



Indians and Race in Early America: A Review Essay

Joshua Piker
University of Oklahoma

Abstract

This article explores the contours of a newly vibrant literature on American Indians and race in early America by reviewing the conclusions offered in ten books published between 2001 and 2004. It focuses on three issues: the Euro-American move toward racializing Indians; the Native Americans' own perspectives on difference and race; and the degree to which the beliefs of Native and Euro-Americans emerged as a consequence of cross-cultural conversations.

Traditionally, the discussion of race in early America has relied upon a series of interlinked dichotomies: race/ethnicity, biology/culture, inherent/learned, slave/free, and, most centrally, black/white. Legacies of these binaries remain with us today, primarily in our teaching but also, to some extent, in our research. Even as several generations' worth of scholarship has called into question the assumptions underlying these oppositions, and even as the deconstructionist assault has undermined the legitimacy of dichotomous constructions more generally, we continue to find it difficult to escape the dead hand of past structures and inherited frameworks. Nowhere has this been more clear than in the halting and incomplete incorporation of Native American peoples and perspectives into our conversation about race in early America. As recently as 1997, Joyce Chaplin could baldly but accurately assert that "Indians have been neglected in interpretations of American racism"; two years later, Kathleen Brown could suggest "there may be an interesting history of early modern racial formation yet to be written about the Englishman and the Indian."¹ Their comments strongly suggest that the periodic invocation of "red, white, and black" and the appearance of an occasional essay focused on Natives notwithstanding, the literature on race in early America simply had little room for Indians as recently as the late 1990s.

The situation has changed dramatically in the last few years. Enough significant scholarship had emerged by 2003 that Chaplin – who only a half dozen years earlier had lamented scholars' neglect of Indians – could assert that "the most recent research on early America looks at both Native Americans and captured Africans"; she went on to describe works

on Native American ethnohistory and the colonists' attitudes toward Native peoples as "standard for early Americanists interested in race." This article explores the contours of this newly vibrant literature by reviewing the conclusions offered in ten books published between 2001 and 2004.² The list is not meant to be exhaustive – other excellent works could have been included – and is deliberately eclectic, embracing works by historians explicitly focused on Natives and race, as well as books whose subject matter touches only glancingly on these topics and whose authors include not just historians but also a sociologist, an anthropologist, and an MD/PhD. To some extent, in fact, the changes in the sub-field are most visible on its margins, where scholars who might once have neglected race now feel obligated to address the subject. I am particularly interested in the ways the authors discussed below have addressed three issues: the Euro-American move toward racializing Indians; the Native Americans' own perspectives on difference and race; and the degree to which the beliefs of Native and Euro-Americans emerged as a consequence of cross-cultural conversations. My hope is that a review of this sort will encourage scholars to incorporate Native peoples into their narratives of race in early America. Doing so, these books demonstrate, opens up new perspectives on familiar issues, offers new subjects for debate, presents new categories of meaning and significance, and suggests new connections between previously discrete categories. The end result, in other words, will most certainly not be the simple addition of "red" highlights to a "black" and "white" world.

When earlier generations of historians discussed Indians and race in early America, they tended to focus on European perspectives on Indians. Three books under review here can safely be said to be additions to this scholarly lineage. Of these, Chaplin's *Subject Matter* is the most challenging and ambitious. Her project is to examine "the way in which contemporary European theories about nature influenced English settlers' relations with Indians" (p. 8), a story which emerges in three overlapping stages: "Approaching America, 1550–1585," "Invading America, 1585–1660," and "Conquering America, 1640–1676." She argues that the English did not – contrary to the standard narrative – move from an early denigration of Indian technology to a later emphasis on the inferiority of Indian bodies. Quite the opposite, in fact. English discussion of "bodily differentiation" (p. 9) emerged surprisingly early on, as did an English self-consciousness regarding their own technological limitations. Those explorers who were "approaching America" posited "that some bodily differences might be inherited" (p. 41), although these ideas only hardened into a "racial idiom" (which she distinguishes from the nineteenth-century's "coherent racial ideology" (p. 160)) once the process of "invading America" was well under way. It was not, however, until the colonists began "conquering America" that the English, newly confident of their ability to thrive in America's natural world, began to denigrate Native scientific and technical abilities. And once technical inferiority combined

with the increasingly obvious signs of Native physical limitations (including, especially, their rapidly shrinking population), English thinkers began confidently insisting on the existence of fundamental differences between themselves and Indians.

