

**The Longest War
in American History**
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**A Chronological Compendium
Reference to the Indian Wars
in the United States, 1400-1898**

By Harold F. Williams

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To my wife, Sue
You're sweet, and you kept me going.

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Harold F. Williams
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Foreword

Several years ago, my husband came home from the bookstore with a thick paperback copy of *Timelines of War: A Chronology of Warfare from 100,000 BC to the Present*, by David Brownstone and Irene M. Franck. “Thought you might find this useful,” he said.

That turned out to be an understatement. As a media historian, I run across mentions of war all the time in newspapers of all eras. Frequently battles or skirmishes detailed in these contemporary sources had not yet been given the names we know today. Thus, as a modern reader, I was hard pressed to tell exactly *which* war. Because it helped untangle such issues, *Timelines of War* quickly became indispensable in my work. In fact, the next time I was in the bookstore, my eye fell on *The Timetables of History: A Horizontal Linkage of People and Events* by Bernard Grun and Eva Simpson. I quickly snatched it up. Again, it was a reference work I consulted over and over again.

Now Harold F. Williams has added a third in my bookshelf of favorite timeline-style reference books. In *The Longest War in American History: A Chronological Compendium Reference to the Indian Wars in the United States, 1400-1898*, Williams has created an outstanding timeline of conflicts involving Native Americans in the United States. It will serve researchers well and will no doubt help spark much further study of American Indians by professional scholars and amateur historians alike.

Williams has chronicled conflicts among the various Indian tribes themselves, as well as Indians’ clashes with Mexicans, Europeans of all nationalities, and American-born descendants of those Europeans. The in-depth compilation doesn’t concern itself solely with the Great Plains, but with the entire continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Alaska to Florida. His timeline touches back to BC times and reaches forward into recent memory, with the bulk of the entries falling between 1400 and 1898. Since the general public often thinks of Indian wars as *only* happening after the Civil War and *only* in the Great Plains,

Williams' wide-ranging book will be an eye-opener to many people.

Williams has not tried to put a limit on the definition of "war." The kidnapping of one white girl by Indians makes this compendium, as does a battle involving hundreds of people. Williams also gives a sense of why some of these wars happened, of what the fighting was about. He also gives an excellent final chapter analyzing Indian wars, tallying up pertinent numbers and offering useful interpretation of the meaning of Indian wars in U.S. history.

Most interesting of all is Williams' insight into Indian wars as one long, continuous chain of fighting, not isolated flare-ups meant merely to clear some troublesome tribesmen from a particular plot of land. Williams comments that historians who have not considered Indian wars as one long, interconnected war have missed an important point. As he puts it, "If Indians are portrayed as few, widely scattered, and not much in the way, then westward expansion becomes not so much a dispossession as an exploration, not so much a war as a few isolated incidents, and not so much a central conflict of American society as a marginal endeavor." Williams' thorough compendium offers persuasive evidence that, indeed, Indian wars have not been a series of fairly rare and largely unrelated events, but could in fact constitute the central conflict in American history. The premise is fascinating and worth considering.

For Williams, this conclusion is the culmination of decades of work. He became fascinated with American Indians when he was a child, leading to 40 years of study of them. While teaching on the college level, he maintained an active academic interest in Indian history, reading as much as he could about American tribes. He concluded that they had played a far bigger role in American history than our history books have ever shown.

With this book, he's doing his part to correct the record.

Julie Hedgepeth Williams
President, 2008-2009
American Journalism Historians Association

Author's note

Although this book is about Indian wars, no assumptions have been made here that American Indians are mainly warlike; rather, as with all human beings, Indians have fought to avoid being displaced or killed. Many tribes have never been warlike.

This book will use interchangeably terms such as *Native American*, *Indian*, *American Indian*, and *First Nations*. The true names for Native people should come out of tribal languages, but most non-Indians would not recognize such designations. Thus, names of tribes have frequently been modernized in this book. The same is true of place names. However, modernized tribal names are often spelled differently in different sources, and I apologize for any inconsistencies that I failed to uncover. As to place names, I attempted to place historic events in geographic locations by their modern names, but I recognize that place names have often changed over five centuries. Again, my apologies for any faulty designations as to place names.

It is beyond the scope of this examination to cover the multitude of small-scale, relatively unorganized native raids where single-settler households or small settlements were targeted. Although some of these types of raids made the book, many did not.

There will no doubt be other omissions of various incidents or details, as well as mistakes that inevitably find their way into print. My editors have uncovered several duplications that I unintentionally placed in the manuscript. I sincerely apologize for errors that remain and expect to correct them in future editions.

The data found in this book is available in the sources listed in the bibliography, but the unique chronology, synthesis, categorization, summary, and analysis in this book should add to the literature and help both the amateur and professional historian by providing a historical thumbnail sketch as well as patterned continuities within the historical record.

