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Some Thoughts on
Colonial Historians and American Indians

James H. Merrell

In the winter of 1953 the anthropologist William N. Fenton made his way to Williamsburg, Virginia, to clear "a common ground" where ethnologists and historians could come together as ethnohistorians (then a newly minted term) to enhance our understanding of the past. The common ground Fenton proposed was Indian-white relations in eastern North America before 1830, and it was no coincidence that he issued his call for action at the Institute of Early American History and Culture, then as now the leading center for study of America's formative years.1

A check of the contents of the Institute's journal, the William and Mary Quarterly, suggests that students of early America were slow to answer Fenton's call.2 In the decade before he arrived in Williamsburg, the Quarterly published three articles and three documents relating to Indians; for the following fifteen years the comparable figures were three and one. This is not to say that nothing at all was being done: Nancy Oestreich Lurie, Allen W. Trelease, and others were exploring some of the terrain Fenton had mapped out.3 Nonetheless, it seems fair to say that the attempt...

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1 Fenton, American Indian and White Relations to 1830: Needs and Opportunities for Study (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1957). Fenton delivered his talk at a conference on "Early American Indian and White Relations," one in a series of conferences sponsored by the Institute on neglected topics in colonial history (ibid., v).

2 On the other hand, ethnohistory and the study of Indians enjoyed more rapid growth. The American Indian Ethnohistoric Conference—later the American Society for Ethnohistory—was established in 1954, and the first issue of its journal, Ethnohistory, appeared the same year. In 1972, to further research on Indian history, the Newberry Library established its Center for the History of the American Indian (now the D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian).

to lure scholars onto the common ground of Indian-white relations had little immediate impact on early American studies.

Over the past two decades more people have taken Fenton’s advice, and once again the Quarterly helps measure the trend. The last twenty volumes contain just over a score of articles relating to Indians, not to mention three primary sources and as many review essays—one more review essay than even republicanism or Puritanism can claim. Add to this the articles on the topic that have appeared elsewhere and the books that have come out, and it appears that Fenton did not visit Williamsburg in vain after all. The study of Indians in colonial British America clearly has arrived, and—if the number of younger scholars busily scratching away at their own plots of that common ground is any indication—it is just as clearly here to stay.

The good news, then, is worth celebrating: more people are seeking to understand the native American experience from Columbian Exchange to Jacksonian Removal, and their efforts are being accorded a more prominent place in the lists of book publishers and the pages of scholarly journals. But with the good news comes the bad: the products of these labors—the writings of James Axtell, J. Frederick Fausz, Francis Jennings, James Ronda, Neal Salisbury, and Wilcomb Washburn (to name only a few of the leading authorities on Indians)—are for the most part ignored by the larger community of scholars studying early America. Obviously,

_French Rivalry along the Ohio and Northwest Frontiers, 1748-1763_ (Stanford, Calif., 1950).


some members of that larger community find this work irrelevant to their own research; not every chapter of colonial history includes Indians. But many chapters do, and there is the problem: those studies published in recent years that should have included native Americans too often neglected to do so, apparently because their authors had not read (or had not profited from reading) the scholarship on Indians. These works on colonial history had an opportunity—one might even say an obligation—to make the native part of the story; their failure to do so gives a distorted impression of the past. Presenting a sample of the monographs and surveys missing the mark makes it clear that the research on Indians, far from overturning long-held notions about America's colonial age, has done little to change the cast of mind that frames—and, by framing, limits—our view. This sobering news merits broadcasting just as much as the good news deserves celebration.6

I

The prospect is not unrelievedly bleak: some scholars have managed to join Indian voices to the chorus (or cacophony) now issuing from early American studies. In Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America, published in 1974, Gary B. Nash criticized the “historical amnesia that has blotted out so much of our past” and left us with a “white-oriented, hero-worshipping history.” In an effort to cure the amnesia, he depicted colonial America as a place where peoples from many cultures came together, where non-Europeans were “actively and intimately involved” in determining the course of development. A decade later T. H. Breen, in a suggestive essay, built on Nash's insights to argue that the colonial experience is best understood as a host of “creative adaptations” to new peoples and new places, adaptations not just by European colonists and their African slaves but by American Indians as well. Since these three groups were “intricately intertwined,” Breen insisted, America's colonization can be comprehended only by scrutinizing the “kaleidoscope of human encounters” among them.7

Now and then a student of a particular province has also tried to give Indians their due. A year after Nash's book appeared, Edmund S. Morgan

6 Early American history is not alone in this neglect. American history textbooks have come in for particularly heavy criticism, most recently from Frederick E. Hoxie, The Indians Versus the Textbooks: Is There Any Way Out?, McNickle Center, Occasional Papers in Curriculum Ser., No. 1 (Chicago, Ill., 1984), and James Axtell, “Europeans, Indians, and the Age of Discovery in American History Textbooks,” American Historical Review, XCII (1987), 621-632. The situation in Canadian scholarship is, according to Bruce G. Trigger, only marginally better (“The Historians' Indian: Native Americans in Canadian Historical Writing from Charlevoix to the Present,” Canadian Historical Review, LXVII [1986], 315, 322-323, 336-338).

drove home its central point, retelling the history of Virginia in such a way that Indians were important figures in that colony’s ordeal.\footnote{Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia} (New York, 1975). For another favorable assessment of Morgan and Nash see Axtell, “Ethnohistory of Early America,” \textit{WMQ}, 3d Ser., XXXV (1978), 128-131. J. Frederick Fausz has praised Morgan’s effort to include Indians while criticizing the results (“The Invasion of Virginia: Indians, Colonialism, and the Conquest of Cant: A Review Essay on Anglo-Indian Relations in the Chesapeake,” \textit{Virginia Magazine of History and Biography}, XCV [1987], 138, 147-148).} In addition, the recently completed KTO series, a thirteen-volume \textit{History of the American Colonies}, contains some pleasant surprises. Michael Kammen’s survey of colonial New York, for example, offers an excellent sketch of aboriginal New York before weaving Indians into the colony’s history, and Jere R. Daniell’s study of New Hampshire, while less extensive in its coverage, is sensitive to variations among native groups as well as to the factors shaping their response to colonization.\footnote{Kammen, \textit{Colonial New York: A History} (New York, 1975); Daniell, \textit{Colonial New Hampshire: A History} (Millwood, N.Y., 1981).} Finally, in Stephen Saunders Webb’s \textit{1676}, a book that is neither a survey nor a study of one colony, the Iroquois sachem Daniel Garakontié’s career is central to the provocative thesis about “the end of American independence.” Webb’s work has drawn heavy critical fire, but no one can deny the breadth of his vision—a vision that takes in Indians as well as colonists, Onondaga as well as London.\footnote{Webb, \textit{1676: The End of American Independence} (New York, 1984). To this list of promising signs might be added William Cronon, \textit{Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England} (New York, 1983), and D. W. Meinig, \textit{The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History}. Vol. I: \textit{Atlantic America, 1492-1800} (New Haven, Conn., 1986). Significantly, neither author is a specialist in early American history. Another promising sign is that John Demos, who is a specialist in early American history, has recently begun to study Indians. See “John Demos Begins Seminar Series,” \textit{Meeting Ground}, McNickle Center, Newsletter, No. 18 (Winter 1988), 3-4.} 

