

An Interview with Professor Karl Jacoby

The Brown Journal of History recently sat down with Professor Karl Jacoby, a specialist in North American environmental history. Professor Jacoby has recently published his second book, *Shadows at Dawn: A Borderlands Massacre and the Violence of History*. The book seeks to understand the true story and meaning of the largely forgotten Camp Grant Massacre of 1871, in which a group of Americans, Mexicans and Tohono O'odham Indians massacred a group of Apaches, sleeping in a camp, and consequently approaches the issue from four angles. The following is an edited transcript of the interview conducted with Professor Jacoby:

BJH: What you covered in *Shadows at Dawn* is so different from what you covered in your first book, which was more an environmental history. How did you become interested in the Camp Grant Massacre?

KJ: The genesis was actually very simple. What I was originally interested in was the issue of identity being linked to place, and particularly the question which I think is integral to American history as a whole: how do Americans begin to think of a place as their homeland? That's the big question of American history, because we have a colonial history in which lands that once belonged to other groups are ultimately assimilated into the United States.

What I started looking at was this case study of the Gadsden Purchase, which was the last adjustment of the continental boundaries in 1854, where a portion of what was northern Mexico is purchased from Mexico and incorporated into the U.S.

When I started looking at the documents, what I was not finding what I expected, which were lots of accounts about mapping and surveying the border. Instead, a lot of the stories were about encountering Apaches – really violent encounters. And it soon became clear to me that the way that people were expressing their claim to this land was through these violent encounters with the Apaches. So I felt like I needed to understand that, and the central story behind understanding that in this time period was the Camp Grant Massacre of 1871.

BJH: You construct this history in the book using four major narratives. How hard was it to construct a history with four very different, often conflicting narratives?

KJ: It's hard because I wanted to make sure I was doing justice to each of the groups and because the sources are different for each of the groups. In part, that's the point. Each of the groups had different ways of recording events – take the calendar sticks of the Tohono O'odham, or the military reports or newspapers that you'd find with the U.S. Army, or the folk songs that you see with the ethnic Mexicans. But the sources are so different that sometimes it's hard to make sure you are not missing the balance.

I also worried about issues of repetition. Sometimes I narrate the same event but from different points of view. You have to try to make that seem exciting and different rather than repetitious when you read it.

BJH: There are different conceptions of time endemic to different cultures. How did you work with that as a historian?

KJ: That's a key point. What I was trying to work against in *Shadows at Dawn* is the notion that there's one singular scale of time that we can use in narrating a history. Usually, frankly, we unconsciously fall into a pattern where we use an "American" scale of time. That is, when people write about the borderlands, the story begins in 1854 with the Gadsden Purchase and there's no sense of earlier things being important. Or, the other big date that gets used is 1886, when Geronimo surrenders, which is often seen as the end of Apache history in the region.

In *Shadows at Dawn* each narrative has not only a different sense of geographic space but also of chronology. When you think about Anglo Americans, their history does pretty much begin in 1854, but with a group like the Tohono O'odham, they have much longer histories and longer senses of time. They go back hundreds of years before Americans even show up. And so there are already patterns and ways of thinking about this region established well before the Americans show up. It seems like a really minor point but it really profoundly changes the perspectives on the history of the region.

BJH: On a different note, the Camp Grant Massacre is something that isn't really addressed in history textbooks or popular memory. Why do you think that such an affecting story has disappeared from popular memory in the United States as a whole?

KJ: That's an interesting comment because in the 19th century people all knew about this event. One of the things that I try to emphasize in the book is that in the 1870s, when there's a lot of debate about Indian policy, the Camp Grant Massacre is one of the preeminent issues that people are thinking through, because it comes right as the United States is groping towards a reservation policy. Camp Grant in many respects highlights the whole intertwined questions of the U.S.'s peace policy and reservation policy.

