



## New Amsterdam History Center's BOOK REVIEW

December 2016

**Daniel K. Richter.** *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001. Pp. xii, 317. Illustrated. Paperback (2003). Price: \$27.00.

**Andrew Lipman.** *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015. Illustrated. Hardcover. Price: \$38.00. Paperback (2017) \$25.00.

**Cynthia J. Van Zandt.** *Brothers among Nations: The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America,* 1580–1660. Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. xii, 252. Illustrated. Hardcover. Price: \$61.00.

The New Amsterdam History Center on November 3, 2016 sponsored a panel discussion at the headquarters of the Netherland Club, 3 West 51st Street, New York, N.Y., where the speakers were: Daniel K. Richter, Professor of American History and Director of the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, on “The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and the Last Days of New Netherland”; Andrew Lipman, Assistant Professor of American History at Barnard College, Columbia University, on “Munsees, New Netherland, and the Saltwater Frontier”; and Cynthia Van Zandt, Associate Professor of American History at the University of New Hampshire, on “Intersecting Networks: Native Americans, Dutch Officials, and English Regicides.” Copies of the speakers’ related books were available for purchase.

Professor Richter’s *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* is built around a novel point of view for North American colonial studies: instead of seeing from the perspective of the Europeans sailing westward across the Atlantic from “old” Europe to arrive on the shores of the “New” World, he positions himself already located on the shore of a long-settled continent, looking eastward and watching the arrival of the strange newcomers,

and their effect upon the Native Peoples already established here. This shift of point of view brings about a revolution in one's approach to understanding of colonial history, and particularly in the interpretation of some of the stereotyped tales that have long formed a staple of the American popular consciousness.

To begin with, the reader is brought to realize that this was not so much a "new" world, as an old one with its own long history, including, for example, such places as Cahokia (near present-day St. Louis), a 12th-century city of "more than twenty thousand people" (p. 3) with temples and plazas and extensive communications networks. A major thesis of Richter's study is that the "emergence of an aggressively expansionist Euro-American United States from what used to be the Indian country of eastern North America is a problem to be explained, not an inevitable process to be traced from the first planting of English seeds on Atlantic shores to their flowering in the trans-Mississippi west" (pp. 7–8).

In his explorations of this "problem" Richter organizes his approach in chronological segments, starting with the 1500s. The discussion is made especially vivid by his insertion of semi-fictional narratives composed from the Indian point of view of such events as the arrival of de Soto in Florida in 1539, and his violent campaign into the interior of the country. Paired with this is a similar narrative account of the landing in Canada of Cartier at about the same time. By means of these stories Richter attempts to fill the gap in our source materials, which lack written accounts of events from the Indian point of view. His tactic is appropriate because it is through oral transmission of stories that the Native American experience was preserved and transmitted in various forms.

In a later chapter Richter similarly discusses, for example, the interactions of the English settlers in Virginia with the Algonquian Pocahontas as imagined from her perspective, as well as the story of the Mohawk Iroquois Tekawitha and that of the New England Algonquian leader known as King Philip. In Richter's book the traditional two-dimensional interpretations of these biographies are replaced by accounts that acknowledge the complexities of cultural interaction that were taking place from both sides.

For the eighteenth century, his interpretation emphasizes economic relations between Native Americans and Europeans, together with their joint participation in conflicts of truly global scope, such as the French and Indian War, or Seven Years' War, of 1754–1763. Richter's analysis proceeds through the impact of the American Revolution to conclude with the violent displacements of the Jacksonian period, when whole populations of Native Americans were forcibly uprooted from their Eastern homelands and removed to locations in the American West.

Andrew Lipman in *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* adopts a similar Indian perspective toward colonial events. His avowed aim is to present a fresh examination of "how coastal Algonquians from the Hudson River to Cape Cod faced the colonial invasion in the seventeenth century." He explores this concept by considering the region of the ocean shore—the "Saltwater Frontier" of the title, rather than the land mass—as a fruitful context of habitation, transportation, and communication between peoples.

One of his overriding concepts is that there are important parallels between then and now: the Native People, the English, and the Dutch who dwelt along the northeastern Atlantic coast also “lived in an age of environmental crises, exploitive global trade, far-reaching wars, and frightening pandemics” (p. xi).

After a discussion of the geographical and social features along the Atlantic shore, and of the “watercraft” and “watermen” who used it, Lipman gives a chronological presentation divided into four main portions. The chapter covering 1600–1633 deals with the early contacts and first settlements along the shore, when the initial impacts—and disruptions—of colonization were first making themselves felt among the Indians. He points out that the Dutch and the English had quite different strategies in their dealings with the Native People they encountered. Whereas the Native Peoples’ relationships with the Dutch were mainly focused upon trade, the local Indian leaders “gradually came to see the English intruders as valuable and potent partners” for their diplomatic and military encounters with other groups (p. 86).

However in the next period, 1634–1646, violent bloody clashes arose, as in Kieft’s War in the Hudson Valley region of New Netherland, and in the Pequot War on the Connecticut shore of New England. Following these conflicts, the period 1647–1674 saw a significant increase in the number of English and Dutch settlements along the coast. At the same time, the colonies felt the impact of war in Europe between the English and the Dutch, when New Netherland was seized by the British in 1664, only to change hands briefly eleven years later, and be almost immediately retaken to bring a permanent end to Dutch rule on the North American continent.