Even works devoting less space to native peoples may exhibit a slightly raised consciousness about America’s original inhabitants. At least one historian has felt obliged to offer something of an apology for leaving natives out of his study;\footnote{Jackson Turner Main, \textit{Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut} (Princeton, N.J., 1985), xiv. In fact, Main does include some discussion of the natives (see pp. 176-177, 182).} others, when they do mention Indians, choose their words with care. The standard formulas that generations of scholars have used to work out their interpretation of colonial American history—Old World vs. New World, civilization vs. savagery, settlement vs. wilderness—are now somewhat out of vogue. It is more fashionable today to speak of “two worlds,” to cushion a term like \textit{civilization} with quotation marks, to describe European colonization not as the settlement of a
wilderness but as “the invasion of America.” Nowadays it is not so easy to write, as distinguished historians a generation ago did, of native Americans as “a nightly terror,” a “menace” for whom “massacre and torture were [the] rule,” “who lay in wait for the earliest colonists” and then “haunted the fringes of settlement through the whole colonial era.”

It is harder to find in the literature claims that English colonists “encountered no going society with fixed institutions of its own.”

Harder but, alas, not impossible. The current scholarship on colonial America contains references to Indians that, combined, yield a composite portrait of natives that bears a striking resemblance to its counterpart in the 1950s (not to say the 1850s). In this portrait, North America on the eve of European colonization is a “void,” a “virgin land,” a “vast empti-
ness,” its “handfuls of indigenous people” a “part of the landscape”; along with “lurking beasts,” “floods[,] and disease,” Indians are one of the “environmental hazards” colonists confronted upon disembarking.

These “redskins” are “scattered” through a “trackless wilderness,” where—having “no towns or villages”—they “roam” across the land.


"Belligerent," "treacherous," often "turned . . . loose" by the French, the "savage foes" introduce the English to "total war" or, as "predators," kill the colonists' livestock. When they stop wandering about and attacking, they live in "houses of a sort"; nearby are fields where they practice "a simple form of agriculture," also known as "primitive agriculture." All of these people—with their "strange ceremonies," their "compliant . . . maidens," their "taste for firewater"—are "the remnants of an Indian culture" that "any place in Anglo-America . . . might contain at the moment of white entry." But only for a moment: once colonists meet up with these "static, passive" people, conflict occurs with "monotonous regularity" until the newcomers "merely displace them," clearing the way for Europeans to make "giant strides . . . toward the formation of civilized communities in the frontier wilderness." It all happened so fast that the Indian had little or no impact on this nation's history, and "in the United States the story of cultural contact and assimilation has largely been the story of a white, English, Protestant culture established during the seventeenth century affecting and being affected by subsequent waves of African, European, and Asian immigrants and their cultural impedimenta."21

II

This picture, culled from many different works, only begins to convey the staying power of the older paradigm about Indians in the colonial period. That the native American remains persona non grata can also be seen in many recent monographs on early America. Studies of colonial New England have long ignored native influence on the development of that region,22 and farther south, where the Indians' presence in colonial


17 Lucas, American Odyssey, 213 ("belligerent"), 140 ("turned . . . loose"); David Freeman Hawke, Everyday Life in Early America (New York, 1988), 133 ("belligerent"), 132 ("treacherous"), 137 (introducing "total war"); Handlin and Handlin, Liberty and Power, 177 ("savage foes"); Land, Colonial Maryland, 43 ("predators").


19 Coleman, Colonial Georgia, 32, 79; Handlin and Handlin, Liberty and Power, 147, 100; Darrett B. Rutman, "Assessing the Little Communities of Early America," WMQ, 3d Ser., XLIII (1986), 172.

20 Illick, Colonial Pennsylvania, 26; Land, Colonial Maryland, 42, xvi; Daniell, Colonial New Hampshire, 67.


22 This point has been made in Neal Salisbury, Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643 (New York, 1982), and Rozbicki, "Transplanted Ethos," Amerikastudien, XXVIII (1983), 405-406. For an exception see Edward Byers, The Nation of Nantucket: Society and Politics in an Early American Commercial Center, 1660-1820 (Boston, 1987).
times was still more pervasive, the scholarship's silence speaks even louder. Ten years ago Douglas Greenberg, surveying the historiography on the Middle Colonies, found it "surprising how little scholarly work has been devoted" to Indians and hoped that "perhaps . . . the next generation of Middle Colonies specialists" would do better. His hopes have not been realized. In 1982 Michael Zuckerman introduced a book of essays by some members of that new scholarly generation with the claim that the lands between New England and the Chesapeake hold the key to the "meaning of early America." When, in his introduction, he writes of "the deep diversities" characteristic of the region, of the "ambiguities of aloofness and accommodation" that each of its peoples confronted, there is reason to hope that the diversities will include Indians and that the ambiguities, which Indians have faced ever since 1492, will embrace the region's many native groups. It is not to be. Not only are Iroquois, Delawares, Shawnees, and the others missing from the book, but they are not even on the list Zuckerman compiled of important topics left out of the volume, a list that stretches as far as "speculators and peculators, backwoods brawlers and backroads haulers, sluts and scullery maids"—stopping just this side of native Americans.

Bad as things are in New England and the Middle Colonies, it is in the Chesapeake—and especially in Virginia—that the news is worst. It is there that so many of the exciting new approaches to early American history have been tried during the past decade. It is there that one might expect that the Powhatan peoples' impact on the English colonists would alert historians to be on the lookout for Indians. It is there that the likes of Robert Beverley and Alexander Spotswood followed John Smith in visiting native towns and reporting what they found. Yet no recent scholar has taken a cue from Edmund Morgan and tried to restore Indians to their proper place in the region's history.

Even the freshest of the new work can seem stale when it comes to Indians. For example, Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman's community study of Middlesex County, a wonderfully rich evocation of life in colonial Virginia, has no more to say about natives than do its New England counterparts. This is not entirely the Rutmans' fault: their part of the tidewater was all but empty of its original inhabitants by 1650, when the study begins. Still, the Rutmans seem a bit too eager to nudge the Indians offstage faster than the script demands. The two hundred Payankatanks who in John Smith's day inhabited what became Middlesex earn only a long note, and once the English pioneers arrive we are told that any Indians still around "simply disappeared before the newcomers." By 1675

Indians and colonists, “still in contact” elsewhere in the province, “were not in Middlesex.”

Hints scattered through A Place in Time suggest that the Rutmans are strict constructionists when it comes to interpreting terms like “disappeared” and “contact.” Who lived in the county’s “isolated ‘Indian Cabins’”? Where did Paul Brewer get the “Indian Bowle” he owned in 1655? What about the two Indians who worked (alongside eighty-eight black slaves and eight white servants) on Ralph Wormeley’s plantation? Saying that English colonists saw no natives in Middlesex narrows things still more, for county folk encountered more than one Indian when they ventured farther afield. Ralph Wormeley himself knew natives who lived on or near his lands up the Rappahannock River, and another leading light of county society, Henry Corbin, certainly was “in contact” with Indians: in 1676 they snuffed out his life.

