

# THE *Current*

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## UCSB Historian Wins Bancroft Book Prize

Pekka Hämäläinen, associate professor of history at UC Santa Barbara, has won the coveted Bancroft Prize for his book "The Comanche Empire" (Yale University Press, 2008). He is one of three scholars to receive 2009 awards. The others are Thomas G. Andrews, assistant professor of history at the University of Colorado, Denver; and Drew Gilpin Faust, the president of Harvard University and the Lincoln Professor of History in Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

The Bancroft Prize, one of the highest honors in the field of history, is presented annually by Columbia University. The prize was established in 1948 with a bequest from Frederic Bancroft, the historian, author, and librarian of the State Department. Its purpose is to provide steady development of library resources, support instruction and research in American history and diplomacy, and to recognize exceptional books in the field. American history includes all of the Americas -- North, Central, and South -- although the award is confined to works originally written in English or of which English translations have been published. The award includes a gift of \$10,000.

In "The Comanche Empire," which was published in association with The William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies at Southern Methodist University, Hämäläinen uncovers the lost story of the Comanche Indians, who built a powerful empire that dominated the fiercely contested lands of the American Southwest, the southern Great Plains, and northern Mexico. The empire eclipsed its various

European rivals in military prowess, political prestige, economic power, commercial reach, and cultural influence.

Hämäläinen presents two intertwined stories in the book. The first examines cross-cultural relations in the region from the perspective of the Comanches, exploring how this nation rose to dominance and constantly reinvented itself in order to preserve and expand its reach. The second looks at the events from the perspective of the Spaniards, Mexicans, Apaches, and others who variously competed and cooperated with the Comanches, but ultimately lost out in the Comanche-controlled world. Both stories are woven into a single narrative thread within the context of the broader framework of Europe's overseas expansion.

"Pekka dazzled us with the depth, originality and interpretive power of his research from his first visit to campus," History Department Chair Kenneth Mouré said of Hämäläinen, who is also co-chair of the advisory committee for the American Indian and Indigenous Studies minor at UCSB.

"We are delighted to have him as a colleague, and to celebrate this major recognition of the quality and importance of his work."

Said David Marshall, executive dean of the College of Letters and Science: "Pekka Hämäläinen's book is a major piece of scholarship, exhaustive in its research and provocative and original in its argument. It will change the way that we understand the history not only of the Comanches but also of the European engagement with indigenous cultures in America. Students in the history department and in our American Indian and Indigenous Studies minor are fortunate to have the opportunity to study with Professor Hämäläinen."

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The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we

draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.