The concluding section, titled “Sea Changes, 1675–1750” includes King Philip’s War, with its vicious battle in the swamps of the Atlantic shore on December 19, 1675, ending in the killing and enslavement of “hundreds of people who had been hiding within” the Indian fort (p. 211). Captured Native individuals were sold as slave laborers and shipped to such various destinations as “Bermuda, Jamaica, Barbados, Curaçao, Cádiz, Málaga, Calais, London, and Amsterdam”—and even Tangier (p. 221).

In a brief epilogue, Lipman reminds readers that Indians did not in the course of history simply “melt away” like last winter’s snow or vanish like morning mists, as later American writers sometimes averred. Rather, their societies blended with others and “became increasingly multiracial, multidenominational, and mobile.” In Lipman’s view, the Native People were “historical players who ranged far beyond their home continent and outside the contained, grounded field of American borderlands. Telling the stories of saltwater frontiers can uncover the many unexpected ways in which Native history could be both global and modern” (p. 246).

The distinctive feature of Cynthia J. Van Zandt’s *Brothers among Nations: The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America 1580–1660* is her highlighting of alliances and fruitful relationships between people of different cultural backgrounds in early America. This is certainly a refreshing change of emphasis from the familiar accounts of conflict and bitter warfare. She introduces her subject via a consideration of maps and map-making in the period. The

relevance of this approach is that maps were based on the experience of many different people with different purposes in mind—navigators, traders, explorers, military personnel—and the combined results of their contributions showed a varied world of different cultures and inhabitants, filled with potential alliances as well as with potential clashes of interest.

Van Zandt explores five kinds of meaningful alliance in different regions, and among members of different cultural groups, as with the Virginia family of Tsenaccommacah, or—as she is better known in European/American-based sources—Pocahontas. Her story, seen in light of her complex relationships with her own people and with other Native Peoples in the region, takes on an entirely new aspect and becomes more fascinating and admirable than ever. When she took on an English identity and adopted Christianity, she was not, from this point of view, abandoning her Powhatan identity, but adding a new dimension onto it. In London Pocahontas reminded John Smith “that she was now in the same position in Smith’s country” that he had been in while in Virginia; she “explicitly laid out their kinship relation and insisted that it carried lifelong obligations” (p. 84).

Also discussed by Van Zandt is Isaac Allerton, a Mayflower passenger and member of the Plymouth Plantation settlement, from which he was later banished as a result of conflicts with William Bradford and others, on account of his active involvement in intercultural alliances—behavior that Bradford did not approve of. She also reviews the career of William Claiborne, a Chesapeake Bay colonist active in the fur trade and in forming important alliances with Native Peoples.

Of particular interest from the point of view of the New Amsterdam History Center is a section of Van Zandt’s study dealing with the African community in Manhattan and with conditions of slavery in New Netherland. The topic is difficult to discuss because available information about it is scarce, and such details as can be found are scattered in court records and church records and similar documents. In dealing with these materials, a good deal of interpretation is necessary in order to understand the cultural context. Van Zandt carefully constructs case histories of certain individuals, such as the alleged murderers of a West India Company slave named Jan Premero who was found beaten to death on January 6, 1641 (p. 149). Nine slaves were charged with the murder and confessed to it: Cleijn Antonio, Paulo d’Angola, Gracia d’Angola, Jan de Fort Orange, Manuel de Gerrit de Reus, Antonij Portugees, Manuel Minuit, Simon Congo, and Manuel de Groote. One notes that several of the names point to origins in the Central African territories of Congo or Angola, a region of Portuguese settlement. Because it was impossible to determine who exactly had delivered the fatal blow, the nine were compelled to draw lots to decide which one of them would suffer the death penalty. By this means Manuel de Gerrit de Reus was designated to hang. But at the execution the ropes broke and the assembled crowd of witnesses cried out for mercy, which was customarily granted in such cases on the basis “that God had acted” in the matter (p. 150). For Van Zandt this episode reveals the internal alliances and strategies used by members of the slave community to protect themselves. Interestingly the officials

were never able to discover why the men had beaten Premero. The slaves were successful in keeping this entirely among themselves as a private affair within the African community.

In another chapter, Van Zandt discusses how the Susquehannock Indians maintained intergroup alliances with other Indian nations and with European settlements. However, by the 1670s—as she explains in her epilogue—conditions in the colonies had fundamentally changed on account of such factors as the increase in the number of European colonists, and the reduction of the Native population by epidemics and displacement. As a result there were fewer opportunities for the kinds of intercultural alliances that had been available and indeed necessary in the days when the colonies were founded.

All three of these books include discussion of New Netherland and neighboring colonies, but what is distinctive in their treatment of colonial history is that they focus on the active role of non-Europeans in the colonial experience, especially various nations of the Native Peoples, and also, in Van Zandt's discussion, the community of Africans in New Amsterdam. The settlement of the colonies, seen in this way, was not simply a matter of the arrival of the Europeans but a complex story of mutual interaction and intercultural contribution.

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Francis J. Sypher

December 31, 2016

For the website of the New Amsterdam History Center