Chaplin develops this argument by focusing on English views of science, the human body and nature, topics which no previous historian of race in early America has mined so thoroughly or effectively. It is this impressive grounding in early modern English ideology – rather than the dating of an emerging “racial idiom” – that represents this book’s signal contribution. After all, Jill Lepore has already suggested that New England’s colonists were exhibiting “a sense of racial identity,” if not a full-blown racial ideology, vis-à-vis Indians by the late 1670s.³ Chaplin’s book could be read as pushing this “racialization of native bodies” (p. 9) back a generation or so, a small but worthwhile correction. More important, however, is the accumulation of detail about English beliefs and what these details tell us about Indians and race in early America. From the early English sense of Indian physical inferiority to the later colonial belief that Indian bodies were “artificial” (p. 244); from the first English comparison between English and Native traditions of archery to the subsequent colonial belief that Indian material culture consisted primarily of curiosities and collectibles; from the initial English interpretation of Native American susceptibility to epidemics to the eventual English effort to describe themselves as America’s true natives – in these ways and more, Chaplin shows that “the colonial propensity to move toward racial distinctions was striking” (p. 193). Early English racial – if not yet racist – thought emerges here out of the interplay of ideologies about and experiences with North America’s Native peoples and their world. Chaplin does not claim Africans play no part in this process; in fact, she specifically labels them “a special case” (p. 141). That said, however, Chaplin’s book demonstrates that our understanding of emerging English notions of race are subject to revisions large and small when the issue at hand becomes European–Native American, not European–African, relations.

David Jones’s *Rationalizing Epidemics* shares Chaplin’s focus on Euro-American views of Indians and her appreciation for the role Indian mortality in the face of European diseases played in shaping the newcomers’ views of and relations with Native Americans. Jones is concerned with how Euro-Americans understood the “health disparities” (p. 2) between themselves and Native peoples, a subject entirely in keeping with his training as an MD (psychiatry)/PhD (history of science). He describes diseases as “negotiated social phenomena” (p. 5), and argues persuasively that disparities in health “were produced by social forces, interpreted through social biases, and used to perpetuate social advantage” (p. 7). Euro-American responses to Native American mortality ranged from exploitation to humanitarian intervention, but even apparently transparent actions were shot through with surprising contradictions and ambiguities. The end results,

though, are unambiguous: health disparities persist into the modern day, even as the diseases in question shift from smallpox to diabetes and alcoholism. This fact “provides a powerful argument against the belief that each disparity reflected an inherent susceptibility of American Indian populations” and points, instead, to “disparities in wealth and power” (p. 20). Jones develops these ideas over the course of four case studies that span the period from initial English colonization through to the efforts to improve Navajo health in the 1950s and 1960s. Of these cases, only one is clearly “early American”: seventeenth-century New England’s epidemics. Jones argues that New England’s colonists arrived with a providential narrative of disease – it was God’s way of clearing the land – but that this was quickly destabilized by their experiences and, in particular, by a growing sense that Indians were part of a “common humanity” (p. 35). Indian bodies and European bodies, they came to recognize, “shared the same vulnerabilities” (p. 39). It was only later in the seventeenth century, as the colonial population continued to rise while Native numbers continued to fall, that New England’s colonists returned to providence as the root cause of the health disparity. More naturalistic explanations persisted to some extent, but colonists increasingly emphasized that “providence was manifested through natural processes” (pp. 48–9). In the end, colonists convinced themselves that there was little they could do to help the Indians, who were not, evidently, meant to be part of their society.

Jones’s book does not, then, center on Indians and race in early America. *Rationalizing Epidemics*, however, belongs in this review because, while race is not the focus, Jones does address Euro-American racial thought, offering a different reading than Chaplin’s. For Jones, “[r]acial definitions . . . did not consolidate until the nineteenth century, and even then . . . observers continued to downplay ideas of inherent difference” (p. 39). Thus, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Jones shows Euro-Americans privileging human agency, not heredity. They sought to control smallpox via inoculation and vaccination while simultaneously reforming Indian cultures so as to eliminate the behaviors assumed to increase Indian vulnerability. Heredity does not figure prominently in Jones’s discussion until he considers mid- to late nineteenth-century Euro-American perspectives on the Lakota, and even here he quotes observers who “emphasized the synergy of bad environment and bad behavior” (p. 133). Jones, in other words, argues for three things: a “hardening” à la Chaplin “of English attitudes towards American Indians” (p. 62) in the late seventeenth century; an extraordinarily long period when these proto-racist beliefs coexisted with competing narratives of difference; and a late-emerging racism that continued to make room for other explanations for Indian-European health disparities. This long-lasting ideological fluidity is something early Americanists would do well to keep in mind.

Unlike *Rationalizing Epidemics*, William Pencak and Daniel Richter’s *Friends and Enemies* promises an investigation of “racial construction” in

its subtitle. In the end, only a third of the book is explicitly devoted to the issue. Nevertheless, this collection of essays is one of a number of recent studies – in Pennsylvania alone, see works by James Merrell (who contributes an “Afterword” to this volume) and Jane Merritt⁴ – that demonstrate how racial thought evolved out of everyday life, out of local worlds in which relatively fluid and at times amiable ties gave way to more restricted relations and deadly ideologies. This book might be thought of as an explication of the lived history of early American racial thought. It begins with a fine essay by Richter and Pencak, who argue that the connection between two canonical events in Pennsylvania’s colonial history – the apparent harmony of William Penn’s 1682 treaty with the Delawares and the all-too-real brutality of the 1763 Paxton Boys’ massacre of the Conestogas – must be understood and that “the eras of peace and war shared much in common” (p. xvii). The book itself has three roughly chronological sections. “Peoples in Conversation” explores early efforts by Native Americans and Euro-Americans to understand each other, while “Fragile Structures of Coexistence” charts the ways in which later generations seized the possibilities for peaceful (if often tense) relations. The eight essays in these two sections are uniformly well written and interesting; several of them – including John Smolenski on the problem of frontier justice and James Spady on Penn’s early Indian relations – are truly excellent. Each contributes to our understanding of the context out of which race emerged in Pennsylvania.

