

BOOK REVIEWS

*David L. Preston. *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667–1783*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. Pp. x, 395, illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$45.00.)*

Every once in a while a book comes along that lacks carefully spun pre-publication praise but does much more to advance historical knowledge than more highly touted volumes. Such a work is David L. Preston's *Texture of Contact*, a study that effectively disputes many of today's commonly held academic shibboleths about Indian-white relations in early America. The dominant interpretative mood today, as espoused among others by some historians of Indian relations in pre-Revolutionary Pennsylvania, is that Native Americans inevitably fell victim to white racism, the alleged motivating factor of bloodthirsty European-Americans bent on grabbing up every last acre of potential farmland as they swept inland across eastern North America. In this interpretive framework, as related to early Pennsylvania, a high tide moment of white brutality was the massacre of some twenty Conestoga Indians by the notorious

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Paxton Boys in December 1763. Some historians have even equated this particular incident of human savagery to a pattern of purposeful “ethnic cleansing” on the part of racist colonists.

Preston’s presentation, which offers a different analysis of the Paxton Boys, represents a very significant challenge to the “white racism explains everything” mode of interpretation. The author takes his readers on an extended tour of contact and settlement points along the borders of the Iroquois Confederacy—from the St. Lawrence River Valley through the Mohawk, Susquehanna, and Ohio river valleys. What emerges in this “borderlands” investigation is a pattern of genuine, often sustained harmony among Indians and whites. European migrants who settled along the borders of Iroquoia appreciated that they were operating “in a distinctly Indian context and landscape” (14). As such, they sought to live harmoniously with their native acquaintances and neighbors. Contact areas, among others, included New York’s Schoharie Valley, where local Mohawks allowed desperately poor Germans to settle among them; Pennsylvania’s Great Cove Valley, where between 1730 and 1755 squatters were able to farm plots of fertile land in return for annual rental payments to Delaware, Shawnee, and Algonquian Indians; and the Monongahela Valley during the 1760s, where in the midst of growing violence white settlers and Iroquois and Algonquian Indians still found the means to deal “with one another in peaceful ways” (20). Perhaps the most interesting co-existence arrangement was in the upper Mohawk Valley “castle” area of Canajoharie, where between circa 1700 and 1750 local Mohawk Indians rented out plots of farmland to Palatine Germans.

Preston does not deny that ugly moments of violence occurred. Rather, he successfully demonstrates that the story line of Indian-white interactions, at least before the outbreak of the Seven Years’ War, was quite often a matter of congenial relations based on mutual tolerance if not true respect for cultural differences. Preston readily admits and documents how this pattern broke down, first in Pennsylvania during the 1750s and later during the Revolutionary War in New York’s Mohawk Valley region. Still, he does not accept the “white racism explains everything” hypothesis. Preston points out that in Pennsylvania, during the period of 1760 to 1774, approximately 39 incidents of murder occurred in which about 100 whites and Indians died (not counting deaths resulting from Pontiac’s War). His research indicates that “whites were more likely to kill whites than they were to kill Indians” during these pre-Revolutionary years (232). This type

of finding, among many thoroughly researched subjects in Preston's study, represents critical evidence indicating that so many facile portraits of white settlers functioning as mindless, racially obsessed Indian killers, both in early Pennsylvania and elsewhere, have been overstated in recent historical literature.

The Texture of Contact deserves to be recognized for what it is, a major contribution to the ever growing body of academic studies about Indian-white interactions, both peaceful and bloody, in colonial North America. Preston's presentation represents a sophisticated analysis that moves significantly beyond currently fashionable explanations about Indian-white interactions—and the reasons why harmony finally gave way to a bloody history of violence and the dispossession of Native Americans from their homelands. In sum, the author has given us a most valuable book.

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Janet Moore Lindman. *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. Pp. xvii, 224, maps, notes, index. Cloth, \$39.95.)

Like many late eighteenth-century American Baptists, Virginian John Taylor endured months of bodily agonies and the "paradoxical religious phrenzy" of the conversion process (2). Nevertheless, to become a Baptist minister, Taylor had to eschew conversion's physical excesses, and discipline himself and his congregation to exhibit bodily restraint and decorum. For Janet Moore Lindman, Taylor's religious regeneration is an apt metaphor for the paradoxes and corporeality of early American Baptists' beliefs and practices. In *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America*, Lindman argues, "The body served as an instrument of spiritual rebirth, sacred performance, and physical restraint that engendered Baptist selfhood" (180). Lindman finds paradoxes in corporate as well as individual bodies. Although early Baptists are recognized for their assertions of religious liberty and spiritual equality, Lindman maintains that their white male leadership built an institutional church based upon a patriarchal model, which accentuated secularized race, class, and gender hierarchies. While in *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, Christine Heyrman charts Methodists' transition from social