

There is a story, believed to be of Cherokee origin, in which a girl is troubled by a recurring dream in which two wolves fight viciously. Seeking an explanation, she goes to her grandfather, highly regarded for his wisdom, who explains that there are two forces within each of us, struggling for supremacy, one embodying peace and the other, war. At this, the girl is even more distressed, and asks her grandfather who wins. His answer: “The one you feed.” (Barash 2013:SR12)

Afterword

*War, Peace, and Plains
Archaeology*

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We have focused here on war. Social violence waxed and waned on the Plains, taking different forms in different regions and over time. Plains communities wove war into the social and ideological aspects of their lives and altered important material aspects of their lives in response to it. Warfare mattered in the long-term history of the Great Plains.

So did peace. Some aspects of the anthropological debate over the prevalence and significance of war seem to depend as much on semantic tricks as on the real conditions of life faced by real groups of people in the present or the past, and they depend particularly on the way we define war and peace. We see only one useful definition of warfare—socially sanctioned group-level violence—with the specific form that war takes varying with many factors, including the nature of the community sanctioning it. This definition distinguishes war from individual conflicts that result in individual

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violence and underscores the importance of community validation. In so doing, though, it also highlights the importance of peace. Documenting long-term patterns in the presence of violence also means documenting long-term patterns in its absence, and these patterns are essential. To take only one example, Bamforth and Nepstad-Thornberry (2007b) document patterns in ceramic variability in the Middle Missouri region that suggest dramatic differences in patterns of intercommunity, perhaps interethnic, social interaction over time, with interaction notably higher in times when people built unfortified communities and notably lower when they lived within ditch-and-palisade defenses. Any effort to understand the processes of change operating on the Plains over time has to actively address the importance of both war and peace—of times when the prospect of violence could not be ignored, and of times when this prospect was not an issue. Our emphasis here on the first of these should not minimize the second.

Warfare varied on the Plains in time and space, and it did so in distinctly patterned ways. From a bird's-eye view, Plains warfare's slow development over time parallels the long, slow increase in indigenous population in North America in general (Peros et al. 2010), and its long-term geographic and temporal variation tracks fairly closely with long-term geographic and temporal patterns of subsistence intensification that likely derive from that increase. Looking more closely, violence seems at least sometimes to have ebbed and flowed with local circumstances like drought and population movements, and to have concentrated at times along boundaries between social groups—Puebloan and Plains, Apachean and Caddoan, and others. Written records from the late 1800s tell us clearly that individual people on the Plains chose war and peace consciously and strategically, evaluating circumstances and possibilities. Red Cloud, raised as a traditional Lakota warrior and the leader of the indigenous resistance to American expansion on the northwestern Plains that actually drove the frontier back for a decade, chose peace when he decided his people could not win in the long term (Drury and Clavin 2013). Comanche leader Quanah Parker led his people's resistance on the southern Plains, surrendered at Palo Duro Canyon in 1872, and ended his days as a rancher in Oklahoma (Neeley 1995). Other warriors on the Plains made other choices, but the transformation of men like these from truly terrifying fighters to citizens shows us unambiguously how situational collective violence is. They chose peace in a situation of military defeat, but they chose it nevertheless, and people can choose peace under other situations as well.

The debate over war and peace is also entwined with debates over many other issues, and we think that this kind of evidence from the Great Plains

bears on a number of these. Most concretely, war and peace have entered into discussions over the notion of the “fundamental” character of humanity, often conceived in evolutionary terms. On one hand, we do not lack for scholars who argue that selective pressures on humans to be warlike go far back in our evolutionary history: violence may have fitness links among at least some human groups and collective homicide among chimpanzees looks eerily like some forms of tribal war (Chagnon 1988; Macfarlan et al. 2014; Wrangham 1999). In contrast, other scholars have argued that evidence for violence in the deep past and in simple, mobile hunter-gatherer societies has been exaggerated and that both tribal and primate violence result from conditions imposed by settling down, by the effects of contact with more complex groups (in the case of primates, with humans), or by both of these (e.g., Ferguson 1992; Wilson et al. 2014). In this view, war grows from circumstances that, in effect, violate the conditions under which we evolved, which might suggest that humans are intrinsically, perhaps evolutionarily, peaceful.