In contrast, the Camp Grant Massacre disappears from popular memory in the twentieth century, and I try and trace out why. Each group has a different reason why it gets forgotten. A lot of Apaches, for instance, don't like to talk about the dead. Of course, too, a lot of Apaches died in the massacre, so we don't have access to their memories as a result of the event itself. For Anglo Americans, it's partially embarrassing, but also, as I try to explore in the book, the desire to modernize the region in the early twentieth century is predicated on not referencing this older history of conflict because that is seen as potentially discouraging the influx of capital in the region.

The other thing, ironically, is the rise of the movies. There's never been a movie about Camp Grant. It's such an ambiguous, difficult subject that the movies have instead favored other topics, like Geronimo, who becomes a huge figure in a lot of Western movies. So movies, in creating our popular history, fixate on certain figures and obscure others.

BJH: There are no clear heroes in this account.

KJ: No, I don't think there are. Western history and the Western imagination is generally an unambiguous place, filled with black hats and white hats. And that's not what I'm going for here. To a certain extent, each group here is very violent in their own way towards the other, and I'm trying to understand this dynamic. Ultimately, I suspect readers will get the overall picture – the Apaches experience far more violence than any other group in the region.

The family of one of the Apache chiefs who survived the Camp Grant Massacre, Captain Chiquito, recently got in touch with me, which has been very moving. In some respects if there is a hero in *Shadows at Dawn*, I think it's Captain Chiquito. He's the one who goes back and resettles the massacre site, and he's the one who befriends the family that led the attack against him. So he's one who's trying in certain ways to get beyond the massacre. But I certainly don't cast him as a hero *per se* in the book. Indeed, the book can be read as a meditation on the limitations of

having heroes, because one of the disturbing features in the nineteenth century is that the people who led the attack on Camp Grant were held up as heroes.

BJH: How is this account played out in local popular memory today? How does the region commemorate the event?

KJ: They don't do too much. The book was fairly well reviewed in the Arizona newspapers, and all the reviews basically said this is an event we should all know more about and don't. One of the big, reoccurring controversies in Tucson is that a lot of the streets and one of the local schools are named after people who perpetrated the attack. There's been some debate as to whether that's appropriate or not.

There's also been some interest in doing something to commemorate the massacre site. The Apache people are somewhat ambivalent about this. On the one hand, they want to make sure that the site is treated respectfully; they're worried about people getting in there and looking for souvenirs or the like. On the other hand, I think they realize this is a fairly important opportunity to invite people in Arizona to know about the massacre and Apache history. There still are tensions between the Apache population and the non-Apache population in Arizona. Knowing about an event like this would help one understand the roots of that.

BJH: There's currently a big trend towards images of violence in United States history. If you go to a bookstore the largest history section is going to be military history, or if you look at images of war on the History Channel. Why do you think this is?

KJ: The way I envision my book is that it's going through the familiar door of the traditional Wild West violent encounter. But where I would like to think *Shadows at Dawn* is different from the History Channel or all those books about the Civil War is that I'm really not interested in gallantry under fire but rather the cost of violence - how people reckon with this indescribable thing; how people try to explain its presence in our lives.

The book was unavoidably written in the shadow of recent events like 9/11, the War in Iraq, and the War in Afghanistan. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that it grapples with the question of terror, when people think violence is appropriate, and what people are asked to do to protect their community.

So in the end the book is a bit like a Trojan horse - it may look on its face like a Wild West book, but it's ultimately trying to get to a very different place. In the standard Wild West book, the Apache are generally treated as this incredibly brutal foil for American settlement. What I really wanted to reveal in *Shadows at Dawn* was the humanity of the Apaches and the ways in which this humanity has been distorted by the historical process. One of the things you'll see when you read the book is that

the accounts of the perpetrators of the Camp Grant Massacre are privileged when the histories of the region were written in the early twentieth century. There was a very clear link between the act of violence and writing about violence, in ways that justify violence in the past and in the future.

For more information about the Camp Grant Massacre, please visit Karl Jacoby's website at www.brown.edu/aravaipa.