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The Indians' New South: Cultural Change in the Colonial Southeast. The Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History. By James Axtell.

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American writing, its cultural and historical contexts, and various critical methodologies.

Of course, as Native American literature defines and reinvents itself, it is an unfortunate reality that publications like Wiget's become dated the moment they are published. The Native American literary scene in 1992 or 1993, when the contributors were writing their entries, was much different than it is today, and with any type of anthology or dictionary, absences become presences. Many readers will be disappointed to find no entries on Susan Power, Sherman Alexie, Janice Gould, LeAnne Howe, Adrian Louis, and, one of my favorite writers, Luci Tapahonso. There is also no information on Linda Hogan's novels or Joy Harjo's musical explorations. While the editor and publisher cannot be held responsible for such contingencies, two other omissions are worth mentioning. First of all, Mary Tall Mountain, who was featured in the PBS *Power of the Word* series does not rate an entry, nor does Native American poetry, despite articles on new Native American fiction and new Native American theater. But if these are the most egregious errors of judgment—and they seem to be—then there remains little in Wiget's volume to second-guess.

Overall, this is an excellent reference for advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and academics in English, American studies, cultural studies, and ethnic studies departments who want or need to bone up on particular authors they might be teaching. But it is also a valuable source for those working in the field of American Indian studies because it enables those of us who tend to specialize in particular periods or genres to acquire a working knowledge of authors, motifs, or historical movements outside our immediate discipline or expertise. Furthermore, when a particular topic requires more in-depth commentary than this volume can provide, the bibliographies become even more indispensable. The hardcover edition of *Handbook of Native American Literature* was a *Library Journal* Best Reference Book and a *Choice* Outstanding Academic Book in 1994. Given the time and effort that went into this publication, these accolades are no surprise.

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The Indians' New South: Cultural Change in the Colonial Southeast. The Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History. By James Axtell. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 102 pages. \$22.95 cloth; \$11.95 paper.

Students of Southern history have always looked forward to the annual publication of the Walter Lynwood Fleming lectures. For more than half a century they have afforded eminent scholars the opportunity to revisit their own work and to reflect on the fields in which they write. One subject, however, has been conspicuously absent from the series—the Native American South. If by his own admission he does not consider himself a Southern historian, James Axtell was a worthy choice for the honor. He has written several important

essays and monographs on Native ethnohistory, and he is well acquainted with the New Indian historiography that has gone so far to revise earlier interpretations of the colonial South.

Over a decade ago James Merrell introduced ethnohistorians to the idea of the “Indians’ New World”—a world in which Indians as well as Europeans experienced new cultures, new goods, and new flora and fauna. The language of Merrell’s model enabled scholars to articulate in new ways a range of challenges to a conventional historiography which posited that Indians were obstacles to the expansion of European civilization. But what at one time was a useful paradigm for revisionist history has become of late a formless idea imposed on contact situations without any further thought to its development as an interpretive framework. In *The Indians’ New South*, for example, the term provides a nice metaphor for the author’s thesis, but the interpretation implied by the term is disappointing.

After three centuries of European colonization, the South, Axtell argues, “remained unmistakably ‘Indian’ throughout” (p. 4). The Spanish were the first to try to carve settlements out of the region, and aspiring conquistadors like Juan Ponce de Leon, Panfilo de Narvaez, and Hernando de Soto combed the coast and the interior in search of slaves to steal, ores to mine, and lands to colonize. Despite their repeated failures to found a colony, the Spanish persisted until 1565 when Pedro Menendez de Aviles smashed the starving French settlement at Fort Caroline and established St. Augustine. From this tiny city Jesuits and Franciscans carried God’s word across the Florida peninsula, alienating and irritating Natives wherever they went. The tensions built up by the missionary endeavor boiled to a head in the last decades of the seventeenth century when the Guales of the Georgia coast and other groups rose in rebellion and, with English support, wrecked the mission system. Axtell remarks that the Spanish never subdued the Florida Indians, but, given the diseases and dislocations that decimated the mission populations, few Indians survived the Spanish.

France and England followed Spain into the South, and each imperial power made its own distinct impression on groups like the Creeks, Natchez, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Cherokees. The French possessed neither the manpower nor the might to decimate the Native groups they encountered in the Lower Mississippi Valley, and they gained a reputation for being generous if not exactly efficient in supplying the Indians’ wants. The English, however, had the will and the means to push Natives in ways the French could only dream about. Deerskin traders, in particular, traveled throughout the South extending credit to Indian hunters and pressing them for repayment.

To be sure, the goods that traders introduced to the interior shaped Native cultures in altogether new ways, but, as Axtell points out, Indians determined to a large extent how cloth, livestock, metal goods, and so forth shaped and were shaped by the contours of their preexisting cultures. The cultural agency he attributes to Indians supports his important assertion that each group’s history was every bit as dynamic as that of their European counterparts. If, however, the Native history of the region was one of constant flux, did the same things that made it “Indian” in 1492 make it so in 1792? Indeed, to what extent the South remained “Indian” throughout the time period considered is unclear. Does

Axtell mean "Indian" in terms of culture? Or population? Or politics? Or something else? At the same time Axtell applauds Native agency, he acknowledges that the mechanisms of commercial credit and debt that underwrote trade and diplomacy with the Europeans lay beyond the Indians' control. The scant attention he devotes to the problems of economic dependency and political power, however, belies the rich body of work undertaken by Richard White, Kathryn Holland Braund, and Wilma Dunaway. Their different interpretations of trade and Native autonomy raise serious doubts about the degree to which the region remained indisputably Indian.

In spite of such problems, the book's greatest weakness lies in the author's approach to the subject matter: the Indians play only a small role in the history Axtell narrates. While the author relates numerous anecdotes that reflect Indians' reactions to the opening of the New World, he does not explain in any systematic way how the original Southerners viewed both the colonization of their region and the innumerable changes in their lives that contact caused. Instead, the author describes for the most part how Spanish officials handled their Native allies, how Jesuits and Franciscans ministered to their charges, and how English traders abused their customers. Scholars not familiar with Native Southern historiography, consequently, will be hard pressed to take seriously the claim that the region was "thoroughly" Indian because the details of Axtell's narrative do little to displace the tired convention that Native history was a function of European colonization. Centering each chapter on a particular imperial power rather than on an indigenous culture like the Calusas, the Apalachees, the Muskogeas, or the Cherokees only exacerbates the problem.

Axtell's discussion of the substantial differences between the colonial efforts of the Spanish, the French, and the English is more successful. Building on Paul Hoffman's recent book, *A New Andalusia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast during the Sixteenth Century* (1990), the author notes that nothing in the colonial history of the South was inevitable. Why each power pursued a different agenda and why the Spanish and the French failed where the English succeeded are important questions. And pondering them will force readers to reevaluate the different roads not taken by all Southerners, European and Native.

The Indians' New South may fail to carry the weight of its thesis, but its publication nevertheless marks a milestone in Southern historiography because Axtell has argued to a large audience of professional and lay readers that Indians were important actors in the history of the South. Once upon a time, Indians in Southern historiography were obstacles to be removed from the landscape so that the history of planters and slaves could be told, a trend historian Daniel Usner likened to a "cotton curtain" that obscured scholars' vision of the South's colonial past. Whether or not *The Indians' New South* will part the curtain even further remains to be seen, but at least practitioners of more conventional forms of Southern history will now have to confront the weight of over a decades' worth of Native American scholarship.