However, we have trouble seeing the data from the Plains as evidence for either war or peace being wired into human beings in some kind of evolutionary sense. Like Barash (2013; also see Roscoe 2007; Thorpe 2003) it seems to us that human beings have the *capacity* to be either peaceful or warlike according to circumstance and, as we have seen, circumstances are often complicated. Instead of being innately warlike or inherently peaceful, human nature is rooted in interaction, and conflict and/or cooperation are simply choices people make.

Even the small-scale foraging societies that Fry and Söderberg (2013) view as “peaceful” document this. Viewing “history” writ very, very small, these authors consider the specific killings documented for such groups by ethnographers, including the Bushmen of southern Africa. Taking the Bushmen as a single and telling example, the list of killings that Lee (2003:116) compiles does look more like individual homicides than like the kind of collective violence that most of us label as “war.” The rate of violent death among the Bushmen, though, is remarkably high, as their incidence of gendered and other violence in general have also been (see, for example, Shostak 1981, 2000). Despite the anthropological celebration of traditional Bushman mechanisms of dispute resolution, under actual “traditional”—that is, early twentieth century—circumstances, these often failed to control Bushman behavior: male Bushmen stopped killing each other to resolve their disputes only when they began to go to prison for doing so. Early to mid-twentieth-century Bushmen may not have gone to war, but, whatever their ideology, it is difficult to call them “peaceful” in any meaningful sense of the word.

But taking Southern African history written longer than just a few decades shows us a different side of these groups: “the Bushmen once waged war, and they lost” (Otterbein 1999: 798). The communities encountered by mid-twentieth-century anthropologists were the survivors of a systematic program of genocide carried out from 1912 to 1915 as a response to armed resistance to white appropriation of Bushman land (Gordon 2009; Guenther 2014; Hitchcock et al. 2014). This is a textbook example of Ferguson and Whitehead’s (1992) “war in the tribal zone.” However, unless we want to argue that white colonists provided military training to the indigenous people they were displacing, we have to acknowledge collective violence—warfare—as an inherent human capacity. Southern African hunter-gatherers organized themselves for war when they believed that they had to, and their poisoned arrows terrorized southern African whites, at least for a short time. And like all other human beings, the hunter-gatherer people of southern Africa have a history that extends long before European contact. We do not know this history in detail, but osteological evidence indicates that, while interpersonal violence was rare overall, some 2,500 years ago people on the southwest South African coast—especially women and children—often died violently (Pfeiffer 2016).

This means that understanding what we mean by “peace” is worth as much attention as defining “war.” One simple, perhaps minimal, definition is the absence of social violence, but this masks a variety of circumstances with different implications for people present and past. Peace is not the passive result of lack of violence, but an active part of society (Ferguson 2013:193). Surely we want “peace” in this sense to reflect positive, friendly relations among neighboring social groups, relations that foster the free and willing flow of people, ideas, and goods and that make it possible to devote individual and community efforts to tasks other than the myriad of activities required by defense.

Peace can come about in different forms, including through diplomacy and ally making. This can be achieved through the mechanisms such as the Making of Relatives rite of the Oglala or the calumet ceremony (Albers 1993; Brown and Steltenkamp 1993; Hall 1997). It is possible to see the latter in the archaeological record (Blakeslee 1981). But the absence of social violence may also reflect the existence of offensive and defensive military capabilities sufficiently well developed to discourage attack, whether neighbors like each other or not. From the day-to-day perspective of a farmer hoping to travel safely to and from the fields, there may not be much distance between these different kinds of “peace.” However, from the perspective of an archaeologist hoping to understand the long-term history of a region like the Great Plains, distinctions like this matter greatly.

The early fifteenth century along the Middle Missouri may be an example of the first of these. In that time and place, communities were relatively small, dispersed, and unfortified, and ceramic and other data suggest substantial geographic overlap of settlement locations among different social groups as well as movements of potters between these groups (Bamforth and Nepstad-Thornberry 2007b). Identifying examples of ancient peace enforced by a recognized balance of power, though, is more difficult, and leads directly to important domains for future archaeological research. Documenting war can be difficult, as the ambiguity of the Central Plains–tradition case illustrates (see Bamforth, chapter 1, this volume); LeBeau's chapter 6 here underscores how uneven and incomplete the evidence for warfare on the Plains is even in the Middle Missouri region, where violence is so spectacularly visible. No one line of evidence will suffice to sort out the details either of the nature of social violence when it existed or the nature and causes of different kinds of peacefulness when it does not exist. Fortifications by themselves tell us about the possibility of attack, but fortifications that are imposing enough may deter actual attacks, although they may not deter small-scale raiding away from fortified localities and, as Vehik's chapter 7 here shows, even endangered communities do not always build fortifications.

