



BROWSE



Making the American Berdache: Choice or Constraint?

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Abstract

Romantic scholars have long assumed that native Americans entered the status of berdache by their own choice. Yet as this article shows, with the exception of the American Plains nations, those who assumed that status across the Western Hemisphere were infants or young children. Repeatedly, parents or communities forced this life-choice upon the young, mainly for purposes of familial or communal demographic balance. The present article reviews the evidence for those origins: beginning with the mostly male berdaches encountered by the Hispanic conquerors, continuing with the evidence from the northern extremes of the hemisphere, where Inuit berdaches were most often girls, and ending with the berdaches of the present-day United States where, again, male berdaches predominated. An analysis of the Plains berdaches shows that while they entered that status in adolescence rather than in childhood, they also were under constraint...of uniform visions staged and interpreted by elders.



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