Introduction

The central war in American history was the Indian War, which lasted through many centuries with many participants in many parts of the country. When the huge number of hostile incidents between native and non-native inhabitants of the United States is added to the widespread expanse and diversity of Indian life, it becomes abundantly clear that Indian war and land dispossession was an almost universal fact of American history. It is a fact that has been underemphasized by most professional historians. The typical Euro-American, Anglo-non-Indian emphasis is not surprising, considering the popularity of the thesis of Manifest Destiny, especially in regard to westward expansion. The notion of an inherent American right to possess the whole U.S. territory from sea to sea seems more rational if American Indians are not much involved in the process. If Indians are portrayed as few, widely scattered, and not much in the way, then westward expansion becomes not so much a dispossession as an exploration, not so much a war as a few isolated incidents, not so much a central conflict of American society as a marginal endeavor.

This reference work has been written to correct the notion that Indian history is an unimportant part of U.S. history. The level of detail in this book dramatically expands the centrality of American vs. Native American conflict and increases awareness of the area of Indian and Euro-white contact. The great geographical expanse of the Indian wars and the extensive geographical dispersion of tribal life in the United States puts the lie to the notion that the Indian encounters were a marginal part of American history. Although the preponderance of Native American groups was not involved in war-making, this does not weaken this book's argument that the central war in American history was the centuries-long Indian War.

These Native vs. non-Native wars are illustrated here through a detailed chronology of hostilities. An analysis in the final chapter provides interpretation, context, and numerical tallies.

Background: Intra-tribal war over centuries

Since many laymen do not perceive of Indian wars as taking place prior to the white settlers' rush into the Great Plains in the latter half of the 1800s, it's worthwhile here to establish the fact of long-running hostilities among some Indian tribes that would one day help fuel hostilities and warlike practices against Euro-white settlers. These intertribal wars are still a somewhat murky area of scholarship due to lost data, to oral history imprecision, and to non-Indian historians' reluctance to accept tribal oral histories. The history of intertribal conflict could go back 20,000 to 40,000 years, depending on the duration of American Indian occupation of the continent. Archaeologists posit habitation from 12,000 to 14,000 years ago, but Native Americans stress their long-standing relationships with particular landscapes from time immemorial. Better understanding of this conflict among Native Americans comes from ethnohistorical data, which relies not only on oral history, but also on thorough research of the writings of early European explorers, missionaries, and military leaders.

Evidence from a thousand years ago indicates more tribal flight, dislocation, and war mortality than earlier assumed. Archaeologists posit warfare at Castle Rock, New Mexico in 1279 AD; major war imagery in the Southwest Anasazi region around 1200; conflict in the Grasshopper Indians of southeast Arizona from the late 1200s; Pueblo defense in west central Arizona, organized war in Perry Mesa, Arizona; warfare in the Tonto basin and southern Arizona; and warfare in the south and Gila basins of Arizona.

Yet, the conflicts in Arizona are not the only evidence of war in the area of the United States in early times. Organized warfare was common in the Southeast region and elsewhere on a smaller scale. More controversially, early evidence of scalping and cannibalism paints a more violent picture of intertribal conflict, with current theory postulating that the Anasazi of the Southwest were victimized and preyed upon by more predatory cultures. Remains elsewhere have yielded evidence of violent Indian demise. For a long time, defenders of Native Americans suggested that scalping was a European invention brought to the Indians, but current study seems to refute this. It is true, however, that Euro-white Americans encouraged Indian scalp-

taking as a wartime body count device and offered large cash rewards for scalps of any gender and age.

Cannibalism as a ritual, wartime, and starvation time practice has occurred in all human societies, though its incidence is usually officially suppressed. Cannibalism was fairly common in Indian warfare, but the partaking was often confined to eating the heart, the seat of human courage, in order to take on the courage of the enemy.

Some have assumed that extensive intertribal conflict would be unlikely among scattered, small, isolated native groups in North America. But this assumption is not correct for the concentrated and numerous Indian cultures such as the Hohokum and Anasazi in the Southwest, the Mississippians in the Southeast, and the Cahokians in Missouri. These high population centers put pressure on the local environments and often involved the subduing of surrounding smaller tribes. While most American Indians practiced good land management and game preservation, some urbanized groups stressed both the land and intertribal relations.

Introduction of Europeans

People often think that Indians only fought whites, but as is clear from the record, by the time Europeans arrived in America on a permanent basis, Indians had been perfecting the art of war among themselves. Thus, they were ready to do battle as needed. And despite every schoolchild's notion that Native American-European contact was slim prior to 1620, that assumption is questioned by scholars. First white contact with American Indians apparently started about 1,000 AD with the Vikings. Historian Donald P. Quinn estimates that 500 European vessels a year visited the Newfoundland fishery by 1580.

