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Review of *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War* by Thomas Vennum, Jr.

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American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War. Thomas Vennum, Jr. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994. Illustrations and index. 376 pp. \$44.95.

Thomas Vennum, Jr.'s, *American Indian Lacrosse* is a welcome compendium of the cultural importance of lacrosse to Native Americans. Using an interesting arrangement of analysis and fictional narrative, the book examines the signal importance of lacrosse in Native American cultures throughout eastern North America. Played for centuries by many Native American societies, lacrosse has been co-opted by Anglo-America, reformed, rationalized, and ordered in a way that has divested it of the ritual importance it once found among Native Americans. Vennum's investigation re-animates a tradition that has withered among Native Americans who have been forced to abandon their cultures by Anglo-Americans. This timely account not only shows the significance of lacrosse as a Native American cultural tradition, but also affirms a renewed interest in the traditional game by Native Americans.

Vennum examines the difference in the game as played by the Native Americans of the Great Lakes, eastern Canada, the Southeastern United States, and the Mississippi Valley. Among the Iroquois, the Choctaw, or the Ojibwa, the game took on different forms. Lacrosse sticks differed in size, in shape, and in the number used. The Choctaw and Cherokee, for instance, play a traditional game using two sticks, whereas the Native Americans of the Great Lakes and eastern Canada use only one stick. The size and density of the ball, the placement of a single goal or two goals, and the size and shape of the field varied as well.

Integral to Native American lacrosse in the past was both its close relationship to warfare and the significance of gambling. Vennum shows that among all cultures the game was traditionally a surrogate for war. Conflict over hunting grounds or fishing rights could be averted as communities instead would arrange a lacrosse match. At times violent and characterized by individual skill, Native American lacrosse often included as many as eighty or one hundred players per side on fields as long as one mile. Matches, furthermore, were invested with ritual obligations that reflected the rituals of war, including fasting, dances, and conjuring. Vennum also examines the importance of gambling in traditional matches. As early as the seventeenth century, Euro-Americans, seeing in the game only violence and vice, attempted to proscribe lacrosse among Native Americans. Canadians went so far as to deny the game's Native American origins. In 1867 the Canadian Parliament declared lacrosse to be white Canada's national game. At the same

time white lacrosse associations excluded Native Americans from the "official" game. Only recently has organized white lacrosse reversed this injustice.

Vennum's study is entertaining and informative. Travelers' accounts, missionary reports, oral accounts, Native American sources, and interpretations of extant equipment and ritual forms are integrated with extensive secondary references. Throughout, Vennum is critical of earlier interpretations that are at best ethnocentric or, worse, racist. Vennum's analysis is extensive and balanced. He provides a thorough account of an important feature of Native American culture that heretofore has been largely neglected. **Brian S. Butler**, *Department of History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.