A few cabins stuck off in the woods, a single bowl, a brace of Indians amid almost one hundred other laborers, here and there a brush with natives elsewhere in the colony—these hardly add up to much. Nor do they suggest that some tribe remained in the backwaters of Middlesex and the Rutmans missed it. But the scraps of evidence do reveal that the county was not as untouched by Indians as A Place in Time can lead one to believe. Within its borders were Indian houses, Indian traders, and Indian slaves; beyond lived other natives who in one way or another affected life in Middlesex. The Rutmans had an opportunity to discuss Indians—not a golden opportunity, to be sure, but an opportunity just the same—yet they chose not to, chose in fact to play the subject down.

Given the Rutmans’ exhaustive scrutiny of Middlesex, the book’s exclusion of natives is curious. One explanation for the silence may lie in lingering traces of that older way of thinking about Indians. For all their new methodology, the Rutmans have not abandoned the idea that

26 Gilbert Chinard, ed., A Huguenot Exile in Virginia; or, Voyages of a Frenchman Exiled for His Religion, with a Description of Virginia and Maryland (New York, 1934), 151-154, and Plate III, “Virginia in 1686,” between pp. 102 and 103; Rutman and Rutman, Place in Time: Middlesex County, 93.
27 It should be noted, however, that in the summer of 1676 the Pamunkeys, a tributary nation, headed into Dragon Swamp in a vain attempt to hide from Nathaniel Bacon’s rebel forces. Dragon Swamp, which forms the border between Middlesex and Gloucester counties, is often mentioned in the Rutmans’ work, but they take no notice of the Indians’ visit to the neighborhood. See Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby, and Thad W. Tate, Colonial Virginia: A History (White Plains, N.Y., 1986), 93-94.
America was an “empty continent,” a place where natives were part of the landscape—indeed, were possessed by the landscape, as colonists in 1607 encountered “the wilderness and *its* Indians.” 28 In Middlesex County it is that wilderness, not *its* Indians, that dominates the first act of the drama: people “tramp[ed] through the forests,” named “places in the wilderness,” “bit into the wilderness,” and ordered “nature—Virginia’s wilderness, broken now by clearings here and there, by houses, fences, and fields.” 29 In fact, to Indians this land was not a wilderness (much less “nature”); while Powhatan’s Virginia lacked fences, it, too, had clearings, houses, and fields. 30 The authors’ failure to appreciate that earlier Virginia and acknowledge its enduring influence on the colony impoverishes their account of Middlesex life.

That a visit to the Rutmans inspired Allan Kulikoff to undertake his own study of the colonial Chesapeake, *Tobacco and Slaves*, would not seem to bode well for this prize-winning book’s treatment of Indians. In fact, however, Kulikoff’s first chapter paints a very different scene from that depicted in *A Place in Time*. “For the better part of the seventeenth century,” he writes, “the Chesapeake region contained innumerable Indian villages that surrounded scattered outposts peopled by white planters and their indentured servants.” Besides bringing the Indians’ towns back to the colonial landscape, Kulikoff also returns their fields and clearings, and he removes their wilderness. “Though English settlers did not find a wilderness,” he argues, “they did create one,” for once colonists drove natives out, “the old [Indian] paths and villages filled with weeds and old pine forests.” 31

This is a promising start, but Kulikoff’s interest in Indians quickly flags, and his discussion focuses exclusively on “how men and women—white and black—forged new social relations.” 32 Sophisticated as that interpretation of Chesapeake society is, without Indians it is too simple. As Edmund Morgan, the late J. Leitch Wright, Jr., and others have shown, Indian servants and slaves were common in the seventeenth century: colonists imported them by land and sea, claimed them as headrights, and passed laws to define their status and control their behavior. 33 *Tobacco and Slaves* mentions none of this. Nor does it consider Morgan’s assertion that

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28 Rutman and Rutman, *Place in Time: Middlesex County*, 237, 37 (emphasis added). Like many others of late, the Rutmans are at times sympathetic to the Indian. They point out that Virginia’s first colonists, who were not above stealing the Powhatans’ corn, “provoked the native Indians to hostility” (*ibid.*, 37, 43).

29 *Ibid.*, 45, 47, 60 (emphasis added).

30 The Rutmans themselves mention the Indian old fields, without considering their significance (*ibid.*, 59).


native Americans were crucial to the shift from indentured servitude to racial slavery at the end of the seventeenth century. "As Virginians began to expand their slave holdings," Morgan maintains, "they seem to have had Indians as much in view as Africans. If the natives of Virginia were insufficient in number, substitute natives from other regions could be brought in, whether from other parts of America or from Africa. They were both, after all, basically uncivil, unchristian, and, above all, unwhite."34 In his own analysis of what he calls this "Great Transformation," however, Kulikoff fails to include Indians among the options colonists had (and an option that many of them chose).38

_Tobacco and Slaves_ has no more to say about native laborers in the eighteenth century,36 though it is evident from other sources that the massive importations of Africans did not end Indian slavery. In 1711, for example, Virginians were offering Tuscarora Indians "the usual price of slaves" for native women and children captured in war, and during the same decade a boatload of 232 slaves, 66 of whom were Carolina Indians, arrived in the colony.37 Few scholars have searched the documentary record to find these and other Indian slaves, but they are there. Colonial newspapers and court proceedings, wills and inventories all mention them, although some natives can be hard to find: "Jack, an Indian Man," was lumped among "The Negro's" on a plantation, "Negro Salvadore" was mislabeled, and others left no trace beyond references to "mulattos of the 'Indian breed'."38 However obscure their lives, these Indians add another dimension to Chesapeake history, a dimension with implications that historians, as a rule, do not consider.39 Kulikoff is no exception to that rule.

There were never very many Indians toiling in the Chesapeake tobacco fields; but there _were_ Indians in those fields, and to imply otherwise, as _Tobacco and Slaves_ does, is to distort the past. Without the Indian laborer,

34 Morgan, _American Slavery, American Freedom_, 329.  
35 Kulikoff, _Tobacco and Slaves_, 23, 38, 40, quotation on p. 37.  
36 The only later references to Indians concern their providing havens for runaway blacks. Kulikoff cites two examples, without discussing their implications (ibid., 328, 352).  
37 Quoted in Morgan, _American Slavery, American Freedom_, 330n; Wright, _Only Land They Knew_, 134. That arrangements like this one with the Tuscaroras yielded more Indians is likely. In 1714, for example, a planter in Henrico County willed an Indian each to three of his children, and pledged to a fourth child another Indian if he decided to buy one, a clear indication that he thought they were still available. At about the same time, a colonist in Surry County purchased a Saponi Indian woman who had been captured by "Forreign Indians." See Henrico County [Virginia], Deeds, Wills, Etc., 1714-1718, 27 (microfilm, Virginia State Library, Richmond), and H. R. McIlwaine, ed., _Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia_, III (Richmond, Va., 1928), 465-466, 474.  
38 Prince George County [Virginia], Deeds, Etc., 1713-1728, Pt. 2, 356 (microfilm, Va. State Lib.). See also Wright, _Only Land They Knew_, 252, 253, 255, 256, 273, 278.  
39 For some of these implications, see Wright, _Only Land They Knew_, chap. 11.
students of colonial America will overlook the aptly named Sorrow, claimed as a headright in 1691, or Merrak, a ten-year-old girl sold in 1704. Without Indians we cannot picture Thomas Wells in his house one Sunday in 1686, "Singing w[i]th his Serv[an]t wench and his Indian boys." We skirt plantations like Edward Stratton's, where in 1699 an Indian slave girl spent her days among four English servants and four black slaves, or William Sloane's, home to three Indians and four blacks in 1715, or Samuel Tatum's, where in the same year there was "an old Lodging for the Indians," the two women and four children Tatum owned. We ignore Ben, a black slave who ran away in 1776—presumably with his wife, an Indian on another plantation, who disappeared at about the same time. We miss all of this, and much more besides, when a work on the "Southern Cultures" of the colonial Chesapeake sees things only in black and white.

