

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Brothers among Nations: The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America, 1580-1660. By Cynthia J. Van Zandt.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0v64p5c6>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 33(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2009-03-01

DOI

10.17953

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This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

and studies. It is not the cost of mounting an exhibition of Tafoya's work that is prohibitive but rather a lack of expertise and sense of purpose to break from the complacency of practiced and comfortable narratives that transforms pottery into what we believe it is and our own longing for an aboriginality and traditionality (149). We do need to challenge ourselves, believing we can never know enough of the complexities of Pueblo pottery (and other Native art forms) whether old or new, in public or private hands. Good work on North American and Native arts is welcomed and needed. However, it is a decidedly subtle endeavor that requires considerable care to balance the popular and scholarly literature, to balance what the potters do, and to avoid sentimentalizing the present context (part of the overall marketing of contemporary Southwest pottery) for lack of historical and contextual investigation and knowledge.

Potters have for centuries offered us great insights into their culture and history through their work, but we continue to ignore it. We will never understand all of Pueblo pottery, but there are new insights to be gained. Good scholarship requires us to find existing systems of interpretation rather than to create new ones.

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Brothers among Nations: The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America, 1580–1660. By Cynthia J. Van Zandt. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 264 pages. \$49.95 cloth.

Do we really need another book about the history of colonial America, especially the well-trodden ground of Jamestown and New England? Historian Cynthia J. Van Zandt proves that we do. *Brothers among Nations* suggests that we may know less than we think about the early history of North America. By studying European and Native American communities from the Chesapeake Bay to New England, Van Zandt reveals that early European colonists were involved in a surprisingly entangled and complex web of intercultural alliances that linked them together. She argues that communities in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries survived “only through their connections with other communities, including those with people from other cultures” (4).

Historians have spent the better part of the last century producing works about colonial America, but these largely community-centered studies have created the illusion that individual colonies existed in isolation of one another. *Brothers among Nations* follows a more recent trend in the historiography of colonial America by placing the experience of Euro-American colonists within the larger context of the Atlantic world, linking the peripheries of European empires to their centers. Van Zandt takes this approach one step further and moves the center of that world from the Atlantic to the colonies, arguing that the communities of her study were part of a larger world that included other

neighboring European colonies and the diverse Native nations that inhabited the eastern seaboard.

Van Zandt begins her study with an explanation of how Europeans and Native Americans “mapped” one another. She argues that mapping was a “process that was linked inextricably and explicitly to making sense of social and physical space” (7). Europeans and Native Americans acted as early ethnographers, recording each other’s structures of political organization, military strength, and alliances. Their findings, she argues, provided the basis for how colonists and Native people understood one another. Readers will be particularly interested in Van Zandt’s examination of how Native peoples mapped Europeans by actively seeking information about their new European neighbors.

For the most part, this section (chapters 1 through 3) is relatively broad and focused on the Chesapeake, as Van Zandt discusses larger theories about how Europeans and Native Americans “read” each other and recorded each other’s language, spirituality, ceremonies, and other cultural practices. Although Van Zandt uses the terminology of mapping to craft her study as something new, the examination of how Europeans and Native Americans studied each other is not. Nearly a decade old, Karen Ordahl Kupperman’s *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (2000) demonstrates how Europeans read Indian bodies, tattoos, hairstyles, and clothing. More recently, Ann Little’s *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England* (2006) illustrates how Native peoples and Europeans studied each other’s appearance and language and used it to blur the relationship between colonist and Indian. Still, Van Zandt adds a new dimension to these types of study by populating her broad study of language and culture with intimate examples of how the reading or mapping of colonial counterparts shaped individual lives.

In a compelling rereading of the Pocahontas story, Van Zandt presents the Powhatan woman known as Pocahontas as an individual immersed in the intercultural alliance between her people and the larger English empire. Her relationships to English men and marriage to John Rolfe, Van Zandt argues, were strategic components of the diplomatic alliance between New World neighboring communities. These relationships, long a part of local indigenous practices of child exchange and alliance building, allowed Pocahontas to navigate among the English colonists and act as an intercultural mediator for her people. Furthermore, the Powhatan chief Wahusonacock “used his daughter Pocahontas as his eyes and ears in the English settlement and instructed her to conduct extensive ethnographic observation for him” (73).

The book’s second half marks a dramatic change in style and substance from the first half. The focus on mapping gives way to more personal accounts, as Van Zandt uses the lives of several individuals to trace connections between seemingly isolated communities. In particular, she explores the life of merchant Isaac Allerton, who used his linguistic and diplomatic skills to negotiate the complex and sometimes turbulent world of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century New England, New Amsterdam, and New Sweden. In one of the most interesting expositions in the book, Van Zandt explains how William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation*, which underplayed

intercultural alliances by portraying Plymouth as an isolated community, has been greatly responsible for our historical amnesia in regards to Allerton. The short analysis of Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* points to the necessity of more studies like *Brothers among Nations*.

