

Resilient Cultures by John Kicza Book Review

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Book Overview and Author Background

Resilient Cultures: America's Native Peoples Confront European Colonization 1500-1800 was written by John E. Kicza in 2003. The author has given a comparative perspective on the influence of American natives. This book has covered the indigenous cultures before they get contacted to each other and their adaptation in the form of colonies in a creative way. The author of the book was a distinguished professor at Washington State University and has great contribution in the field of history.

Mayan Culture and the Theory of Resilience

Kicza mentioned in his book his theory of resiliency, and the major culture that influenced him was the Mayans, as even though there was a European expansion, the Mayan culture did not alter its identity. The Mayan culture was almost 2000 years old, even before the exploration of Europe. It was the time when Mexican agricultural societies started organizing themselves into some political units. It was also the time when Spain arrived in the new world; this Mayan culture transformed itself from a highly sophisticated and sedentary society to a semi-sedentary and village-based society. This culture was highly civilized, with the ability of a writing system and an updated knowledge of math and astronomy. But during the ninth century, everything collapsed, and they left their nobility far behind while adopting consensus politics.

Spanish Conquest of the Maya

When the Spanish came to the Yucatan, they wanted to conquer the Mayans, and for this, they had to knock out their capital. But However, the main problem of that time was that the Mayans were not centralized and did not live in their capital. Rather, they preferred a semi-sedentary lifestyle and paid allegiance only to the central community. So, the Spanish had to conquer them one by one as they were living in the form of small communities in different parts of that area. After the fights and battles, the Spanish conquered the Mayans, and they accepted the defeat; even then, there were Mayans who were living autonomously free from Spanish rule in different areas.

Religious and Cultural Adaptation

Although there were autonomous groups of Mayans, they were also affected by the Spanish. During the Franciscan friar's trip to the far forests where he found Mayans, he started to convert them to Christianity. However, the Mayans were resilient, and even after this, they have been true to their religion for thousands of years. And although they were converted to Christianity, these new religious teachings did not affect them, and they remained resilient and upgraded to their own values. Another major thing that shows the resiliency of the Mayans was that they were not very much influenced by the culture of Spanish. They kept their own values related to clothing, language, and lifestyle and did not adapt to the new culture. The biggest calamity that Mayans had to fight was that it was inflicted by the epidemics brought by the Spanish, like smallpox, etc., and so their population dropped from 240000 to 170000 in the next 50 years. The traditional nobility of Mayans was also destroyed due to the decline in their trade as they were forced to move from rural areas to large towns. Kicza has focused on the argument of Mayans' resiliency, and it was obvious that their culture was untouched and they were not much influenced by the Spanish.

Aztec Culture and the Limits of Resilience

Another culture, the Aztec culture, which Kicza considered very resilient, was not as resilient as the Mayans. The author mentioned that native cultures have maintained their identity, but actually, it is difficult to maintain one's true identity when there is no culture left. The Aztecs were once warriors, and they ended up like they were none other than slaves, so it is difficult to say that they were quite resilient. Initially, the Aztecs did not consider the Spanish a great fear; they just considered them outsiders. However, when these outsiders tried to conquer this culture, the Aztecs were left with nothing more than bowing and accepting their defeat. Similar to the Mayans, the Aztecs also fell to smallpox, which was brought by the Spanish, and they had no immunity to it. I think the Aztecs were not resilient, as there is another argument to this thesis: fragmentation resulted from colonial rule. After the victory of the Spanish, the Aztecs were unaware of whom they would ask for freedom and what they would do. So, they were forced into small groups as they were quite unaware of their cultural background. The Aztecs were not even allowed to follow their religion and were forced to follow Catholicism, which again proves they were not very resilient. Warfare and disease dropped the Aztec population from 20 million to 1.25 million in a century, so the civilization disintegrated.

Iroquois Survival and Cultural Continuity

Another most resilient culture was the Iroquois Nation, as they not only survived their culture within colonial America but also have survived to date. This culture was not dealing with the Spanish but also Britain and the Americans. They have been involved in warfare, treaties, betrayals, and trades but still have maintained their individuality within American society. One can say that this is a

resultant culture as they have preserved their culture before and after colonial periods. They were also attacked by diseases and horses, yet they preserve themselves, and rather than being affected by others, they adapt to the change and become an example of resilience (Kicza & Horn, 2016).

Critical Evaluation of Kicza's Argument

By reading this book, I came to know that Kizca has mentioned the most resilient cultures that have survived a lot of things, but in my view, rather than resilient, these cultures were durable and strong enough and have survived the tough times.

References

Kicza, J. E., & Horn, R. (2016). *Resilient Cultures: America's Native Peoples Confront European Colonialization 1500-1800*. Routledge.