Another recent and important book on colonial Virginia offers an even greater opportunity for including Indians in its analysis, making their absence that much more remarkable. The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744, by Kenneth A. Lockridge, is a meditation on the inner life of a Virginia gentleman. Through an imaginative gloss on Byrd's writings Lockridge seeks the keys that will unlock his personality. One of those keys is Byrd's father, William Byrd I, who shipped his young son to England to make him into a proper English gentleman, whose social position and public offices in Virginia that son coveted once he returned to the colony, and whose corpse the son dug up in the vain hope that some message could "be distinguished" in its "wasted" features. Lockridge, in following the second William Byrd's struggle to fulfill his father's wishes, is determined to leave no stone unturned. Money and courtship, prostitutes and politicians, food and sex, slaves and friends, dreams and fears—all are part of the dogged chase after an elusive personality, a chase that takes us into every corner of Byrd's life.

Except one: Indians. Granted, they are not altogether absent from this account. Lockridge mentions that William Byrd I "had made his real money in the Indian trade" and that his namesake also had "interests in that trade." We learn that William Byrd II lobbied hard to be appointed

40 Nell Marion Nugent, comp., Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants, II (Richmond, Va., 1977), 360; Wright, Only Land They Knew, 150.
42 Henrico Co., Deeds, Wills, Etc., 1697-1704, 138; ibid., 1714-1718, 48; Prince George Co., Deeds, Etc., 1713-1728, Pt. 1, 70. One of the women Tatum owned was identified only as "an old wench Sue," and one of the children, listed with "an old Indian wench Ann[?]" was called simply "a young child." The others, like Ann(?), were labeled Indians.
43 Wright, Only Land They Knew, 259.
44 Lockridge, Diary, and Life, of Byrd (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1987).
45 Quoted ibid., 44.
46 Ibid., 12, 81.
the House of Burgesses' agent for Indian affairs and that he knew something of Indian initiation rites. But another look at the evidence suggests that there is more to it than that. The founder of the Byrd dynasty was no mere trader. From his arrival in the colony in 1669 until his death thirty-five years later, he was a central figure in Virginia's relations with native peoples near and far, not only as a trader but also as an explorer, diplomat, troubleshooter, and soldier. He "knows more of Indian affairs than any man in the Country," wrote one observer in 1688. Shortly before the elder Byrd's death in 1704, Robert Beverley agreed, noting that "this Gentleman has for a long time been extremally respected, and fear'd by all the Indians round about, who, without knowing the Name of any Governour, have ever been kept in order by Him."  

Had William Byrd II, that aspiring English gentleman, come into his inheritance and shunned this distinctly un-English and ungentlemanly side of his father's life, Lockridge might well overlook Indians. But the younger Byrd did not. Upon his return to Virginia he became involved in the deerskin trade, meeting with the traders and complaining, as his father had before him, that Virginia's Indian policies were cutting into his profits. From this base Byrd branched out: as a member of the provincial council he met with Indian ambassadors and discussed policy, and when the Tuscaroras attacked North Carolina in 1711 he helped defend Virginia's southern flank. These experiences qualified Byrd to speak on Indian affairs with some authority, making him an obvious candidate to be the assembly's Indian agent. Finally, after he won that appointment,

49 Alvord and Bidgood, eds., *First Explorations*, 194.  
52 Wright and Tinling, eds., *Secret Diary*, xvi, 422-425, and *passim*. 

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carried out his duties in London, and returned to Virginia, he went with a
band of officials, guides, and Indians to survey the boundary line between
Virginia and North Carolina. During this journey Byrd discussed religion
with the party’s Indian hunter, exchanged pleasantries with Indian head-
men, and eyed Indian women.53

Trader, soldier, expert, explorer—William Byrd II’s Indian career looks
very much like an effort to copy his father, making it an obvious line of
inquiry for someone seeking the hidden wellsprings of the son’s life in the
pattern laid down by the father.54 Yet Lockridge, with an ear attuned to
every signal, however faint, of Byrd’s striving to equal or surpass his
father’s achievements, suddenly goes deaf when it comes to Indians. The
two phrases he includes on the Byrds’ trading interests are two more than
their service as Indian fighters receives. The job of Indian agent, an official
stamp of approval as the colony’s Indian expert, earns more attention but
little comprehension. Lockridge, on the alert for evidence that “William
Byrd had entered into almost every role and place occupied by his father,”
misses the point here. “Most likely,” he concludes after chronicling Byrd’s
campaign for the appointment, “Byrd had been interested in this limited
post only for the very fat salary, which would help finance his ongoing
search for an heiress in London.”55

The deafness becomes most severe in the discussion of Byrd’s adven-
tures on the boundary line survey. Lockridge devotes considerable space
to these journeys, but he seems unaware that here again the son was,
sometimes literally, following in his father’s footsteps. He, too, was
venturing beyond the confines of English settlement. He, too, was
traveling with “woodsmen,” most of them traders, some of them old
even to have been his father’s companions on earlier trips.56 He, too,
was matching wits with Indians. Of those encounters with natives,
however, Lockridge has nothing to say beyond claiming that Byrd was on
“a dangerous journey through a wilderness inhabited by hostile Indians,”
an odd way to describe an expedition that saw no hostile Indians at all
(none of whom lived in the area in any case), but plenty of friendly ones.57

In his conclusion Lockridge generously welcomes other interpretations
of Byrd. Yet Byrd’s relations with Indians are not another interpretation;

53 The principal encounters with natives are in Louis B. Wright, ed., The Prose
Works of William Byrd of Westover: Narratives of a Colonial Virginian (Cambridge,

54 In light of Lockridge’s assertion that William Byrd II was caught up in a
struggle with his father, it is significant for the book’s overall argument that in each
of these pursuits the son was a poor copy of the original: the younger Byrd never
did any trading among Indians himself; as a soldier in 1712 his only run-ins with
natives were dalliances with women; his expertise was mostly secondhand; and his
exploration could not have equaled the danger and excitement his father must
have experienced 50 years earlier.

