



War Before Civilization

By Lawrence H. Keeley

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The myth of the peace-loving "noble savage" is persistent and pernicious. Indeed, for the last fifty years, most popular and scholarly works have agreed that prehistoric warfare was rare, harmless, unimportant, and, like smallpox, a disease of civilized societies alone. Prehistoric warfare, according to this view, was little more than a ritualized game, where casualties were limited and the effects of aggression relatively mild. Lawrence Keeley's groundbreaking *War Before Civilization* offers a devastating rebuttal to such comfortable myths and debunks the notion that warfare was introduced to primitive societies through contact with civilization (an idea he denounces as "the pacification of the past").

Building on much fascinating archeological and historical research and offering an astute comparison of warfare in civilized and prehistoric societies, from modern European states to the Plains Indians of North America, *War Before Civilization* convincingly demonstrates that prehistoric warfare was in fact more deadly, more frequent, and more ruthless than modern war. To support this point, Keeley provides a wide-ranging look at warfare and brutality in the prehistoric world. He reveals, for instance, that prehistorical tactics favoring raids and ambushes, as opposed to formal battles, often yielded a high death-rate; that adult males falling into the hands of their enemies were almost universally killed; and that surprise raids seldom spared even women and children. Keeley cites evidence of ancient massacres in many areas of the world, including the discovery in South Dakota of a prehistoric mass grave containing the remains of over 500 scalped and mutilated men, women, and children (a slaughter that took place a century and a half before the arrival of Columbus). In addition, Keeley surveys the prevalence of looting, destruction, and trophy-taking in all kinds of warfare and again finds little moral distinction between ancient warriors and civilized armies. Finally, and perhaps most controversially, he examines the evidence of cannibalism among some preliterate peoples.

Keeley is a seasoned writer and his book is packed with vivid, eye-opening details (for instance, that the homicide rate of prehistoric Illinois villagers may have exceeded that of the modern United States by some 70 times). But he also goes beyond grisly facts to address the larger moral and philosophical issues raised by his work. What are the causes of war? Are human beings inherently violent? How can we ensure peace in our own time? Challenging some of our most dearly held beliefs, Keeley's conclusions are bound to stir controversy.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Throughout much of this century the notion has been gaining ground, bolstered by genocide and Holocaust, that modern warfare is more barbaric than war has ever been. Alongside this view has grown a romantic impression that primitive cultures were, and are, more peaceful. Lawrence Keeley, an anthropologist at the University of Illinois, aims to dispel this inversion of the connotations of "civilization." He cites the historical evidence that humans have always been just as bloodthirsty as they are today, and that indeed in the days when death was less clinical it was often nastier. War, it seems, has always been with us.

Review

"The evidence that Mr. Keeley marshals is vivid, varied, and often complex."--*The New York Times Book Review*

"[Keeley] skillfully shows that pre-state peoples fought as cleverly and cruelly as we moderns, and for the same ostensibly 'rational' reasons. The 'primitives' were not innocent, nor are we moderns uniquely depraved."--*Lingua Franca*

Review

"The evidence that Mr. Keeley marshals is vivid, varied, and often complex."--*The New York Times Book Review*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Frederick Warren:

This War Before Civilization tend to be reliable for you who want to certainly be a successful person, why. The explanation of this War Before Civilization can be one of the great books you must have is usually giving you more than just simple examining food but feed you with information that might be will shock your previous knowledge. This book is handy, you can bring it all over the place and whenever your conditions at e-book and printed ones. Beside that this War Before Civilization forcing you to have an enormous of experience like rich vocabulary, giving you demo of critical thinking that we realize it useful in your day action. So , let's have it and revel in reading.

James Smith:

The reserve with title War Before Civilization includes a lot of information that you can discover it. You can get a lot of help after read this book. This kind of book exist new information the information that exist in this e-book represented the condition of the world at this point. That is important to yo7u to learn how the improvement of the world. That book will bring you inside new era of the internationalization. You can read

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Leslie Martin:

People live in this new day of lifestyle always try and and must have the time or they will get lots of stress from both daily life and work. So , when we ask do people have spare time, we will say absolutely without a doubt. People is human not just a robot. Then we inquire again, what kind of activity are you experiencing when the spare time coming to an individual of course your answer will unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading publications. It can be your alternative within spending your spare time, the particular book you have read will be War Before Civilization.

Margarett Lee:

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