



Gambling and Survival in Native North America

Paul Pasquaretta

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The cards are turned, the chips are raked. In casinos all over the country, Native Americans are making money and reclaiming power. But the games are by no means confined to the tables, as the Mashantucket Pequots can attest. Although Anglo-Americans have attempted to undermine Pequot sovereignty for centuries, these Native Americans have developed a strategy of survival in order to maintain their sense of peoplehood—a resiliency that has vexed outsiders, from English settlers to Donald Trump.

The Pequots have found success at their southeastern Connecticut casino in spite of the odds. But in considering their story, Paul Pasquaretta shifts the focus from casinos to the political struggles that have marked the long history of indigenous-colonial relations. Viewing the survival of Native communities in the face of genocide and forced assimilation as a high-stakes game of chance, he examines gambling metaphors in historical and literary contexts to reveal strategies employed by several tribes as they participate in various "games" with white society--whether land re-acquisition, political positioning, or resistance to outside dominance.

Through a comparative analysis of texts spanning four centuries—colonial war narratives, nineteenth-century romance fiction, tribal memorials, Native American novels—Pasquaretta provides a framework for understanding Indian-white relations and the role of "chance" in the realm of colonialism. He explores two intertwining themes: the survival of indigenous peoples in the face of the European invasion of North America and the ongoing contest of Natives and newcomers that has transpired in the marketplace, on the battlefield, and in the courts. In so doing, he considers the impact of reservation gambling on the development of contemporary tribal communities and the role of traditional Indian gambling practices and stories in the survival of indigenous cultural traditions.

Gambling and Survival in Native North America is a wide-ranging book that shows how Native Americans have become active participants in their own survival despite the popular belief that Indian tribes, as "conquered peoples," have been rendered helpless for over a century. Working within a system devised to confine and even destroy them, they have found ways to remain in the game—and, against all odds, have learned to play it well.

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