



## Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis

By Eric R. Wolf

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With the originality and energy that have marked his earlier works, Eric Wolf now explores the historical relationship of ideas, power, and culture. Responding to anthropology's long reliance on a concept of culture that takes little account of power, Wolf argues that power is crucial in shaping the circumstances of cultural production. Responding to social-science notions of ideology that incorporate power but disregard the ways ideas respond to cultural promptings, he demonstrates how power and ideas connect through the medium of culture.

Wolf advances his argument by examining three very different societies, each remarkable for its flamboyant ideological expressions: the Kwakiutl Indians of the Northwest Pacific Coast, the Aztecs of pre-Hispanic Mexico, and National Socialist Germany. Tracing the history of each case, he shows how these societies faced tensions posed by ecological, social, political, or psychological crises, prompting ideological responses that drew on distinctive, historically rooted cultural understandings. In each case study, Wolf analyzes how the regnant ideology intertwines with power around the pivotal relationships that govern social labor. Anyone interested in the history of anthropology or in how the social sciences make comparisons will want to join Wolf in *Envisioning Power*.

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### Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Wolf (anthropology, emeritus, CUNY) challenges tradition in the field of anthropology in this book by emphasizing theory over the experiences of a specific community. He examines the role of power in the development of culture by focusing on three unrelated groups: the Kwakiutl of British Columbia, a chiefdom; the Aztecs of 15th- and 16th-century Mexico, an early state; and Nationalist Socialist Germany, a modern state heavily influenced by fascism. The individual case studies are excellent, but the work suffers when Wolf tries to compare and contrast unrelated groups in order to draw narrow conclusions. Wolf's methodology is also questionable?this type of study allows the researcher to select groups that fit neatly into a thesis while avoiding ones that would be problematic. Recommended for specialized collections in academic libraries.?John Burch, Hagan Memorial Lib., Williamsburg, KY  
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From the Inside Flap

"The book reconceptualizes power and explores factors that allow it to take on extreme forms. The three case studies are simply superb, each the most profound and most interesting I have seen on each of these examples of power in excess."—Robert B. Edgerton, author of *Rules, Exceptions, and Social Order*

"One of anthropology's master thinkers offers a sustained, empirically grounded meditation on questions that have concerned him through a long career: how, when, and why absolutizing ideas and organized power converge to cause human suffering. Our thinking about . . . power mongers . . . will never be the same." —Charles Tilly, author of *Durable Inequality*

From the Back Cover

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**Alice Bowers:**

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