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Book Review: *Skeletal Biology and Bioarchaeology of the Northwestern Plains* Edited by George W. Gill and Rick L. Weathermon

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This volume is a capstone of George W. Gill's long and productive (and continuing) career at the University of Wyoming, where he has spent the last three and a half decades teaching and in pursuit of the data encapsulated here. Contributions from 21 scholars, most of them his students, present studies of bioarchaeology and skeletal biology, especially in the fields of demography, pathology, and morphology. The 19 chapters (and the introductory comments by William M. Bass, Douglas H. Ubelaker, and the senior editor) cover 10,000 years on the Northwestern Plains, from the Archaic period to historic times, encompassing studies of Native Americans, Euro-American pioneers and military men, and Chinese laborers.

Basic skeletal data are provided for specialists in other fields, but in many respects this is a general book that provides new insights into Native American and Euro-American biology. Examples: there is less sexual dimorphism in the former than in the latter; the hunters and gatherers in the Northwestern Plains had fewer dental caries than their corn-consuming agricultural eastern neighbors and showed more accidental injury, while the agriculturists had more nutritional and metabolic problems; the hunter-gatherers had more severe cranial trauma than the agriculturists; and some Archaic populations appeared to have more in common with earlier Paleoindians than with more recent Plains populations. Furthermore, a dramatic increase in interpersonal violence, changes in diet and
burial customs, and a dramatic drop in longevity of over 15 years, accompanied by changes in morphology, suggest that new peoples arrived in the area during Woodland times, likely introducing bows and arrows that permitted greater hunting returns that led to reduced dental caries.

Some of the ostensibly Euro-American pioneer skeletons reveal unexpected evidence of Native American admixture. Field archaeology and bioarchaeological research thus combine to contribute significantly to the story of the Native American occupation of the area, as well as to that of the Euro-American intruders, that formerly was told only in documents and in oral tradition. Space does not permit commentary on the microevolutionary trends Gill and his colleagues propose and document, but they clearly will engage the interest of specialists.

Even the casual history buff will find the volume of interest for the stories it tells and the history it illuminates. Weathermon’s discussion of burials along the Oregon and related trails in “An analysis of Western Pioneer-Era Burials” is only one of many that riveted this reviewer’s attention. The work is an exemplar of a scientific monograph: it contains basic data for the use of future scholars, illuminates varying aspects of the record of human habitation focused on the Northwestern Plains, and offers hypotheses for future investigations—all presented within an integrated interdisciplinary framework. Hats off to George Gill and Rick Weathermon for a job well done! W. Raymond Wood, Department of Anthropology, University of Missouri, Columbia.