This has important implications for the ways in which we approach archaeological sites on the Plains, particularly sites dated to periods in which warfare was clearly important. The chapters here have discussed a wider variety of fortification styles than most of the Plains literature considers, and this is important. But documenting better-known kinds of fortifications in detail is also important. For example, people entered some recent palisaded sites on the Plains using ladders to climb up the inner face of the fortification ditch, ladders that people could pull up into the community to prevent access. Other Plains sites, though, have causeways across their ditches, which offer a very different kind of access and require a different approach to defense. Plains archaeologists have examined very few entrances to fortified sites: there is a simple baffle gate at Helb (Kay 1995) and at least one of the causewayed entrances to the Wittrock site appears to have a more complex and carefully designed and guarded baffled design (Anderson 1985). Documenting these aspects of fortifications along with the presence or absence of features like bastions and possible guard stations (e.g., the hearth within a corner bastion at Huff, perhaps to keep warm during winter sentry duty; Wood 1967) will open doors to questions we are only beginning to ask. It may be possible to gather data on topics like these with limited, or perhaps no, excavation, using geophysical techniques focused on very fine-scale subsurface patterns. More

focused attention on the details of site chronologies also matters: knowing at what point in the history of a community its members decided to fortify themselves is important, and this is often impossible to assess on the Plains because of an overwhelming emphasis in chronological work on placing sites in a culture-historical sequence rather than on understanding their individual occupation histories in detail.

Distinguishing clearly between evidence telling us that people were worried about attacks and evidence telling us that people actually were attacked is also essential. Osteological data are one obvious critical line of evidence in this context, and the Plains offers some of the most spectacular evidence of attacks known anywhere in the world, as we have discussed. However, partial publication of completed analyses addressing direct evidence for interpersonal violence on the Plains, not to mention the all-too-common total failure to publish for years after such analyses are completed, limits what we know in very serious ways. In a post-NAGPRA world, this is simply inexcusable.

But attacks are visible in archaeological data beyond human skeletons, and we need to design field strategies with this in mind. For example, we often take systematic evidence for burning of residential structures as possible evidence for war (e.g., Lintz 1986), although we all recognize that people may burn their houses for more than one reason. But careful documentation of detailed patterns of structure burning may help to distinguish between household accidents, destruction for ritual or safety reasons, and violence: setting houses with thatched roofs on fire from the outside, for example, may leave a distinctive signature (Bleed et al. 2009). Alternatively, Keeley (1996:19) illustrates point-plotted projectile points scattered along the outer face of a British Neolithic site's palisade, along with a swarm of points into the site's interior at the location of a gate. It is difficult to interpret a pattern like this except in terms of sustained arrow fire at defenders along the palisade along with a burst of fire through an opening in the palisade into the site's interior: this site was attacked. Lacking detailed provenience data, this pattern would be invisible.

Gathering field data like these might also let us look beyond the simple fact of massed attacks (in the cases where those occurred) to at least some of the tactics of these attacks. Both osteological data (most spectacularly at Crow Creek) and western Plains hunter-gatherer rock art underscore the central role of shock weapons in Plains warfare, and evidence for initial assaults by archers might document particular kinds of attacks or different stages in attacks. And well-fortified sites with no evidence for any kind of violence might document at least local peace that was enforced not by warm social bonds but by military prowess.

Finally, even the most detailed analyses of the most spectacular archaeological sites matter only because they tell us something meaningful about what ancient people did and why they did it: description for its own sake, no matter how sophisticated, is not worth the time and effort it consumes. War matters, and peace matters, because they affected the ways in which people have lived their lives, in the present and in the past. This means that understanding how war is related to human lifeways, and how and why it appears and disappears, is among the fundamental issues archaeologists should address. As for other fundamental issues, though, we will find no simple explanations of either war or peace: no single factors, material or otherwise, “cause” people to go to war or to make peace, and we should not expect to find one single universal set of causes for war or peace throughout the Plains or anywhere else.

This does not mean that it is not useful for specific analyses to target specific aspects of social violence, but, rather, that we will need many different analyses targeting many different topics to be able to outline the place of war in human history on the Plains.