Section III, “Toward a White Pennsylvania,” shows the end result of decades of conversation and coexistence. The five essays demonstrate, in the editors’ words, that “the process of racial estrangement was neither simple nor direct” (p. xv). Thus, Steven Harper charts the various ways Delawares dealt with the dispossession that followed the 1737 Walking Purchase, culminating in the recognition that Delawares and colonists would be enemies. David Preston discusses the Seven Years’ War as “a war between neighbors” (p. 181) that stemmed from a combination of ambivalent squatter-Indian relations and the complicated “triangular contest” (p. 182) between squatters, local Indians, and the proprietary government. This is followed by the most suggestive essay of the section: Krista Camenzind’s subtle reading of how the Seven Years’ War led the Paxton Boys to move from symbolic action to racial violence, all in the name of re-establishing their masculinity. Eventually, she argues, any Indian could stand for all Indians, a process of “metonymic substitution” (p. 215) critical to the coalescence of long-term tensions and recent war-related threats to domestic patriarchy. Violence of the sort visited upon the Conestogas “presumed the existence of a uniform and essential Native identity” (p. 216). Paul Moyer examines the phenomenon of Euro-Americans dressing as Indians and attacking other Euro-Americans to uncover the legacy of cross-cultural violence for Revolutionary-era Pennsylvania. Finally, Gregory T. Knouff considers pension requests from Revolutionary

War veterans to demonstrate their “undifferentiated” (p. 238) view of Indians and their reliance on a biologically based Whiteness to define and unite citizens of the United States. These essays, individually and as a whole, go a long way toward justifying Richter and Pencak’s assertion that Pennsylvania’s frontier “may have been the first place on the continent where ‘Reds’ and ‘Whites’ consciously battled each other as racially defined groups” (p. xviii).

But they do not go all the way. For all of its strengths, this collection of essays has one significant weakness: Native American perspectives, present in the first two sections, drop away almost entirely in Section III. *Friends and Enemies*, in other words, tells us little of Native views about the process of “racial construction.” Neither, of course, do Chaplin or Jones, but then they do not claim to. *Friends and Enemies* promises more but does not, in this case, deliver. At several points, the essays mention that Indians were also adopting a racial discourse, but there is little sustained analysis. Camenzind, for example, states that the “construction of an Indian racial identity was not a one-way process,” and refers to a growing sense of pan-Indian identity, but this point appears in an endnote (p. 313, n. 53) and is not pursued. Knouff spends a bit more time on the issue, asserting that the “process of [racial] self-definition was mutually reinforcing” (p. 248) and that Native Americans adopted a “racialist self-identity” (p. 249). Unfortunately, his understanding of this identity is grounded in European concepts, not Native ones, which leads him to interpret Indian efforts to attack Americans while allying with the British as evidence of instability in Native racial categories. More likely, Pennsylvania Indians did not see American frontiersmen and the British as part of the same race, just as their counterparts to the west distinguished between the French and the British and their contemporaries to the south distinguished between “Virginia People” and “White People.”⁵ The lack of a Native perspective on these issues necessarily limits what the book as a whole can achieve.

The failure of *Friends and Enemies* to include Indian points of view on race is regrettable but understandable. The field is just beginning to probe Native understandings of difference, racial or otherwise. Several of the books under review here make substantial contributions to that effort, including Perdue’s *“Mixed Blood” Indians*, a published version of her Lamar Lectures at Mercer University. It is, like many lecture-based books, short (103 pages of text) and suggestive rather than definitive. Perdue’s focus is on the “mixed blood” children of Native women and Euro-American men who lived in the southeast’s Native societies and who have, according to Perdue, all too often been seen as the entering wedge of “civilization.” For Perdue, such a description presumes that culture follows blood and works “to racialize Native societies in ways that are foreign to Native cultural traditions” (p. x). Her book, by contrast, is devoted to the notion that “[i]n our analysis of ‘mixed blood’ Indians, we have underestimated the power and persistence of the culture into which they were born and chose to live” (p. 69). We should, she suggests, be

“looking for the ‘red’” (p. 69), not the “white.” This position is developed in three chapters, the first of which considers the southeastern Indians’ success at incorporating outsiders into their families and communities; Perdue believes that these Euro-Americans, who became the fathers of mixed-race children, chose “to become Indian” in many ways (p. 32). Their children, the subject of chapter 2, grew up with certain advantages because of their fathers’ connections and resources, but they remained fundamentally Native in their outlook. Finally, in chapter 3, Perdue turns to the rising interest among Euro-Americans in racial ideology and their nineteenth-century efforts to define “‘mixed blood’ as a specific category with its own inherent characteristics” (p. 86). Native Americans, by contrast, focused on behavior as the root of identity. For them, Perdue asserts, “mixed blood” meant someone who abandoned traditions, and as long as an individual’s mother was a clan member, they “saw no distinction” (p. 93) between bi-racial and mono-racial peoples.