Previous assumptions had been that serious intertribal conflict did not start until the Beaver Wars, where commercial fur trade sponsored by the Europeans exacerbated intertribal struggle. However, current study suggests instead that long-standing animosity from the intertribal period seeped into the Colonial and Beaver Wars. In addition, the fighting appears to have been promiscuous and unstable. Alliances were formed very temporarily and might have been made just to fuel the warrior ethic rather than to pursue more instrumental ends, again a

carryover from the long years of intertribal warfare. Tribes had grudges to settle. This may account for the enthusiasm of certain native groups to throw in their lot with whites against other tribes. For example, the Powhatan Confederacy's subordinate tribes joined with their natural enemies, the whites, to get revenge on dominant Indian groups that had taken their territory or had taken them as slaves. Native Americans also formed alliances with related tribal and language groups against other Indian tribes. Such alliances were reflected in Indians' early alliances with whites. When whites appeared on the continent, Native American self-interest caused them to first align with the Spanish to prevent French encroachment, then to side with the French to stop British invasion, and later to join with the British to slow the land-grabbing Americans.

Such alliances between Indians and whites built up and shifted over centuries into a long chain of white-Indian wars. Most truncated, limited, and discontinuous histories involving Indian wars simply portray disjointed struggles that do not give a true impression of the nature of the long war.

One way of correcting misimpressions is to paint the multi-century conflict as it occurred—as an interlocking, continuous stream of wars, battles, skirmishes, raids, massacres, and murderous atrocities. All of these struggles contained one common element—the unrelenting contest of Native Americans against invading whites who came from Europe and Mexico. Specifically, Indians fought against Dutch, Spanish, French, Scots, Irish, Scots-Irish, Mexicans, and English and the descendants of all of these groups. Even when Indians fought with (instead of against) the invaders as some tribes did through the Imperial Wars, it was always with the intent of serving tribal interest by better positioning themselves against the next assault on their land base.

Excessive mortality from European diseases had its effect on Indian wars as well. From 1520 to 1900, European diseases erupted every four years and two months. Such depopulation of up to 75 percent of a group forced the remnant group to raid for captives to rebuild their societies. Mourning raids, slaving raids, and the taking of captives in most battles somewhat ameliorated the cultural and physical destruction produced by disease depopulation. The new multiethnic polyglot towns were the

result of this population restocking and led to the excessive factionalism of Algonquin society, where intra-village and inter-village conflict probably increased the number of tribal disputes leading to war.

In short, this longest running war in American history, in all its many facets, developed and changed due to a wide variety of circumstances over centuries. All of these circumstances can all be described as interwoven into one long, ongoing battle as Native Americans fought for their survival.

Chapter 1

Intertribal Conflict

Native American habitation of the United States area is dated to 40,000 years ago. In this period, Period I, artifactual evidence points to a hunter-food collector culture. Period II, from 20000–15000 BC, indicates a Bering Straights incursion into America. Period III, from 15000–8000 BC, evidences a combination heritage from periods I and II. Period IV from 8000–5000 BC is archeologically characterized as a big game-hunting tradition. Period V, from 5000–2000 BC, shows more refined hunting and fishing techniques. Finally, Period VI, from 2000 BC–1500 AD, evolves into settled agricultural communities.

All of these periods are dated by projectile points and other early artifacts discovered in situ. Another way to categorize this history is to divide it into PaleoIndian period, Archaic period, Woodland period, and Mississippian period. The Paleo period runs from 40000–8000 BC, Archaic from 8000–2000 BC, Woodland from 2000 BC–1500 AD, and Mississippian from 700–1700 AD. Thus intertribal war history starts in late Woodland period and progresses into historic times.

Although a number of known intertribal conflicts are listed here, some intertribal clashes, often associated with the interaction with non-Indians, appear in other chapters.

500 BC

Sometime in the Archaic period the Sioux invade the North Carolina Piedmont area.

Archaeologists discover trophy heads and scalps taken by the Basket Maker culture Indians of the Southwest.

700

Mexican-based Mississippian culture invades Mississippi Valley, displacing indigenous Adena-Hopewell culture.

900

Early Mississippi First Nations invade and displace late Woodland Indians at Macon, Georgia.

1100

Twenty-nine people butchered and eaten at Mancos Canyon site in Anasazi country, Colorado.

Centralized Mississippian military power and invasion breeds corresponding militarization in Appalachian Native Americans.

1400

First Nations wage ferocious wars on each other from wood-palisaded, fortified villages until the League of the Iroquois, based in upstate New York, establishes peace between the tribal divisions.

Iroquois wage mourning wars on other groups to repopulate from their war losses.

Wars between Algonquin and Iroquois. Algonquin were based in the Ottawa River Valley in Ontario/Quebec but had pushed south, clashing with Iroquois.

Coast Tsimshian leader murdered in intra-tribal rivalry in Alaska, forcing many other feuding Tsimshian into alliance with their Tlingit neighbors: precise date unknown in tribal oral history.

Siouxian cult from Wisconsin takes over Mound Builder culture.

Delaware drive out Snakes from Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

Delaware push Mound Builders out of Ohio.

1450

Seneca massacre Mishinimackinawgoes on Mackinac Island, Michigan.