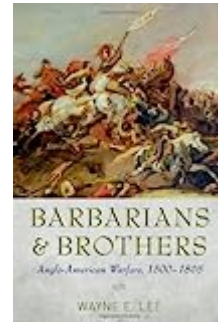




**Wayne E. Lee.** *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1865.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. ix + 340 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-973791-8.



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## Can You Sum up Attitudes to War over Four Centuries in Two Words?

This is a stimulating book which shows an impressive grasp of the scholarly literature in its vast field, supplemented by printed sources. It is clearly the victim of the need for a punchy title which it forms by juxtaposing two words. Publishers like this. Given a gnomic main title, you then also need an explanatory subtitle, but it is the main title that sticks in the public mind. Ironically neither title nor subtitle quite sum up this book, which is not really as broad as the subtitle implies yet far more complex and sophisticated than the title suggests. It does not matter that it cannot cover all wars waged by Anglo-Americans, but the conclusions offered at the end of each section often revert to the terrible simplification inherent in the book's title.

It comes with praise from eminent academic historians on the dust cover. In the United Kingdom puffs used to be a specialization of that old puffer Jack Plumb. Now the disease has become epidemic in both the United Kingdom and the United States. It is an attempt by publishers to fix the reviews before the book has been published. They only use unqualified puffs and they secure them

by moral blackmail. You receive a pre-publication copy with a letter asking if you could write something short and positive about it. Because the publisher works off a list of friends supplied by the author you know that a refusal is going to cost you a friendship. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto has rightly complained that flawed books appear festooned in uncritical praise extracted from distinguished scholars. This is a good book, but uncritical praise demeans it. Its great virtue is that it should stimulate any intelligent reader, academic or not, to think critically about its arguments and the nature of warfare in the context of a clash of cultures.

Christopher Coker has recently published *Barbarous Philosophers: Reflections on the Nature of War from Heraclitus to Heisenberg* (2010). As usual, after the gnomic two-word title, Coker's subtitle tells you what the book is about. Central to it is a distinction between war and warfare. The latter is seen as primordial unselfconscious violence, whereas the former is an intellectualized abstract concept. Philosophers can discuss the nature of war, devise and define rules for it, and treat it as an

intellectual concept rooted in the cultural grammars of advanced "civilized" societies. Wayne E. Lee starts by facing up to the basic fact that war between so-called civilized peoples very often slides into sheer atrocity, and then examines the recent tendency among historians to emphasize ethnic or racial demonization as the root of that atrocity. However, Lee rightly feels that it is in many ways better to approach so complex a field through an analysis built out of four categories: capacity, control, calculation, and culture. He then follows his theoretical prologue with one of four case studies: warfare in sixteenth-century Ireland; the seventeenth-century English civil war; native American warfare with white settlers from the earliest English settlements to the early eighteenth century; and finally, in a selection that confirms an implicit teleological structure for his whole analytical edifice, the American War of Independence.

Arguably, even he does not bring out the full complexity of the background to the Kingdom of Ireland, which was an invention of the years 1541-42 and before the accession of King James VI and I in 1603 a pretty notional one. James was the first monarch to really rule all Ireland. For a long time, the Lordship of Ireland was a marcher province of an Anglo-Norman Kingdom of England. The pretender Lambert Simnel had even been crowned "King Edward VI" (of England, of course) in Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin in 1487. Lee's section on Ireland starts with a piece of advice to Henry VIII from his Irish administration in 1540, telling him that it was impractical to even think of conquering all Ireland and that he should hit open rebellion hard but otherwise be grateful for acquiescence. Medieval attempts at a system of social apartheid between Gaelic and English society had long been abandoned by the sixteenth century. The ruling elites, Anglo-Norman and Old English, intermarried extensively and cultural ambiguity and bilingualism were rampant. The conveniently simplifying idea that "the English" in the Elizabethan era denounced "the Irish" who opposed them as savage barbarians and then carried this approach across the Atlantic to apply it to native Americans was originally floated by David Beers Quinn and given wider currency in *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic and America, 1480-1650* (1979), a tribute to Quinn edited by K. R. Andrews, N. P. Canny, and P. E. H. Hair. In practice, the situation in Ireland was, as Lee shows, far more complex. Queen Elizabeth began her reign with virtually everyone who mattered in Ireland on her side, and ended it with virtually everyone alienated except for the recent New English immigrants, themselves the source of much mis-

chief. "Gloriana" faced serious problems in an Ireland of multiple cultures and a basic religious divide policed by churches that regarded the people on the other side as just a mistake about which God was very angry, but she proved a mean, irresponsible, gullible, and generally incompetent ruler in Ireland. Lee brings out brilliantly the intricate mess she left behind her.