Perdue, then, is fundamentally uncomfortable with the notion that southern Indians adopted a racial ideology. Since historians have traditionally seen “mixed bloods” as the progenitors – both in their ideologies and in their embodiment of racial difference – of Indian notions of race, her focus on their Indian-ness works to problematize easy assumptions about Native racial consciousness vis-à-vis Euro-Americans. And what of Indian views of Africans? Perdue has written extensively on this subject elsewhere, asserting that, from a Cherokee perspective, “kinship became less crucial in a person’s claim to humanity and freedom than his skin color.”⁶ *Mixed Blood* Indians does not repudiate that claim, asserting, for example, that “racial slavery became entrenched among southern Indians in the nineteenth century” (p. 5); but this issue is neither discussed in any detail nor put into dialogue with her assertions regarding Euro-Americans and their children. In fact, even in the area of Indian-African relations, Perdue’s discussion centers on the ways more traditional notions of “kinship often overrode racial considerations” (pp. 4–5). Such a rhetorical strategy is entirely in keeping with her broader emphasis on cultural continuity and integrity⁷, but it is an open question whether it delivers on her subtitle’s promise to discuss “racial construction in the early south.”

Like Perdue, Circe Sturm is a specialist in Cherokee culture. *Blood Politics* examines “how Cherokee identity is socially and politically constructed and how that process is embedded in ideas of blood, color, and race that permeate discourses of belonging in the United States” (p. 2). In Sturm’s analysis, blood becomes a powerful symbol for Cherokee people, color emerges as a marker of identity, and race becomes a means of exclusion. While Sturm is an anthropologist and her focus is primarily on post-Removal Cherokee experiences, *Blood Politics* will significantly advance historians’ understanding of early Native engagements with race. Using a combination of ethnographic and archival research, she charts how Cherokees “created, internalized, manipulated, and resisted” (p. 8)

systems of racial classification, a process that allowed “racial identity [to become] a rallying point of collective resistance as well as a source of political and social factionalism” (p. 17). The identities she describes are shifting and relational. Thus, in chapter 5, she traces five distinct markers of identity (phenotype, behavior, language, religious knowledge/participation, and community residence/participation) to show that “[m]ost [modern] Cherokees socially identify within a highly nuanced race-culture continuum” (p. 137) in which apparently racial categories are mediated “through local categories of meaning” (p. 137). It takes more than blood, Sturm shows, to be full blood, and race and culture can stand in for each other. The Cherokees, in other words, have “remade racial hegemony in their own image” (p. 205) and, in doing so, they have shown the heterogeneous and deeply contingent nature of racial formation.

Importantly for early Americanists, Sturm finds the roots of these developments in the eighteenth century. Her second chapter – “Blood, Culture, and Race: Cherokee Politics and Identity in the Eighteenth Century” – provides a fine discussion of both the Cherokees’ traditional notions of identity and their colonial-era engagement with Euro-American norms. In Sturm’s narrative, “blood” emerges early on as a critical concept, first as a literal link binding matrilineal clans together but later – and increasingly – as a metaphoric substance that “defined who was and was not a Cherokee” (p. 35). She sees, in other words, an “entanglement of Cherokee kinship ideologies with modern discourses of identity” (p. 29), even as cultural markers of identity such as language and religion continued to be relevant to Cherokees. This development accompanied and reciprocally influenced evolving notions of political identity that, under Euro-American pressure, created a relatively coherent polity out of previously autonomous towns. Blood and politics – the two halves of Sturm’s title – were thus factors in Cherokee identity early on. By the late eighteenth century, “Cherokees were beginning to define themselves in terms of race as well as culture” (p. 43). In doing so, they set themselves off from both African and Euro-Americans, a process that involved “the creative and, at times, subversive” (p. 50) use of Euro-American ideological constructs (race and nation) within a Cherokee-inflected system of values and meanings. Sturm’s material in this chapter, it must be noted, is based on secondary sources, but her ability to connect eighteenth-century Cherokee experiences with her own research on later periods offers historians of early America suggestive ways to conceptualize Natives’ engagement with race. It is productively disconcerting to watch Cherokees make race their own.