55 Lockridge, Diary, and Life, of Byrd, 73, 113.

56 For “woodsmen” see Wright, ed., Prose Works, 47.

57 Lockridge, Diary, and Life, of Byrd, 134.
they belong to the analytical framework Lockridge himself has painstakingly pieced together. His own reading of a man trying to come to terms with his father’s legacy demands that Indians be included as another link in the heavy chain the younger Byrd dragged around most of his life. Lockridge, throughout his career, has been exemplar and defender of “the new social history,” an approach that has dramatically expanded our conception of who belongs in the study of America’s past. If in his own work he does not put Indians where they belong, it seems reasonable to ask who will.

It is bad enough that Lockridge and other recent students of the colonial Chesapeake overlook the Indian. It is even worse that the absence of natives from interpretations of that region’s development goes all but unremarked and unlamented. In this regard the field is not only not advancing; it is retreating. A decade ago Thad W. Tate, in an essay on the Chesapeake’s modern historians, chided scholars for their neglect of Indians. More recently, in a review article bringing things Chesapeake up to date, Anita Rutman says nothing at all about the natives’ presence or absence in the more than twenty books on the region published over the past ten years. Nor, in looking ahead, does she urge her fellow toilers in the Chesapeake vineyard to mend their ways. “There is a future in Chesapeake studies,” she assures us, but apparently not for Indians, who are not included among the “missing elements (women, blacks)” waiting to be “filled in” or the “whole areas [that] remain essentially unexplored.” Rutman seems to believe that the “meaningful grand synthesis of Chesapeake history” lurking somewhere down the road will have no place for Powhatan and Opechancanough, much less Indian slaves and Indian traders. If A Place in Time, Tobacco and Slaves, and The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II are any indication of what is in store, she may well be right.

III

It is a dizzying leap from the microscope probing the innermost secrets

59 For an exception see Fausz, “Invasion of Virginia,” VMHB, XCV (1987), 139.
61 Anita H. Rutman, “Still Planting the Seeds of Hope: The Recent Literature of the Early Chesapeake Region,” VMHB, XCV (1987), 23-24; for the count of books see ibid., 4. Ironically, the same issue of this journal contains an excellent article by the leading student of Indians in the colonial Chesapeake (J. Frederick Fausz, “Middlemen in Peace and War: Virginia’s Earliest Indian Interpreters, 1608-1632,” ibid., 41-64), and the following issue is devoted entirely to Virginia Indians.
of a place or person to a satellite surveying all of eastern North America.\textsuperscript{62} One deals in depth, the other breadth. One draws primarily upon arduous combing of original sources; the other relies more on a sweeping foray through the scholarly literature. Yet the result, as far as American Indians are concerned, is much the same. It is true that the packaging of syntheses has been improved: two recent surveys proclaim that they are up to date on the latest work about native Americans, and a third, by Paul Lucas, conveys the same impression by having its cover depict colonists and Indians haggling over a pile of furs.\textsuperscript{63} Yet none fully delivers on the implicit promise to provide full and fair coverage of native history.

The worst of the lot is Lucas's \textit{American Odyssey}, which confirms the old adage about a book and its cover. After a few opening remarks about Indians, \textit{American Odyssey} lapses into almost total silence on the topic. Lucas says nothing about those traders on the cover, leaves out the Puritans' war with the Pequots in 1636-1637, and mentions "King Phillip's [{\textit{sic}}] War," which forty years later devastated New England, only because it spawned a famous capitivity narrative and its "traumatic aftermath" affected colonial religious life.\textsuperscript{64} Moreover, when Lucas traces America's divergence from inherited Old World patterns, Indians are not among the principal causes of that divergence; the omission will be a surprise to anyone familiar with the work of James Axtell.\textsuperscript{65}

James A. Henretta and Gregory H. Nobles, authors of \textit{Evolution and Revolution: American Society, 1600-1820}, clearly have read Axtell and other experts on Indians. The opening chapter of their survey, entitled "The Collision of English and Native American Cultures," examines Indian ways and the impact of trade, disease, missionaries, and alcohol on native life. At the end of this first chapter they stress that the "fortunes" of native and newcomer were "intertwined," that "native Americans had a definite

\textsuperscript{62} The image of the satellite is from Bernard Bailyn, \textit{The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction} (New York, 1986), 3.


\textsuperscript{64} Lucas, \textit{American Odyssey}, 205, 113. Lucas does mention in passing that the fur trade was one of many colonial industries (see, for example, pp. 26, 27, 76), and he includes a section (pp. 205-210) on how Indian captivity narratives, along with tales of shipwrecks, help us to understand the 18th-century colonial mind.

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ibid.,} 51-54, 122-123. The only reference to Indians here is the observation (p. 123) that "the reality of Indians"—along with the frontier, climate, disease, and Catholic threats—was one factor that strengthened Protestant tendencies in the New England colonies. In his conclusion Lucas seems to reverse himself by including, without discussion, "the treatment of Indians" among the reasons that "America represented a distorted version of English and European society" (p. 231). For the Indians' role in shaping an American culture see Axtell, "The Indian Impact on English Colonial Culture," in \textit{European and Indian}, 272-315.
impact on the political and social (as well as the economic) evolution of the developing colonies."

A closer look reveals that Evolution and Revolution has come only a few steps farther down a very long road. Problems plague that first chapter in spite of its promising title. Only the last nine of its twenty-one pages deal with Indians; first the reader learns about England on the eve of colonization and the struggles of colonists in Virginia and New England. There is nothing inherently wrong with such an organizational scheme, except that Indians have been carefully extracted from the discussion of England's first successful colonial experiments. Thus we read about Virginia's early years—tobacco, disease, the Virginia Company's failure, political developments, and so on—with nary a word about Powhatan or the 1622 attack on the colony. Indians, instead of being integrated into the analysis, are relegated to a special section, a sidebar to the lead story.

The pages that do examine Indians during the opening years of English colonization have problems of their own. In the authors' hands the Iroquoian-speaking Susquehannocks become "Algonquin [sic] speakers," the highly localized and deeply fragmented Five Nations Iroquois are promoted to a "centrally organized . . . nation," while Powhatan, the closest thing Indians of the East Coast had to a powerful ruler, is assigned the lowly status of "leading sachem of the many small tribes of the Chesapeake Bay area." In the midst of this section a map of eastern North America in 1650 offers a welcome reminder that "almost all the land was still controlled by scores of Indian tribes" but then shows only twenty-seven of those scores (including the Seminoles, who did not exist for another century), leaving huge spaces on the map and thereby reinforcing the stereotype of an almost empty land. Finally, that word "controlled," used here and elsewhere, also gives the reader pause. Did the English "control" England, or the French Paris? The term connotes a tenuous grip on disputed territory, a far cry from the Indians' view of their homelands.

The opening chapter's errors and distortions are not the only opportu-

66 Henretta and Nobles, Evolution and Revolution, 27, 28. Also worth noting is their discussion of how Indians in the early national period adopted various strategies in attempts to resist the new nation's hegemony (ibid., 225-229).


