

resulted in the disappearance or recognizability of Indian surnames from town records, further contributing to what O'Brien calls "the myth of disappearance." Still, Indians managed to perpetuate their lineages and remain in the community, despite their invisibility to neighboring whites. Indians preserved their identity and their ties, however tenuous, to the land.

O'Brien's book joins a growing number of works looking at New England Indians living behind the frontier, tracing their efforts to maintain their culture and land base after the collapse of the "middle ground." Drawing parallels between the condition of Indians at Natick and those, over a century later, affected by the policy of allotment under the Dawes Act, O'Brien shows just how insidious myths of native disappearance can be. Yet, although O'Brien makes some useful comparisons with later Euro-American policies toward Native Americans, her book introduces the question of how applicable her findings for Natick are for the region as a whole. Natick was founded as an Indian place, one that received the sanction of provincial officials and clergymen. But what happened in other Indian towns as English settlers began to encroach on their lands? Such historians as Richard Melvoin have explored this question, but much work remains to be done. O'Brien clearly has written an extremely well-crafted study that should provide historians with important insights that they will need to consider as they begin to explore this important subject.

Numbers from Nowhere: The American Indian Contact Population Debate. By David Henige. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. xi + 532 pp., bibliography, index. \$47.95 cloth).

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When in 1976, David Henige first stumbled on the topic of determining the contact population of the Americas, he was intrigued by the historical question. After he observed a class on the subject, Henige's curiosity was piqued. He subsequently embarked on a less inadvertent and more adventurous course of action, which over the past twenty years has seen him subject to scrutiny (some would allege, subject to scorn) the research findings of an eclectic mix of physical and social scientists whom Henige terms "high counters" (xi). Henige's swashbuckling critiques are well-known and often cited in the literature. His voice having cried out in the wilderness of scholarly journals and edited collections for too long (and, at least to Henige, to little effect or none at all), Henige now offers a thick, unpromising tome called *Numbers from Nowhere*. He considers this book "a series of essays that are disparate and self-contained yet not, I think, so

much so that their aggregate does not offer a reasonable assessment" (7). Typically, it is the reader's responsibility to judge whether "a reasonable assessment" has been made of the subject at hand, not least one so charged and controversial as Native American population size at European contact.

Henige believes his purpose is clear. He writes, "At the heart of the High Counters' enterprise is an ensemble of assumptions," the most problematic being (1) "that early European observers could count or estimate large numbers closely; (2) that they wanted to do just this, reckoning precision a virtue; (3) that they actually did so; and (4) that these counts were transmitted into and through the written sources accurately" (6). In eighteen combative chapters, Henige engages "with all but the second of these, and I see the first and third as different in the abstract but in practice much the same." He seeks to demolish the work of a host of researchers whose heinous scholarly crime is to marshal evidence in such a way as to postulate that in all likelihood there were more Native Americans alive at the time of Columbus's landfall than previously thought.

Few high counters in the field of Native American historical demography escape the rapier thrusts of Henige's sustained attack, but those whose work is singled out for special inquisitorial attention include Woodrow Borah, Sherburne Cook, and Lesley B. Simpson (chapter 4), Henry F. Dobyns (chapter 5), Pierre Clastres (chapter 8), Ann Ramenofsky (chapter 9), Sarah Campbell (chapter 10), Noble David Cook and Francisco Guerra (chapter 11), and Linda Newson (chapter 15). For confrontational, in-your-face, me-against-them kind of reading, served up page after page with more than a whiff of righteous indignation at the moronic shortcomings of many academics save one hard-done-by maverick, this is the book.

What if, however, the argument Henige makes about the high counters' assumptions turns out not to be so very well founded? What if, in fact, many of the valid points he discusses have already been raised, usually with less clamor and more collegial respect, by the likes of such "low counters" as Angel Rosenblat, William Sanders, B. H. Slicher van Bath, Rudolph Zambardino, and Elías Zamora? What if some high counters actually have paid attention to what some low counters have said, Henige's work included? And what if, instead of constructing the whole affair as an orchestrated conspiracy perfectly suited to the whims of the politically correct zeitgeist, it proves simply to be the way that Thomas Kuhn argues the world of knowledge unfolds: one paradigm inexorably giving way to another? What the book consists of, despite Henige's protestations, is far less constructive commentary about an important debate than the willful insistence of a clever man to exercise his right to voice a dissenting opinion.

A multitude of objections may be leveled at the manner in which Hen-

ige has chosen to proclaim his case, but three suffice. First, the “numbers” do not come from “nowhere.” They are derived, like a lot of historical data, from difficult and problematical sources that, if handled judiciously, offer insights into an admittedly tricky and contentious field of research. To declare in advance of the evidence, as Henige does, that all that comes of the enterprise are “forlorn attempts to answer a thoroughly unanswerable question” (9) furnishes more a measure of Henige’s arrogance than a critical analysis of a body of literature that, while certainly of limited use and uneven quality, is nonetheless fascinating to explore. His cynical summing up of the endeavors of dozens of scholars insults their intelligence as well as his own. He writes: “Find numbers, believe them, multiply them. In the process brush off skepticism like a troublesome gnat” (315). Second, the “numbers” in question pertain to human beings, members of the species *Homo sapiens*, not “gnats” as “troublesome” as Henige portrays himself. The conquest of America unleashed forces that most observers now believe destroyed the greatest number of lives in history. Perhaps if Henige were more conversant with Native American sources than European ones, he would be able to humanize for his readers the tragedy’s colossal dimension. Only quite recently have scholars become more aware of the fact that key events and circumstances in the course of European expansion wrought untold havoc on the inhabitants of the non-European world. That said, seven years after the Columbus Quincentennial and on the eve of the new millennium, many still do not view it that way. Much of the credit for raising consciousness belongs to the “high counter movement” (27), which dates back to the 1930s pioneering work of Carl Sauer and the Berkeley School. Third, even though Henige acknowledges that “when European diseases did strike, they were usually devastating” (10), he opts to title one of his chapters “Giving Disease a Bad Name.” In the end, it all comes down, morally as much as mathematically, to a new world form of Holocaust denial.