Eva Marie Garroutte’s *Real Indians* has a related lesson to teach. Garroutte is a sociologist interested in how people move between identities and gain or fail to gain other’s consent. Indians, she asserts, “provide a fabulously rich example for considering the implications of the increasingly ambiguous [modern American] system of racial classification” (p. 9). *Real Indians* is not, however, a standard academic monograph because Garroutte emphasizes

the intellectual and moral efficacy of “Radical Indigenism.” This intellectual program is “dedicated to the validation of American Indian . . . ways of knowing and of living in the world” (p. xii); it “assumes that scholars can take philosophies of knowledge carried by indigenous people seriously” (p. 10), not simply as beliefs but as ways to learn about the world.⁸ Her book is based primarily on interviews with modern Native people and is divided into six chapters, the first four of which focus on competing definitions of Indian identity (law, biology, culture, and self-identification) within modern Indian country, while the fifth discusses “the angry mood” (p. 99) within Indian communities due to identity conflicts. In keeping with her concept of Radical Indigenism, she argues in chapter 5 that “American Indian cultures contain tools of inquiry that create *knowledge*” and that this knowledge includes “new meanings about identity” (p. 107), which are presented in chapter 6, “Allowing the Ancestors to Speak: Radical Indigenism and New/Old Definitions of Identity.” Here, she combines the community-based perspectives outlined in earlier chapters with origin stories, histories, and ethnographic accounts to present an account of Indian identity that has implications for historians’ understandings of early Native perspectives on race.

Garrouette is particularly interesting when she describes the relationship between Native notions of biological connection and social action. These aspects of Native identity come together within kinship, which Garrouette describes as having two facets. The first is “a condition of *being*, which I call *relationship to ancestry*” (p. 118). This condition has long-standing roots in “genealogical descent” (p. 121), in the biological ties between one generation and those that come before and after it. These ties, however, are not adequately captured by terms such as “blood quantum” because the relationships are not compromised by the mixing of different “bloods.” Instead, genealogical bonds transcend admixture as long as the line of descent remains intact, a socio-spiritual corollary to African American hypodescent as expressed in the “one drop” rule. Moreover, these lines of descent are not always the product of birth. Ceremonies of adoption, properly conducted, can create the necessary ties by literally changing (at least in the eyes of the participants) the physical nature of the person involved. This is, in other words, an essentialism that is not rooted in race and that allows for both continuity and fluidity. The second facet of kinship she labels “a condition of *doing*” manifested in a “*responsibility to reciprocity*” (p. 118). There is and has been, she argues, “a widespread conviction that The People . . . are responsible for living with each other in particular ways” (p. 129). A European captive who successfully performed community norms became one of The People; an Indian who violated those norms was no longer A Person. Behavior and identity are intertwined. Garrouette, then, offers historians of race in early America a new sort of biology, one that combines physiology and society, essential fact and human agency. Her ability to ground this concept in early Native

lifeways is admittedly tentative – “a *suggestive exploration*” (p. 113) – but she nevertheless challenges us to re-think what race meant to Native peoples.

Garroutte is focused on one people’s ideology, as are all of the authors discussed above. To be sure, several of these scholars – most notably, Perdue and Sturm – acknowledge that ideologies of race were influenced by cross-cultural contact. But conversations of this sort are not their focus. An emerging body of work suggests, however, that while concentrating on one group’s mental world is necessary for understanding the emergence of racial ideologies, it is not sufficient. Race, several books demonstrate, emerges out of dialogue, not monologue. Nancy Shoemaker’s *A Strange Likeness* is a prime example of the dialogic approach. She argues that we are so conditioned to find Indian-European differences that we have overlooked the “shared ideas” (p. 3) that brought those differences to the fore. “Indian and European similarities enabled them to see their differences in sharper relief and, over the course of the eighteenth century, construct new identities that exaggerated the contrasts between them while ignoring what they had in common” (p. 3). Early America’s Natives and newcomers, she believes, shared “first, the intellectual equipment to construct knowledge, and second, a physical world (night and day, rivers and mountains, the human body) upon which abstract systems of thought (national identities, social structures, political organization) could be modeled” (p. 3). Each chapter in *A Strange Likeness* is devoted to one aspect of this shared world: land, kings, writing, alliances, gender, and race. In each case, Shoemaker “reviews some common features of European and Indian thought” about the issue at hand and then shows how the two peoples “together created new identities for themselves based on the fiction of irresolute difference” (p. 11). The book, then, actually delivers more than its subtitle suggests, going well beyond the one-dimensional racial contrast “Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America” seems to imply and presenting us with the multi-dimensional reality of early American identity formation. The chapters themselves can be read as stand-alone pieces, but the cumulative effect of reading them in sequence is impressive.