68 Henretta and Nobles, Evolution and Revolution, 21, 20, 25.
nities missed in *Evolution and Revolution*. Later on in the analysis of colonial America there are other chances to bring Indians into the story in a meaningful way, but the chances, one by one, slip past. In their discussion of the relative numbers of blacks and whites in early Carolina, for example, Henretta and Nobles allude to a 1708 census without mentioning the 1,400 Indian slaves (almost 15 percent of the population) also counted by the census taker that year. Recent scholarship reveals that throughout the colonies not only Indian slaves but also Indian traders, Indian whalers, Indian Christians, and other natives remained scattered among the English settlements, and their histories belong in any of a number of the book’s later sections—on “The Atlantic Economy,” for instance, or “The Social Synthesis,” or the Great Awakening. That an otherwise excellent survey like *Evolution and Revolution* omits these Indians (to say nothing of those still beyond the frontier) bodes ill for what students of the 1990s, the book’s target audience, will learn about native America.

However they treat Indians, most surveys of the colonial field share the aspirations of Henretta and Nobles: to synthesize for classroom use the latest scholarship on early America. That in itself is a challenging task. But still another survey, this one by Bernard Bailyn, is even more ambitious, for it goes beyond synthesis to propose a new way of thinking about colonial history. Bailyn’s reading of the literature has persuaded him that the field is in “disarray”; “the sheer amount of accumulated information has overwhelmed the effective organizing principles, the major themes or interpretative structures, that have heretofore contained it.” What we need now is “a fresh look at the whole story, ... a general interpretation or set of related interpretations that ... provides a framework for a comprehensive, developmental narrative of early American history.” That new blueprint, he suggests, may be “The Peopling of British North America,” his ongoing investigation into the migrations across the Atlantic, a project that so far has produced two books.

Bailyn argues that elucidating “the peopling process”—following people as they left home to begin new lives in America, and learning as much as possible about those new lives—“enlarges the perspective of early Amer-

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73 The other is *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1986). My discussion of Bailyn’s work focuses on *Peopling*, which serves as “an introduction to the overall project” (ix).
ican history to the broadest possible range” by taking us into the remote reaches of Europe, Africa, and America. Some critics charge that it is not broad enough, however, that in fact Bailyn still looks at things through the eyes of the “independent white men[,] . . . the ambitious, self-improving winners in the great scramble for land.” Has Bailyn, too, left Indians (among others) out? He has vigorously denied the charge, and parts of his introductory volume seem to back him up. He admits that the four fundamental propositions, the compass points guiding his current inquiries, exclude Indians and Africans, but he also recognizes that both of these groups are “vital” to the larger story he is telling. Nor are Indians wholly absent from Bailyn’s overview of his work: he writes briefly of colonial fur traders; he mentions colonists adopted into Indian nations and Indians enslaved on colonial plantations; he takes us past an Indian cabin in the Virginia interior and through William Johnson’s manor house in Iroquoia. Moreover, he dwells at somewhat greater length on South Carolina’s Indian trade regime and the Indian wars that seared virtually every colony, and he promises still more in future volumes.

Until those volumes appear the jury will be out on Bailyn and the Indians, but at this point clues dropped in the introductory volume hint that his critics may be onto something. The qualifiers, protests, and discussions of natives notwithstanding, those holding out hope that Bailyn’s “fresh look” will at last incorporate Indians into the early American saga may see some disquieting signs. One is that after more than a decade of research he has not yet found a way of including them, however tentatively, in the four “broad lines of interpretation” he has fashioned. He is quick to point out that these four do not exhaust the possibilities and that in any case none is carved in stone; all will be tested by time and by further research and reflection. Meanwhile, however, the investigation proceeds without Indians, in the expectation that eventually these pieces to the puzzle will fit in somewhere.

The project’s title may be another concern to anyone interested in the scholarly treatment of Indians. To Bailyn, “The Peopling of British North America” is an old phrase endowed with “new meaning”; it now “means” or “implies” many things, including “the mingling and clashing of diverse

74 Bailyn, Peopling, 29, 8.
77 Bailyn, Peopling, 20.
78 Ibid., 72, 102 (traders), 129 (adopted), 109-110 (Indian slaves), 107 (Virginia Indians), 128 (Johnson).
79 Ibid., 110-111 (South Carolina trade), 109, 114-117 (wars); “Letters,” N.Y. Rev. of Books, XXXIV, No. 6 (Apr. 9, 1987), 45.
80 Bailyn, Peopling, 20.
groups and races."  
Still, there is no denying the enduring power of the old and accepted connotation of "peopling," which, if it does not suggest the Rutmans' "empty continent," certainly calls to mind William Bradford's vision of the "vast and unpeopled countries of America, . . . where there are only savage and brutish men which range up and down, little otherwise than the wild beasts of the same."  
In light of "peopling's" pedigree, resurrecting it for a study in which Indians are to be "vital" risks giving readers the wrong impression.

The implications of the title are reinforced by some of the book's rhetoric. Bailyn employs that time-honored but recently tarnished polarity between settlement (European) and wilderness (Indian), between field and forest. Much of his tale is about how Europeans "open[ed] to initial cultivation millions of acres in the wilderness to the west," those "millions of open acres east of the Mississippi" that (he neglects to add) Cherokees, Chickasaws, Delawares, Shawnees, and other Indian nations called home.  
And when they do find their way into the overview, the native occupants of these lands appear so alien that they all but defy efforts to understand them. Colonial traders who visited "strange Indian territories" returned "with strange tales and stranger experiences they could never fully tell," while adopted captives (some of whom did return and tell their stories) simply "disappeared across the forest pale."  

What can be understood—what must, Bailyn insists, be understood—is the blood that flowed when two worlds met. The South Carolina trade "was an enterprise of ferocious, often bloody, exploitation," and the Indian wars—the main arena of contact, to judge from this book—were "orgies of atrocities on both sides."  
On intercultural alliances such as the Anglo-Iroquois Covenant Chain, on trade that was mutually exploitative (and mutually profitable), on the Mayhews and other missionaries, The Peopling of British North America is silent. Ferocity and atrocity there certainly were, and in abundance. But that was not all there was to the American encounter. By unintentionally conjuring up images of America as unpeopled, by talking of a wilderness being opened, by dwelling upon bloodshed almost to the exclusion of everything else, Bailyn—at this stage, anyway—gives his critics enough evidence to suspect, if not convict, him of looking backward to old interpretations of the colonial world, not forward to new ones.

81 Ibid., 7-8.
83 Bailyn, Peopling, 8, 38. Appleby's review (WMQ, 3d Ser., XLIV [1987], 795) makes this point. For wilderness and forest see Bailyn, Peopling, 57, 58, 68, 104, 106, 128, 131; for the opening of the land see ibid., 7, 14, 64.
84 Bailyn, Peopling, 128-129.
85 Ibid., 110-111, 109. See also 114-117.
86 This is the main thrust of Appleby's review (WMQ, 3d Ser., XLIV [1987], 791-796).
IV

It is much easier to point out where students of early America have failed to pay proper regard to Indians than it is to explain the causes of that failure. One might argue that it is too soon to expect the latest scholarship on Indians to have any real impact on the larger school of colonial studies. It may be true that there is a lag-time, since it can take some years for new work to enter the mainstream of historical interpretation, but that seems unlikely in this case. For one thing, studies of women and blacks, who (like Indians) have only recently received the scholarly attention they deserve, have percolated much more quickly across the boundaries between specialists and generalists.87 For another, as noted earlier, there are indications that historians were more sensitive to Indian history in the 1970s, before much of the literature on the subject appeared, than they are today, when the scholarship on Indians is more abundant.