He then ignores his own sophisticated analysis in a conclusion that reverts to an alarming degree to literary sources and concludes that the English had internalized the idea of the Irish as Catholic barbarians, which explains why they waged oblitative war there in both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Why then was Mountjoy, the fine general Elizabeth did not deserve who saved her cause from total collapse by a narrow margin at the end, willing to grant the great Tyrone and eventually the allied house of Tyrconnell notably generous peace terms that left Tyrone in some ways more powerful in Ulster than before the Nine Years' War? Yes, Mountjoy had waged a campaign of devastation in Ulster, but faced with a really clever opponent who avoided battle and hoped to wear him out, that was the only way to win a war he had to win. He was more than friendly with his great and culturally ambiguous opponent once peace broke out. The new King James was a Scot who did not share English prejudices. Indeed, when Mountjoy came to England to pay court to James, in company with Tyrone, the king issued a royal decree forbidding his subjects to offer abuse to the Earl of Tyrone. James was genuinely baffled by the 1607 September flight of the two Ulster earls, which was an act of extraordinary social irresponsibility toward the Gaelic people of Ulster. One of the best features of King James was that his court culture rewarded those who cultivated social, religious, political, and sexual ambiguity. Ambiguity is a great virtue but hard on historians who write books with two-word titles. A second edition of this book (and it is worth it) needs to devote a chapter to why the peace that closed the Nine Years' War did not work out as expected and why the benign King James could not deal with Tyrone, as he would have preferred, on the intimate terms he extended in Scotland to a very similar Catholic Gaelic regional prince, like the Earl of Huntly, chief of Clan Gordon.

One reason for the strangely inconsistent conclusion to the Irish section is that Lee wants to have a sharp contrast with his second section on the English Civil War. Barbarous war has to be followed by brothers' war. This is another well-worn theme covered in Richard Lawrence Ollard's *This War without an Enemy: A History of the English Civil Wars* (1976, reprinted 1989). However, we now

grasp that civil war broke out in England because many Englishmen could not trust their king with the army that he would have needed to deal with crises in his other two kingdoms. Internal English struggles were an integral part of the crisis of a multiple monarchy which led to the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. Basically the English ruling elites were crucified on the cross of the appalling personal kingship of Charles I, a monarch unfit for purpose who alienated the aristocracies of not one but three kingdoms. There was plenty of savagery in the local fighting in England, especially across the Catholic-Protestant divide, but arguably what kept the killing in hand was less various forms of aristocratic culture (Montrose, from a very similar background inflicted unspeakable violence on his native Scotland) and more the nature of the war. Apart from the king, nobody wanted it, so men complained that they were being forced unwillingly into combat. The only reason Charles could fight was that, helped by Clarendon, he managed to form a king's party that regarded him as the lesser of two evils, which meant that winning upper-class hearts and minds was crucial. The Clubmen, whom Lee sees as representing a culture of localism as they tried to keep both armies out of their counties, also reflect the extreme detachment of the lower orders in a war that most of their betters would have preferred not to be fighting. It was not so much a brother's war as a case of a war almost nobody really wanted.

From a slightly myopic stress on England, Lee moves to his third section, which is on settler-Indian conflict in North America. Here his contrapuntal structure demands war against barbarians, but that is rather taken for granted in a splendid section devoted mainly to the Native Americans's approach to warfare, which stresses the variety basic to the thousands of different indigenous groups and the prevalence of a passion for blood revenge to some extent compensated for by elaborate conciliation or balancing procedures, complete with peace chiefs (some female) to balance war chiefs. Europeans and Indians simply looked at warfare through the lenses of incompatible cultures, though one must recall that a minority of Europeans consciously chose to embrace an indigenous culture they preferred to their own. Lee does point out that indigenous peoples had no objection to large-scale killing of enemies. They simply found it difficult to achieve this unless they surprised their foes and caught them off guard. The massacre of the Pequots in 1637 by English settlers has been a much-cherished source of retrospective guilt for American historians, but the protests of the Narragansett and Mohegan allies of the colonists