The place of race at the end of this sequence suggests both its connection to other Indian-European conversations about similarities and differences and its ability to serve as something of a conversation stopper. With race on the table, it no longer makes sense to discuss similarities. Body metaphors “became the means to organize new understandings of difference” (p. 127). Initially, this had not been the case. Instead, the body had given Indians and Europeans “a mutually intelligible language” (p. 127). All parties could agree on what it meant to extend the right hand or nurse at the breast; all shared in a common corporeal frame of reference. Given these similarities, Shoemaker notes, it is ironic that “only one part of the body came to symbolize irresolute difference: skin color” (p. 129). At different times and in different places, Indians became “Red” and

Europeans became “White,” a process that Shoemaker links to the rise of “Black” slavery. Wherever and whenever this rise of a “color divide” (p. 134) occurred, it did so within the context of one people’s active social and intellectual engagement with another group. By the 1760s, “the contention that skin color obstructed [Indian-European] unity had become commonplace in council rhetoric” (p. 134), and being “Red” or “White” became “a powerful explanation” (p. 137) for the two people’s inability to get along. The deadly and divisive nature of this ideology should not, Shoemaker argues, be allowed to obscure the fact that “Indians and Europeans were engaged in the same mental processes” (p. 139). They both “experimented with biological difference” (p. 139); they both “dealt with the sudden diversity of people by creating new knowledge out of old knowledge” (p. 139). And they both “built their notions of difference . . . independently and in tandem” (p. 143).

John Wood Sweet’s *Bodies Politic* likewise presents a world in which European, Indian, and African lives were “densely intertwined” (p. 4). His goal is to explain the influence colonial society had on antebellum northern (and particularly New England) democracy, not necessarily a topic that immediately calls to mind Native Americans and race. Sweet, however, focuses on “the often conflicted boundary that separated legally recognized citizens from those who lived among them but did not enjoy the same rights and privileges” (p. 4), and it is this focus that allows him to discuss the shifting relations between New England’s various peoples. He argues that this tripartite relationship ultimately produced a society characterized by freedom, but not equality. After the Civil War, the United States as a whole adopted this approach to diversity, which meant both that “Americans would always be split apart by race” and that “race would also always bring them together” (p. 11). Sweet’s investigation of the emergence of this pattern relies heavily on his belief that historians have overemphasized culture clashes and underplayed “hybridity, paradox, and constantly shifting strategies for claiming respect, power, and citizenship” (p. 8). In keeping with this understanding, he emphasizes that the public was never simply Euro-American, and that categories for, and uses of, racial identity emerged out of complicated socio-cultural negotiations and changed with time and personal background. *Bodies Politic* is remarkably successful in grounding these assertions in detailed, well-told reconstructions of individual lives and community events.

That said, it must be acknowledged that Sweet’s story presents Indians as junior partners in New England’s three-part conversation. As the narrative moves forward in time, the relationship between Euro-Americans and African-Americans increasingly comes to the fore, and Sweet shows these peoples’ initiatives driving the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century construction of “ever more rigid lines of color” (p. 315). It is striking to read in a chapter entitled “Manifest Destinies” that “racial politics in New England became increasingly bipolar” (p. 314); it is disappointing

that an author whose “Note on Sources” laments that “[e]ven now, histories of Indians in early America tend to focus disproportionately on the earliest moments of encounter and conflict” (p. 468) does not do more to redress this problem. In fact, Sweet’s success in showing Indian involvement in the dialogic construction of race in his earlier chapters makes the Indians’ relative absence in later chapters seem particularly unfortunate. In chapter 1 he discusses how, in the 1730s and 1740s, Narragansetts struggled amongst themselves over the threat that aristocratically inclined sachems posed to common people seeking to become economically autonomous Christian yeoman. Each side sought “to turn the process of anglicization to their advantage” (p. 19–20); each found itself enmeshed in English legal and economic networks; and each side eventually lost, becoming victims of the colonists’ eagerness for Indian resources and disdain for Indian pretensions to have “reinvent[ed] themselves” (p. 36). But the process of cultural convergence that saw sachems aspire to English-style respectability and common Narragansetts pursue English-style economic competency “prompted increasingly vital senses of racial identity” (p. 57). A similar thing happened, according to Sweet’s third chapter, when Indians and Africans converted to Christianity. The sharing of “cultural ground . . . tended to drive [Indians, Africans, and Europeans] apart” (p. 103). Colonists consistently spoke of the enduring savagery of Indian culture – even as Indians spoke of their own culture’s defeat – and sought to equate Christianity with European civilization. When Indians converted, this equation crumbled. In response, the colonists “learned to draw new lines of difference. Ultimately, cultural convergence . . . helped to invent ‘racial’ identities” (p. 106). Oppositions that had once been phrased in terms of culture – “a potentially *mutable* form of difference” – were replaced by “the more stubborn, essentialist identities of race” (p. 108).

