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The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667–1783. By David L. Preston. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. 408 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

David Preston's fantastic new book, *The Texture of Contact*, is a wonderful addition to the existing literature on the Iroquois that historians with a more general interest in Early America will want to read. Focusing upon a series of *Iroquoian borderlands* or *Iroquoian frontiers*, Preston examines in close compass the nature of the relationships that developed between Native peoples and settlers not solely on battlefields or in council houses but also at "frontier farms, forts, churches, mills, taverns, and towns." In these small-scale encounters, he argues, "ordinary people powerfully shaped the larger social, economic, and diplomatic patterns of cultural contact through their routine negotiations." These local relationships, the substance of everyday life along these early American frontiers, he adds, "were as important in maintaining peace as the formal alliances orchestrated by British, French, and Iroquois diplomats" (5).

Preston prefers to employ terms like *Iroquoian borderlands* to older concepts like, for example, the New York Frontier, because the Five and later the Six Nations "did not operate in nebulous and boundaryless borderlands but with definite senses of boundaries among themselves and with other nations." Settlers living along the Iroquois frontier "operated in a distinctly Indian context and landscape" (14). Settlers found themselves quite often conforming to Iroquois expectations and accommodating themselves to what the Haudenosaunee expected from their neighbors and kin. The Iroquois expanded during the colonial period, establishing frontiers in the St. Lawrence, Ohio, and Susquehanna river valleys. They defy and complicate the stereotype of Native peoples retreating consistently in the face of expanding colonial settlements. The Laurentian Iroquois towns, Preston correctly points out, were not mere dumping grounds for Catholic refugees but were "towns that flourished both spiritually and materially." Sidestepping, in a sense, the historiographical debate over the role of Catholicism in the founding of Kahnawake and other settlements in the region, Preston asserts that the growing and significant population of these Christian Iroquois communities, as well as "their importance as trading partners and military allies of the French, gave the settled Indians the ability to assert their autonomy and independence" (28). For the Mohawk Valley, Preston describes how Palatine, Dutch, English, Irish, and African colonists lived in close order with Mohawks, Oneidas, and Mahicans. At Schoharie, Tiononderoge, and Canajoharie, Indians and non-Indians lived lives "often characterized by mutually beneficial social, economic, and religious relationships" (70). The material existence of the Mohawks and their neighbors closely resembled each other, and they derived their living from the land in remarkably similar ways. Though New Yorkers steadily pressed upon Iroquois lands in the Mohawk Valley, the "Mohawks accommodated the New York colonists and lived a peaceful, if increasingly tense, coexistence" (115).

Despite this mounting tension, the Mohawk Valley remained at peace during the colonial era, but this was not so for Iroquoian frontiers in the

Susquehanna River valley. Settlers who moved into this region sought land and independence, and for them, peaceful relationships with the local Indians were literally a necessity for survival. They coexisted, Preston argues, and “communicated, and crafted mutually beneficial relationships through such routine encounters as the small-scale trading of corn, alcohol, tobacco, and wild game” (118). Still, with some considerable understatement, Preston points out that at times and in places an “undercurrent of disagreement” existed. Preston does not ignore the violence that so many historians have found characteristic of these frontiers. Natives and newcomers, after all, competed for control of finite frontier resources—hunting grounds, springs, and fertile soil—which in the end they used in incompatible ways. Out of these incompatibilities came conflict. Furthermore, “different cultural beliefs about alcohol, land use, property, and reciprocity made settler-Indian encounters prone to break down into fights, brawls, and, more infrequently, murders” (130). Thus in Preston’s retelling, the source of the bloodshed that came to the region in the middle of the eighteenth century stemmed less from disease, systemic abuses in trade, or the failure of diplomacy conducted by imperial officials than it did from “the mistreatment, misunderstanding, and violence that arose in the context of ordinary colonial farmers and Indians’ everyday encounters” (155). Preston emphasizes the primacy of local relationships gone bad and finds in the texture of everyday life the roots of racial violence.

Yet throughout the book, Preston argues that too many historians have characterized “all white settlers as racist killers” (222–23) or have viewed colonists only as “land-hungry, violent and ethnocentric catalysts of conflict with Indians” (6). In the Ohio River valley, he argues, even after the violence of the Great War for Empire, “Indians and settlers continued to interact in nonviolent ways, establish mutually satisfactory trading relationships, and negotiate over land just as they had before the wars” (211). Preston concedes, however, that new ingredients “in these encounters were the mutual distrust, hatred, and vengeful feelings that some—but not all—Indians and colonists held” (233).

But how many colonists hated Indians? And vice versa? Certainly Preston’s criticism of previous historians is a touch overstated: many scholars have examined these early frontiers and none of them have depicted “*all* white settlers as racist killers” (202). In an effort to distance himself from the work of earlier scholars who have emphasized the violence of the early American frontier, Preston may in places go too far in the other direction, setting up something of a straw man. Clearly, enough colonists and Indians hated each other to immerse parts of the Ohio and Susquehanna valleys in blood during the second half of the eighteenth century, and it does not hurt Preston’s argument at all to say so.

Despite the manifold horrors of intercultural warfare in the Ohio country, described so well by so many historians, peace returned in some measure at its conclusion. The responsibility for the violence that reignited there in the 1760s, Preston asserts, cannot justly be placed upon frontier settlers. Rather, it was the British Army “more so than the squatters, with whom Natives often peacefully dealt” that “was the touchstone of conflict because of its military

colonization of the Ohio Valley” (223). Like revolutionary-era American colonists, Native peoples in the Ohio Valley “experienced the British presence as an unwanted standing army that threatened to destroy their basic liberties” (227). Perhaps so, but as historians like James Merrell have pointed out, the viciousness of groups like the Paxton Boys—and other Indian killers—can also be understood through examining closely the texture of contact between colonial settlers and Native men and women. Fear and hatred existed uneasily beside the manifold encounters that characterized everyday life.

Preston carries his discussion of intercultural relations along these borderlands through to the end of the revolution. At the outset of the war between rebels and redcoats, the Six Nations found themselves caught “between two hells” with both the colonists and the British demanding their loyalty (283). Even here, however, the texture of earlier contacts influenced the decisions that Iroquois people made. The close ties between Palatine settlers and their Oneida neighbors, for instance, informed the choices of many Oneidas to side with the Americans during the Revolutionary War. That conflict rapidly became a race war characterized by a level of hostility that justified horrid atrocities. Many Iroquois fled the homelands where they had lived in close contact with their non-Indian neighbors. Iroquois people who remained behind understood well that the victorious Americans coveted their lands, hoped to dispossess them, and wished to drive them into the West.

David Preston, in his first book, has offered an important addition to the literature of the Iroquois and Native peoples in Early America more generally. Although a number of important and well-received books on the Iroquois have been published in the past few years, and still more important work is in press, none of these works do quite what Preston has aimed to do. He looks, as much as his imaginative use of the sources allows, at the lives of ordinary colonists and Native peoples. He looks at how they interacted, how Native peoples accommodated Europeans and assimilated them into their world, and how colonists of the empire and citizens of the American state failed to live up to what their neighbors expected of them. Although in places Preston downplays the genuine hatred that developed out of frontier encounters, few recent books demonstrate as effectively the tenuous possibility for intercultural peace and the enormous forces that denied this accommodation a chance to be anything but a short-lived phenomenon.

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