Book Review: *Silent Victims: Hate Crimes Against Native Americans* By Barbara Perry

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Anyone familiar with Indian Country and the endemic racism and discrimination—on and off the reservations—that persist for Native Americans in the United States might assume that hate crimes perpetuated against this population are not only common but also well documented. As Barbara Perry provocatively establishes, only the former is true: Native Americans are subjected routinely to ethnoviolence, yet they rarely report these transgressions. In fact, according to Perry, Native Americans reported only 83 incidences of hate crimes in 2004 (< 1% of all reported hate crimes that year).

Perry explores several explanations for this apparent anomaly, including traditional Native cultural values of nonconfrontation. Her thesis, however, focuses primarily
on the legacy of colonialism. She notes that racism and ethnoviolence against Native Americans are a constant and have become “normative” as a means of establishing and maintaining the dominant society’s social, economic, political, and geographical boundaries that isolate, segregate, and marginalize Native peoples. Moreover, the intergenerational colonial experiences of Native Americans have fostered profound distrust of both law enforcement and the justice system (as the visible representatives of the oppressors). Viewed in this context, Perry’s explanatory model is plausible and timely.

The book is based empirically on 278 semistructured qualitative interviews with Native Americans living in three regions: Four Corners (Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado); Great Lakes (Wisconsin, Minnesota); and the Northern Plains (Montana). Perry incorporates poignant excerpts from these interviews, indicating the gender and home state of the interviewee. Each region has its own concerns (e.g., treaty fishing rights in the Great Lakes), but the biographical stories of racism and ethnoviolence are remarkably uniform and add Native voice to the theoretical framework Perry employs. Therefore, while not specific to the Great Plains, this book draws on interviews from the Northern Plains and accurately represents the experiences of many contemporary Native Plains peoples. Perry notes she employed three Native research assistants (one from each region) to facilitate the interviews.

This book is the first to document the lived experiences of ethnoviolence in the Native community. The author examines “reactionary violence” and highlights the micro- and macroaggressions that have accompanied Native American activism and self-determination efforts in recent decades. Perry also examines the cumulative long-term impact of hate crime on Native victims and their communities (including internalized oppression and violence). Perry’s home discipline is criminal justice, and she is a recognized expert in hate crime research. Native American specialists may be distracted by some factual errors (e.g., an incorrect date for the Sand Creek Massacre) and the use of nonstandard citations for historical and federal Indian policy discussions. Moreover, the global use of several terms with special meaning in Native American studies (e.g., recognition and self-determination) as well as poorly developed representations of key, albeit complicated, concepts (e.g., sovereignty, dispossession, and jurisdiction) detract from the merits of her research, which are considerable. Beth R. Ritter, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and Program in Native American Studies, University of Nebraska at Omaha.