Kirsten Fischer’s *Suspect Relations* shares with *Bodies Politic* a willingness to consider the dialogic construction of racial identity, an understanding of the role Indians played in this process, and an unfortunate tendency to drop Natives from the story once the discussion turns to European-African relations. Her book aims to describe evolving racial attitudes of North Carolinians during the eighteenth century. To do so, she focuses on illicit sexual relations. She argues that shifting ideas about “gender, race, and class propped each other up in the developing social hierarchy” (p. 5), with race becoming evermore salient over time; “indeterminate ideas about racial distinction melded with notions of gender and class differences to form a new amalgam, a fully biological notion of race, one that seemed as natural as sexual difference already did and as divinely ordained as the social order” (p. 10). Importantly, she asserts that while eighteenth-century notions of racial difference lacked the “more thoroughly biological definitions of race” which emerged in the nineteenth century, these earlier ideas “proved no less harmful than later versions” (p. 3). It is, in fact, difficult to read her chapters on the sexual regulation of servant

women, white responses to sexual slander, and sexual violence without concluding that even proto-racist beliefs were enormously powerful – powerful and useful for some, powerful and dangerous for others. For all, though, race became real in the context of everyday behavior.

Though Fischer's core chapters do not focus on Native Americans, she does not neglect them entirely. A large section (pp. 29–42) of the first chapter's discussion of the relationship between female sexuality and patriarchal authority is devoted to discussing the threat Native culture (and especially gender relations) posed to "the presumed naturalness" (p. 16) of the colonists' social order. More centrally, chapter 2 – "Cross-cultural Sex in Native North Carolina" – is focused entirely on Indian-European relations. Her discussion here emphasizes two elements of "the sexual encounters" (p. 56) between the two peoples: the ways in which colonial views of Indian women "constructed racial difference in gendered terms" (p. 56), and the shifts in the balance of power that led the colonists to abandon ideas about intermarriage and emphasize, instead, that "redness" "connote[d] permanent degradation" (p. 57). Colonial elites worked to enshrine these understandings into law and custom, a process that strengthened notions of racial difference on both sides of the frontier. The Indians themselves were initially "ethnocentric," sometimes in "color-coded" ways, but their sense of difference was not linked to "a permanent condition" (p. 88). This would change: "racialized thought developed among Indians as well" (p. 89), to the point that end-of-the-century Native peoples embraced "distinct racial categories that implied innate difference" (p. 89). We learn, though, much less about Indian-European relations in Fischer's book than we do about European-African relations. In her 194 pages of text, the last substantive mention of Indians – prior to the short "Epilogue" – that I found (and that the index mentions) appears on page 97. In a book organized into thematic chapters, this might seem to make sense: she has, after all, already "done" Indians in chapter 2. Indian experiences with race and sex, however, were certainly not as neatly circumscribed as Fischer's chapter sequence would suggest. For example, weren't European reputations (the subject of chapter 4) harmed by being connected to Indian-European sex? Didn't sexual violence (the subject of chapter 5) surface in the frontier conflict that increasingly characterized Indian-European relations after c.1750? Listening to dialogue sometimes requires hearing unfamiliar voices in surprising places.

The above critique of Fischer and Sweet for allowing Indians to fall out of their narratives of racial construction once Africans appear on the scene is ungenerous to some extent. Both scholars should be praised for at least attempting to discuss Natives, Africans, and Europeans within one book. As anyone who has ever learned to juggle knows, moving from keeping two objects in the air to doing the same with three objects requires a qualitative change in movement and thought, not simply a

quantitative one. Not the least of Sweet and Fischer's contributions, then, is that they point us toward a new and difficult transition in our thinking and writing. Scholars focused on Indians and race in early America have tended to restrict themselves to two objects, Indians and Europeans. They have, in other words, modified the dichotomies mentioned at the beginning of this essay while leaving the Manichean structure intact. We have only to look at the final book under review here, James Brooks' *Confounding the Color Line*, to see how difficult it will be to overcome this habit. Though this collection of essays has many strengths, I have selected it by default: no monograph published between 2001 and 2004 devotes significant attention to Indian-African relations in early America. Moreover, of the twelve essays (plus an epilogue and introduction) in Brooks' book, only three focus on the period prior to the nineteenth century, and the best of those – Claudio Saunt's award-winning discussion of "Creeks, Seminoles, and the Problem of Slavery" – was originally published in 1998, as was a second early American piece, Dedra McDonald's treatment of Indian-African interaction in colonial New Mexico. In other words, with the exception of Russel Barsh's essay on the complicated relations between Indian and African seamen in New England, early Americanists will find little here that is either new or explicitly grounded in their time period. That is not to say that such scholars should avoid the book. On the contrary, Brooks has assembled a fine collection of essays, and his "Introduction" challenges us "to confound the color line . . . in ways as yet beyond the imagination" (p. 6) by embracing frameworks that allow for complexity and "the cross-cutting tensions and ambiguities of dynamic cultural hybridity" (p. 6). The essays' authors follow through on this program in a variety of provocative and rewarding ways, from Tiya Miles's efforts at "Tracing the Red in Black Slavery" to C. Richard King's discussion of "Native American Mascots and Indian-Black relations." For an early Americanist, however, the end result of reading such a book is likely to be a disquieting mixture of optimism and pessimism.