According to Bailyn, that scholarship itself is the problem. Explaining his own exclusion of native Americans from the heart of his story so far, he asserts that the work on Indians is too small in quantity and too poor in quality to be of much use. “Despite the mass of writing [about Indians and blacks], much of it polemical, that is available,” Bailyn argues, “we know as yet relatively little about their histories; we have nothing like the density of information about them that is available for other groups.” He pursues this line of thought in an explanatory note devoted to Indians alone, stating that “a narrative history of the coastal North American Indian population is still almost impossible to assemble.”88

Thus Bailyn seems content to hold off until students of Indian history do more work, and do it better. But why wait?89 To observe that we do not know as much about Indians as we do about, say, Puritans, is no reason to embrace one and shun the other. “Polemical” or not (and Bailyn cites only one work that is—Jennings’s Invasion of America), there is indeed a “mass of writing” available, full of information that scholars, filtering out any traces of polemicism, can put to use in expanding our perspective on colonial history. If, taken together, this information does not add up to a narrative history, that is hardly unique to Indians. Bailyn and others have pointed out that nowadays such a history of colonial British America is equally elusive, though for different reasons.90 In any event, a sweeping

87 See, for example, the treatment in Henretta and Nobles, Evolution and Revolution.
89 I ask this even as I acknowledge and appreciate Professor Bailyn’s vote of confidence in the promise of my own research (Bailyn, Peopling, 141, n. 15).
narrative of the native experience in eastern North America should not be a prerequisite for incorporating Indians into a work like Lockridge’s *William Byrd* or a survey such as Bailyn’s that, like every survey, draws upon the detailed monograph more than the general history.

While the scholarship on Indians should not take the blame for the continuing silence, perhaps its putative sponsor, ethnohistory, should. This methodology has enjoyed a distinguished career devoted to broadening the horizons of scholarly inquiry. By arguing that Indians and other forgotten peoples are suitable (indeed, essential) subjects of study, by asserting that to be successful such study must be multidisciplinary, by insisting that scholars examine potsherds as well as laws, site plans as well as letters, linguistics as well as diaries, folklore as well as travel accounts—by tirelessly preaching this sermon, ethnohistory has tried to add new elements to the historian’s stock in trade. When William Fenton went to Williamsburg (and for many years thereafter), the sermon had to be delivered again and again in order to alert historians to the world of possibility awaiting them outside the archives and history departments.

The preaching is no longer necessary, however, and the term itself, as a former president of the American Society for Ethnohistory once argued, “has outgrown its usefulness.” Colonial historians have gotten the message; they have picked up ethnohistory’s method, less perhaps from people like Fenton than from the French *Annales* school and other sources. Wherever they got the idea, students of early America—in the topics they choose, the sources they consult, and the techniques they employ—are now doing what ethnohistory’s champions have been pushing them to do: borrow freely from other disciplines and examine all sorts of evidence to give voice to the historically silent. Besides the frontier separating native and newcomer, recent scholarship has highlighted other important boundaries of colonial life: between free and slave, men and women, clergy and laity, coast and interior, literate and illiterate. Because


92 Trigger, “Indian and White History,” in Foster *et al.*, eds., *Extending the Rafters*, 22. He would drop it in favor of “Indian history.”

of this new work, the line between ethnohistory and "conventional" or "traditional" history, a line that was clear a generation ago, is now virtually erased.  

But the term "ethnohistory" is not just redundant; it is pernicious. By calling themselves ethnohistorians, scholars writing on Indians in the colonial period may actually contribute to the persistent exclusion of natives from the rest of early American studies. In fact, what James Axtell does is not strikingly different from what Rhys Isaac or Peter H. Wood or Laurel Thatcher Ulrich do; it only seems that way because Axtell, like most of those interested in Indians, continues to fly the ethnohistorical flag—a flag standing for a journal, a society, and an approach devoted primarily to native peoples of the Americas. 

No doubt colonial historians should ignore the talk about the ethnohistorical method and peruse the results, for then they might well see that the rhetoric is empty and the work on Indians akin to their own. But few have bothered, because the idea that there is some arcane way to study native history reinforces the habit of considering the Indian a special case demanding separate treatment by that small band of scholars well versed in the methodology.  

This bad habit—this almost instinctive inclination to set Indians aside

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94 It might be argued that ethnohistory's distinctiveness lies in its focus on two cultures in contact along a frontier. While James Axtell observes that this is indeed where "historians have found the greatest utility and most distinctive contribution of ethnohistory," neither he nor other leading ethnohistorians restrict the approach to study of the frontier between peoples ("Ethnohistory of Early America," WMQ, 3d Ser., XXXV [1978], 113-116; quotation on p. 116).

95 My argument here would move the study of Indians in the opposite direction from that urged by Calvin Martin, who criticizes not only the term but the methodology. Martin recently has asserted that the scholar's Indian is a "caricature." To understand the native perspective and the American Indian experience, he would have us leave history—a European construct, grounded in notions of time and of the world that are alien to Indians—even farther behind. We should, he argues, "get out of history, as we know it," in order to enter the natives' "mythic world." Martin is correct to say that our comprehension of the Indians' perspective is still feeble and that a fuller appreciation of the natives' world view is needed. But one wonders whether removing Indians from history (and history from Indians) improves our understanding of what has happened in the Americas over the past five centuries. See Calvin Martin, ed., The American Indian and the Problem of History (New York, 1987), Introduction, chap. 1, and Epilogue; quotations on pp. 9, 15, 30.

96 The last 20 volumes of Ethnohistory (1968-1987) contain 234 articles and documents relating to American Indians, 110 on all other topics. Over the past five years, under the editorship of Shepard Krech III, the journal's emphasis on native America has decreased somewhat; I am grateful to Daniel K. Richter, an associate editor of Ethnohistory, for pointing this out to me. For discussion of ethnohistory's relationship to history see Axtell, "Ethnohistory: An Historian's Viewpoint," in European and Indian, 3-15; Bruce G. Trigger, The Children of Aataensic: A History of the Huron People to 1660 (Montreal, 1976), 12, 24, "Problems and Prospects," Ethnohistory, XXIX (1982), 3, 9-10, and "Indian and White History," in Foster et al., eds., Extending the Rafters, 22.
(which the use of “ethnohistory” unwittingly encourages)—is symptomatic of a strain of presentism afflicting the scholarly community, an affliction that may also help explain why Indians are still left out in the cold. Thinking of America’s native peoples today as a tiny minority isolated on reservations, we jump to the conclusion that America has always looked like this, that in colonial times, too, Indians were not only few and far between but few and far away. That other groups long excluded—women, for instance, or blacks—have made greater strides toward being accepted as integral parts of America’s past may be due not to any superior quantity or quality of scholarship but to the fact that they are today more visible, more vocal than Indians are. They intrude on contemporary consciousness, they are part of modern America, in a way that Indians simply do not and, given their numbers and special status, cannot.

