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and
Lisa Kealhofer

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Ann L.W. Stodder

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FOREWORD

The Columbian Exchange, the meeting of East and West that began with the initial voyage of Christopher Columbus, brought great changes to the world. One aspect of that exchange was the European colonization of the Americas, a process that took place in the context of a hemispheric-wide demographic collapse: for in the several centuries following 1492, Native American populations suffered precipitous reductions. Some native groups ceased to exist, while others adapted to the new world that was taking shape around them and of which they were a part.

This volume is composed of a group of essays that focus on the nature of that demographic collapse. The contention is that such a catastrophe indeed did take place. But the process was much more variable than that proposed by those scholars who believe the collapse resulted from disease-caused pandemics that swept across North and South America. This latter model holds that in only a few short years a single epidemic could have spread from the Great Lakes to Tierra del Fuego, devastating the native groups who had no immunities to smallpox, measles, and other diseases introduced into the Americas by European explorers and early colonists.

Editors Brenda Baker and Lisa Kealhofer argue that in contrast to this pandemic model are data showing that the responses by Native Americans to the presence of people from Europe were not uniform. Many groups did adapt to conditions of the post-Columbian era, and those adaptations varied by culture and circumstance. Epidemics were circumscribed, affecting different populations in different ways. And different cultural factors such as population densities and the nature of European contact situations led to different epidemiological and demographic outcomes. As a result, some Native American groups disappeared within several decades after 1492, while others were relatively unaffected for several centuries. From examining the cultural and biological contexts of specific contact situations, a more accurate model explaining the impact of that contact can be developed.

This perspective on population collapse in the Americas is illustrated with case studies taken from the region that today is the southern United States:

the area from Florida and Georgia through Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas into New Mexico and California. Taken together, these well-documented investigations convincingly support the contention that archaeological and bioanthropological research are powerful tools for interpreting the variable cultural and biological factors affecting Native American groups in the post-Columbian world.

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Chapter 1

Assessing the Impact of European Contact on Aboriginal Populations

BRENDA J. BAKER AND LISA KEALHOFER

The effects of European contact on New World populations have been the subject of a proliferating body of literature in recent years (e.g., Axtell 1981, 1985, 1992; Crosby 1972; Denevan 1992; Dobyns 1966, 1983; Jennings 1975; Johansson 1982; Larsen and Milner 1994; Ramenofsky 1987; Reff 1991; Rouse 1992; Sale 1990; Salisbury 1982; Stannard 1992; Steele 1994; Thomas 1989, 1990, 1991; Thornton 1987; Trigger 1985; Verano and Ubelaker 1992; Viola and Margolis 1991). Many investigators focus on the impact of European-introduced epidemic disease and subsequent demographic "collapse" of indigenous populations. In many groups, however, population decline did not occur in a matter of a generation or two but took place over several centuries. This gradual depopulation resulted from the interaction of many factors, only one of which was introduced disease. As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, biocultural responses to European contact were not uniform, ranging from rapid cultural and demographic collapse to adaptation and resilience.

To assess the magnitude of demographic collapse, scholars have devoted considerable effort to reconstructing the size of precontact and protohistoric Native American populations. Less attention has been paid to rigorous definition of the parameters of demographic collapse. How long does this "collapse" take? Is it caused by one major pandemic? Does it take five years or fifty?

We suggest that demographic collapse or an "*abrupt and catastrophic decline*" (as defined by Ramenofsky [1987, 22], emphasis in original) is a special, short-term case of depopulation, which is a gradual process of population reduction. Recent uses of the term *collapse* have included population loss over long periods (e.g., Dobyns 1983; Ramenofsky 1987; Thornton 1987). There is no question that most indigenous groups experienced depopulation during the historic period. What is at issue here is the nature and magnitude of this decline, and the extent to which it is

correlated with epidemic disease. The question of demographic collapse has been inexorably tied to demographic