

## **Book Reviews**

Loni Ronnebaum

### **Review: Silent Victims: Hate Crimes Against Native Americans**

*by Barbara Perry*

*The University of Arizona Press, 2008. 176 pages  
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I was somewhat uncomfortable in the beginning with writing a book review on hate crimes against Native Americans. Barbara Perry, author of “Silent Victims,” has quite a background on the subject; she is currently professor of Criminology, Justice, and Policy studies in Ontario, Canada. Between the years 1999 and 2003, while employed by Northern Arizona University, Barbara conducted over 300 interviews throughout Indian country. Her study was composed of 8 research questions rather than a hypothesis; it was the first of its kind, a large-scale empirical exploration of hate crime against American Indians.

“Silent Victims” is structured well; Barbara uses plenty of excerpts from interviews providing individual instances of hate crime as well as the growing body of literature on oppression based on race/ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation to explain the structural and cultural context of hate crimes in America. In setting the context, ethical considerations during research on such a sensitive subject are discussed. I found these of particular importance and of value to future studies. Keeping with oral tradition was one thing mentioned; the written word can sometimes be regarded with suspicion by some native peoples. Giving in exchange for the knowledge you use and sharing the consequential information with the interviewees is pointed out to be good etiquette as well.

Dr. Perry exposes the history of violence that came with the colonization of America and the alarming ignorance of this in American society today. Barbara gives us example after example on how oppression is laced in our education system, the medical industry, policing authorities, government, religion, the workplace, and media. In the authors view hatred and the negative

identity construction are part of formal governmental mechanisms which fuel the informal mechanism, which help perpetuate the marginalization of traditionally oppressed and subordinate groups. Understanding violence and hatred in this context is rather disturbing.

Perry writes on how stereotypes are being used to marginalize and stigmatize, disempowering the “other”. The eternal tourists or Euro-Americans are described as being held back by their contrasting values (power, materialism, economic efficiency, immediacy, endless growth, and imperialism) from completely understanding the “other’s” ways. Extremely troublesome is the pushiness of euro-culture on indigenous peoples, to the point of ethno-genocide. Ethno-genocide would be the systematic destruction of the thought and the way of life of people different from those who carry out this enterprise of destruction. Whereas the genocide assassinates the people in their body, the ethno-genocide kills them in their spirit. Perry shows that the stereotypes and putdowns have become internalized by some native peoples, leading to high levels of violence, alcoholism, and suicide. On the other hand some Native peoples have been empowered by reactionary violence to extending land bases and asserting treaty rights, motivating constructive defiance.

In the final chapter, the most powerful of the eight chapters in the book, Perry argues that decolonization as an answer. Decolonization can be achieved by attaining independence, integrating with the administering power or another state, or establishing a "free association" status. Re-education is an important aspect of her solution. Perry believes confronting and challenging stereotypes and hate crimes provides one avenue to bridging the gap between native and non-native communities. She also calls for collective defiance against the institutions and mythologies that shape ethno-violence. At base, she insists, this must be a part of the broader agenda toward Native sovereignty.

Over all I enjoyed reading this story and believe it has value on many levels. “Silent Victims” gives voice to those who struggle to keep their cultures alive amidst a dominating society. The next step is to acknowledge the deep cultural loss in America and offer help in its revival. Once we learn to appreciate cultural diversity and respect difference we will really understand the wisdom of indigenous cultures and what living in a balance with nature truly means. I feel knowledge is meant to be shared and I think this book will encourage and empower others.

*(Loni Ronnebaum is a research intern at the Center for World Indigenous Studies in the final months of her undergraduate program studying mycology at Evergreen State College.)*