We need to remember that things were different two or three centuries ago. To help jog our memory, it might be useful to follow Dr. Alexander Hamilton, a Scottish physician recently arrived in Maryland, as he rode along the coastal highway from Annapolis to Maine and back again during the summer of 1744. Hamilton was not looking for Indians (nor they for him), yet he often crossed paths with them. At Princeton a lone Indian traveler greeted him with the customary How’s t’n ni tap. Farther along the road a Narragansett “King” named George Ninigret treated the doctor to a glass of wine. In Boston Hamilton sat near some Indians during a service in King’s Chapel, and two days later he rushed to a window to watch a delegation of Mohawks march down King’s Street. And so it went: riding past a native village near New London, coming upon three Indians on the road from Boston to Cambridge, passing a party of some eighteen or twenty more en route to Norwalk, watching ten others gathering oysters in front of a tavern where he breakfasted—Hamilton could not help but run into Indians.

Even when they were not before his eyes, native Americans were apt to intrude into Hamilton’s thoughts and conversations. In Philadelphia he chatted with Virginians who were on their way to meet with Iroquois ambassadors at Lancaster, and he later met another traveler who had seen forty canoes of Indians bound for the same conference. In New York City he heard talk of recent Indian attacks on the frontier, attacks that had distant echoes as Hamilton passed Mount Hope on the Massachusetts border, King Philip’s stronghold during the great conflict of the previous century. In the flesh or in the mind, the Indians’ diversity was as striking as their ubiquity. They ranged in status from slaves around Norwalk to the Mohawk sachems striding down a Boston thoroughfare, in size of party from a solitary traveler to an entire “caravan,” in manners from those

oysterers—“wretches” who “waded about stark naked”—to George Nini-gret who, living “after the English mode,” attired his wife in “silks, hoops, stays, and dresses,” educated his children in “the belles letters,” and was, even to the snobbish Hamilton, “a very . . . mannerly man.”

Dr. Hamilton and his contemporaries knew something their descend-ants have forgotten: Indians were very much a part of the early American scene, even late in the colonial era and in places long since taken over by Europeans. Our failure to grasp this simple yet vital fact of life in early America has crippled our every effort to reconstruct the colonial world on paper. Without the leap of imagination needed to include those Boston church-goers or that Princeton Indian in our vision of early America, we have not really understood—have not really begun to understand—the colonial experience.

To make that leap it will be necessary to expand our horizons, to redefine the meaning of colonial America. Dispatching more researchers across the cultural and scholarly divide separating Indian from colonist will certainly help, but it is not enough. There must be some means of using the information these explorers bring back, some way of fitting what they learn into what we already know. One possible approach is to consider Indian peoples in colonial times communities and place them among “the little communities of early America.”

Over the past generation historians have uncovered many variations on the standard theme of the colonial community. Beginning with a search for the typical New England town, they have come to grant not only the range of village types in that region but also to recognize that elsewhere in early America communities were not absent, just different. In a recent survey of the genre, Darrett Rutman has argued that certain fundamental conditions tie together these disparate works. The “little communities of Anglo-America” were, he asserts, small, face-to-face, cooperative places, where the nuclear family and neighborhood network combined to create a “moral community” that shaped the contours of everyday life. For the most part these “social ‘fields’ ” were subsistence farming communities, their routine marked by a slow pace that was subject to seasonal rhythms.

98 Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744 (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1948), 34 (Princeton), 98 (“King” George), 110 (Indians in church), 112-114 (Mohawks), 141 (Canadian Indians), 162 (Indian village), 168 (Norwalk, caravan, servants), 172 (oysterers), 23, 34, 178, 103-104 (conversation and thought). Hamilton did leave the coast to make a side trip up the Hudson River (pp. 50-79), where he saw even more Indians. I was alerted to this valuable source by Angus Calder, Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English Speaking Empires from the Fifteenth Century to the 1780s (New York, 1981), 509. 99 Rutman, “Little Communities,” WMQ, 3d Ser., XLIII (1986), 163-178.
Insular places preoccupied with their own affairs, all were nonetheless involved in the wider world through "outward linkages" that touched each in a variety of ways.\textsuperscript{100}

Rutman, by uncovering the similarities among the many species of community in Anglo-America, implicitly invites us to continue widening the search by venturing into Indian Country. As varied in character as their colonial neighbors, the "little communities" of native America shared many (though by no means all) of the traits Rutman mentions. While they were not composed of nuclear families and did not have to cope with the consequences of their own population growth, they, too, were small, face-to-face, cooperative places connected by kinfolk, neighbors, and a shared morality. They, too, tended to be heavily involved in farming and therefore closely bound to changes of the seasons. They, too, were part of a wider Atlantic world.\textsuperscript{101}

Careful attention to these outward linkages is particularly important to an understanding of natives and their place in early America. For one thing, an Indian community was touched by people and events beyond its borders even more deeply than was its colonial counterpart; in native America disease was more devastating, participation in the Atlantic economy more revolutionary, warfare more destructive. For another, the outward linkages of a colonial community could stretch west as well as east, across the frontier as well as across the sea. It is essential, then, to study contacts among all of the inhabited "patches of ground," European or Indian or African, dotting the American landscape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{102} Here T. H. Breen's call for greater attention to "the specific historical contexts in which interaction occurred" will be helpful, for it requires that we listen in on "cultural 'conversations' of the past" in order to reconstruct the setting and flesh out the character of the actors.\textsuperscript{103} A little judicious eavesdropping will pick up snatches of conversation that can shed new light on European colonists, African slaves, and American Indians, as well as on the history that, together, they made in North America.

Considering Natick with Lockridge's Dedham, Senecas with the Rutmans' Middlesex, or Logstown with Stephanie G. Wolf's Germantown is not intended to accomplish what the English failed to do: turn Indians into colonists. Rather, such comparisons—while highlighting differences as well as similarities—may help to recast our thinking, they may tempt us to make that imaginative leap into foreign territory. Like any leap, this one

\textsuperscript{100}\textit{Ibid.}, 163, 169, 165, 177.

\textsuperscript{101}Daniel K. Richter has made an important start on drawing this connection and suggesting some of the linkages mentioned below ("Cultural Brokers and Intercultural Politics: New York–Iroquois Relations, 1664–1701," \textit{JAH}, LXXV [1988], 40-67).

\textsuperscript{102}Rutman, "Little Communities," \textit{WMQ}, 3d Ser., XLIII (1986), 166.

\textsuperscript{103}Breen, "Creative Adaptations," in Greene and Pole, eds., \textit{Colonial British America}, 197.
carries risks. We leave behind the comfortable and familiar; what lies on the other side is only dimly visible. But the risk seems worth the reward, for unless we raise our sights, unless we forge new, scholarly outward linkages of our own, we will never recapture the world that Dr. Alexander Hamilton and those naked Indian oysterers shared. Both the native oysterers and the Scottish physician deserve a better fate.