in the action probably reflected chagrin over the total absence of captives who could be adopted, tortured to death, or enslaved. Native Americans had their own cultures of lethality, and though it was difficult for English settlers to grasp these, they were underpinned by logic. For example, if you were forced to retreat rapidly after a long-distance raid and prisoners slowed you down, you killed them. Europeans fought differently, so the need for this procedure seldom arose (though Henry V used it at Agincourt). It is disconcerting to find yet again that the conclusion to this section is as conventional as the main body of the text is innovative and sophisticated. It falls back again on stereotypes of barbarism justifying murderous settler aggression. Yet Karen Ordahl Kupperman, one of the supporting voices on the dust jacket, pointed out in *Settling with the Indian: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640s* (1980) that initially Englishmen did not deprecate all Indians. They instantly saw Powhattan (whom King James expected to become his vassal king) as a gentleman—he did no manual work and was dignified, so it was obvious!

Inevitably, the American War of Independence is the psychological as well as the physical culmination of this book. The argument advanced is that this was essentially a brother's war fought, albeit with appalling exceptions at the local level, with self-conscious restraint on the part of George Washington on the American side and by commanders like the Howe brothers on the British side. The impact of Enlightenment ideas is seen as reinforcing such values as discipline and moderation, both seen as conducive to a much-desired postwar reconciliation. Certainly, the Patriot party in America found it both satisfying and hugely profitable to depict the war as fratricidal. Being mostly radical Country Whig in political ideology, they had all the self-righteousness of that tradition, and assumed originally that they had (because they deserved it) massive support among right-thinking Englishmen. Though indignant to discover that they had nothing of the sort, it still paid them, after they easily seized control of colonial governments, to try to undermine the will of the Westminster government to fight by a propaganda that depicted themselves as brothers in liberty reluctantly driven into rebellion by that notorious tyrant George III, and anxious for a reconciliation, which would be facilitated, of course, by further extensive concessions by Westminster. Lee contrasts this war of brothers with the savage behavior of American troops in General John Sullivan's massive strike against the Crown's Iroquois allies in 1779.

Washington's Continentals could show restraint in

victory. George III was reluctant to wage unrestrained warfare on people he regarded as subjects. The Howe brothers, both strong Whigs, repeatedly pulled their punches at a critical stage in the war, to the point of defying clear orders, because they hoped to score a political triumph by securing the elusive reconciliation. It was all utterly delusional. American Whigs had never offered any positive and realistic proposals to deal with the endless prewar crisis. During the war, they developed a virulently anti-British political culture that remained a significant factor deep into the twentieth century. The vital partisan war between Loyalists and Patriots was vicious on both sides, and the battle of King's Mountain, where the Crown commander was probably the only non-American present, was fought with notable savagery. By concealing their Anglophobia and talking endlessly of reconciliation, American delegates to the peace talks secured an outrageously favorable settlement from Shelburne. It basely betrayed both Loyalists and Indians and encouraged future American demands. It remains the only peace treaty ever formally (and rightly) denounced by the Westminster House of Commons as shameful.

Lee sketchily extends his analysis to the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian one, which is at least

a war too far, especially given the new problems posed by conscription and systematic state mobilization of mass opinion. His book remains a fascinating demonstration of how much historians miss by knowing very little about the actual conduct of warfare. Politically correct rhetoric about a war often bears little relation to the actual warfare. When in 1901 William Howard Taft urged Americans to think of Filipinos as little brown brothers (an enlightened view at the time), the Marine Corps, busy fighting Filipino insurgents, composed a ditty that says "he may be a brother of Big Bill Taft, but he ain't no pal of mine." It is difficult to be politically correct about someone who is trying to kill you. It is interesting that this book cannot quite face up to the radical implications of its own methodology. It needs to start with opportunity, as well as with capacity, control, calculation, and culture. Lee's final position is that culture is often a decisive influence. What his main text demonstrates, often brilliantly, is more frequently just the opposite: a favorable conjuncture of the other factors usually encourages the adoption or generation of a cultural stance that justifies and facilitates taking advantage of a perceived opportunity. Lee has made a splendid start. Let us hope that he and others continue with a closer examination of the twisted, treacherous links between the realities of warfare and the theories of war.

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