Optimism seems warranted when we consider what has been learned of late by bringing Indians into our conversations about race in early America. The literature reviewed here demonstrates the unique place Native Americans occupied in early American society and early American racial thought. American trends and processes take on different contours and meanings when Natives are brought to the fore. If, for example, we consider European thought in regards to Indians as opposed to Africans, then we must talk about emerging race relations with the excluded rather than the encompassed, with the military enemy rather than the domestic threat, with the sickly but dangerous aboriginal rather than the hardy but imported worker. Or, if Native conceptions of Europeans are privileged, then we inevitably turn to new definitions of terms – e.g., "kinship" and "blood" – which had seemed transparent, and to novel ways of understanding the intersection of biology and society, continuity and change.

There is every reason to expect that adding Indian–African relations to this mix will be every bit as productive and transformative. And so why the pessimism? The prospect of trying to uncover Indian–African relationships in a European-dominated historical record is daunting, as is the thought of modifying our still tentative understanding of Indian–European race relations. Scholars in the field are only beginning to understand Indian views of Europeans and the dialogic relationship between Indian and European ideologies and experiences. *Confounding the Color Line* shows that such investigations must proceed in tandem with projects that move beyond both Indian/European and Black/White.

Perhaps this is as it should be. Dichotomies are tidy; early America was not, and its inhabitants knew it. Like us, they struggled to explain the messiness. By the 1720s, Native Americans on the Gulf Coast were asserting that “[l]ong ago . . . there were three men in a cave, one white, one red, and one black”; a generation later, Delawares living in Pennsylvania noted that “God first made three men and three women, viz: the Indians, the negro, and the white man.” Their non-Native neighbors also on occasion embraced polygenetic explanations for early America’s diversity. For much of the eighteenth century, however, Euro-American orthodoxy favored some combination of Linnaean classification – which posited divisions of humanity including Indians, Europeans, and Africans – and an environmentalism that emphasized humanity’s common but uneven progress from savagery through barbarism to civilization.⁹ From a twenty-first-century standpoint, of course, these Native and non-Native models are nonsensical, but their ubiquity and the reality they attempted to explain are not so easily dismissed. Early America’s peoples knew that their models must be all-encompassing, that they had to embrace Africans, Europeans, and Indians. We don’t have to accept polygenesis or environmentalism to recognize that they were on to something.

Notes

¹ J. E. Chaplin, “Natural philosophy and an early racial idiom in North America: Comparing English and Indian bodies,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 54 (1), 1997, pp. 229–52, quotation from p. 231; K. Brown, “Native Americans and the early modern concept of race,” in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850*, ed. M. Daunton and R. Halpern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 79–100, quotation from p. 98.

² J. E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); J. F. Brooks (ed.), *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); K. Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); C. Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); E. M. Garrouette, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); T. Perdue, “Mixed Blood” Indians: *Racial Construction in the Early South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); J. W. Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); D. S. Jones,

- Rationalizing Epidemics: Meanings and Uses of American Indian Mortality since 1600* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); W. A. Pencak and D. K. Richter (eds.), *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); N. Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Being and Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ³ J. Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), p. 167.
- ⁴ J. H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); J. T. Merritt, *At The Crossroads: Indians & Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
- ⁵ G. E. Dowd, "The French king wakes up in Detroit: 'Pontiac's War' in rumor and history," *Ethnohistory*, 37 (3), 1990, pp. 254–78, especially pp. 260–1; J. Piker, "Creeks and colonists: Re-thinking the southern backcountry," *Journal of Southern History*, 70 (3), 2004, pp. 503–40, especially p. 535.
- ⁶ T. Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540–1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979), p. 49; also Perdue, "Clan and court: Another look at the early Cherokee Republic," *American Indian Quarterly*, 24 (4), 2000, pp. 562–9.
- ⁷ See, for example, her statement that "[p]ersistence is one of the themes of this book"; T. Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. 8.
- ⁸ My appreciation of Garroutte's contribution comes with a caveat: she is passionately committed to the notion that the investigation of Native theories of identity must be situated within the social, intellectual, and moral worlds of particular Native communities. She makes clear that the benefits of such an approach also entail a long-term engagement with the communities in question and certain real constraints on academic freedom. Whether or not these assertions are accepted by individual historians, the fruits of her research are still worth considering. Or, to put it another way, one does not have to be a devotee of Radical Indigenism to appreciate the insights Garroutte's deployment of a Radical Indigenist methodology has produced with regards to Indian identity.
- ⁹ Shoemaker, *Strange Likeness*, p. 130 ("cave"); G. E. Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745–1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 30 ("God"). For a discussion of Native and Euro-American polygenetic thought, see W. G. McLoughlin and W. H. Conser (Jr.), "The first man was red: Cherokee responses to the debate over Indian origins, 1760–1860," *American Quarterly*, 41 (2), 1989, pp. 243–64. For Euro-American thought, see R. H. Berkhofer (Jr.), *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), pp. 38–49.

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