between the two cultures. Chapter three investigates the development of sheep pastoralism in New Mexico, particularly in light of the effect Spanish colonialism had on native economic structures. Shifting populations and higher demand for commodities drove captive acquisition and trading. Chapters four through six continue the narrative of subsistence and cultural exchange resulting in increasing exchange between communities in the southwest. Chapter seven discusses the effects of the increasing influence of the American government over the region and concludes with a reshaping of the Plains Indians and their territories. Coming to the conclusion of the book, chapter eight explores the changes caused by American settlement especially in relation to the American understanding of slavery. Over the course of the book, Brooks develops his picture of the borderland communities and their network of exchange. Though the players change, circumstances are continually plugged back through Brooks' concept of a violent coexistence made habitable with human trafficking.

Throughout the book Brooks is largely guided by the relation between gender and power. Much of Brooks' work finds women and children in positions equivalent to chattel, interchangeable for the purposes of men. There are elements of a post-colonial critique of imperialism spread through the book, but Brooks asserts that there was a system of cultural exchange via human trafficking in place well before the arrival of Spanish colonists.

Brooks relies on a wide variety of sources to make his points. Due to the nature of some of the areas Brooks touches on, particularly interactions within indigenous groups before the arrival of the Spanish, Brooks falls back on ethnography to piece together plausible stories. His most powerful points are made when employing primary sources developed by Spanish and other Europeans. Brooks demonstrates a keen understanding of the European mindset and he manages the precarious task of balancing secondary sources well. Since half the book requires the poorly documented subaltern perspective, both that of indigenous culture and that of the women who were victims in this system, Brooks' ability to mold a concise ethnography is tantamount. Overall, *Captives & Cousins* achieves its stated purpose of casting light on the uglier aspects of the culture developed in the southwest borderlands. Brooks writes eloquent and poignant prose, pulling together many different sources in a concise and easy to understand form. The post-colonial nature of Brooks narrative reflects on the desire to dispel myth and nostalgia shared by Geary in *Myth of Nations*, but the inclusion of gender and power yields more practical, applicable results. In later chapters, the introduction of the American government strengthens Brooks' model of violent coexistence with Americans struggling to grasp the violent society they have inherited. Unfortunately Brooks chooses to merely summarize the the unravelling of this system, simply explaining in a few paragraphs the eventual dissolution of human trafficking among plains residents. In all, *Captives & Cousins* is a fantastic collection of sources and interpretation on the long glossed over topic of this other form of North American slavery.

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