By writing from the vantage point of Plymouth, and Plymouth alone, Bradford portrays a world that was motionless, where Indians appeared on the margins, and where internal political and economic issues were of utmost importance. However, by focusing on Allerton, who slipped in and out of numerous colonial communities (and even back and forth between the Americas and Europe), Van Zandt reveals a much more mobile and multilingual world where intercultural alliances were crucial in maintaining relationships between Europeans and Native peoples and between Europeans and other Europeans in America. This dramatically altered view of colonial New England not only ties European colonies together, but it also places Native peoples at the story's center and imparts to them an important role in the early history of colonial America.

Allerton was not alone in understanding the importance of intercultural alliances and colonial mobility not limited to north of the Chesapeake. In colonial Virginia, official William Claiborne likewise understood the importance of intercultural alliances, especially in regard to the lucrative business of trade with Native communities. Alliances benefited more than just Native Americans and Euro-Americans. Van Zandt argues that African slaves also utilized alliances to assert limited control over their own bodies. In a short chapter on court cases involving slaves of the Dutch West India Company, Van Zandt illustrates how alliances among slaves were used to subvert their masters in New Amsterdam. The cases are profoundly interesting and open new questions about slavery in early America, but ultimately the chapter breaks from the narrative of how Allerton and Claiborne were able to use their skills and understanding of alliances to navigate the political, diplomatic, and economic landscape of the colonial New World.

Van Zandt concludes by trying to connect the people, places, and alliances outlined in the book, but drawing connections between those involved in the web of personal and community alliances proves a difficult task. How do Pocahontas, Bradford, the Susquehannock, Allerton, Claiborne, the slaves of the Dutch West India Company, and the numerous other historical actors cited in the book connect to one another? The difficulty in answering this question (or the impossibility of answering it) points to the strength of *Brothers among Nations*; the New World was a far more muddled place than historians have identified it. Men like Allerton were able to shift between identities easily. He used his English birth to define himself as an Englishman when residing in the Plymouth colony, yet he relied on his ability to speak Dutch and his membership with the Dutch West India Company to identify himself as Dutch when it benefited him in New Amsterdam. Allerton kept homes in both colonies.

All of the communities mentioned in *Brothers among Nations*—European, Native, and African—shared the difficult task of cohabitating the same space. In that way, Van Zandt has done a wonderful job of redrawing our map of the

colonial New World. Moreover, she demonstrates that the worlds of Allerton, Pocahontas, John Smith, Claiborne, and other intercultural mediators of the early seventeenth century were mostly lost by the end of the century, as Europeans no longer desired or encouraged intercultural alliances as the primary diplomatic association between themselves and others in the New World. By the end of the seventeenth century, European nations increasingly envisioned a map of the New World absent competing nations—European or Native American.

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Cultural Contact and Linguistic Relativity among the Indians of Northwestern California. By Sean O’Neil. 354 pages. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. \$50.00 cloth.

The indigenous languages and cultures of northwestern California have long provided an especially interesting topic for scholars interested in comparative research. For many centuries the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk have embraced similar eco-cultural adaptations yet maintained their distinctive languages even while speaking those of their neighbors. Prior scholarship on these languages has appropriately emphasized two topics: linguistic diffusion and linguistic relativity. Scholars such as William Bright and Joel Sherzer have represented this region as an “ethnolinguistic area” characterized by significant diffusion of linguistic structures across language boundaries.

Edward Sapir and Bright have also showcased the region as a type of living laboratory for gauging the nature and extent of linguistic relativity or what is often called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: language profoundly influences the worldview of its speakers. What better place to study this than in northwestern California where speakers from three distinct language families have adapted to a common environment? Because prior scholarship lacks Sean O’Neil’s command of the comparative linguistics of these languages as well as his original field research in each language community, it is no wonder that the author has produced the definitive treatment of this area and, in the process, provided clear, if complex, answers to many of the questions about linguistic diffusion and relativity raised by earlier scholars.

The author announces his general goal, which is “to assess the long term effects of social contact among speakers of diverse languages,” and his temporal emphasis on the traditional cultures of these language communities as they existed from precontact times to just before the 1840s and the massive disruption of indigenous groups that occurred since that time (ix). The book follows a five-part plan. In the two chapters comprising part I, O’Neil provides a firm foundation for the chapters that follow by introducing the linguistic diversity represented by the three languages and by producing a selective but extremely useful review of the considerable scholarly literature on linguistic relativity. Though nonlinguists can be overwhelmed by the apparent structural