

REVIEW ESSAY

Did Pennsylvania Have a Middle Ground? Examining Indian-White Relations on the Eighteenth-Century Pennsylvania Frontier

NEARLY EVERY STUDENT and scholar of Pennsylvania history is familiar with the story of the Paxton Boys. It has come to occupy an infamous but lasting place in the landscape of colonial Pennsylvania history. Indeed, several important scholarly books published over the last twelve years have afforded considerable attention to the Paxton Boys and their motivations for murder. This essay is, for the most part, about what historians have said about those motivations and the conditions that precipitated them. But it begins with the murders. In the predawn hours on December 13, 1763, a posse of fifty-seven mostly Scots-Irish colonists from the frontier community of Paxton advanced through snow and sleet toward a small Indian settlement at Conestoga Town. There the frontiersmen attacked and killed the six Conestoga Indians they encountered and burned the village. Two weeks later, the self-styled Paxton Boys were on the march again, this time toward Lancaster, where fourteen additional Conestogas, survivors who had been absent from their town that fateful morning, had been billeted in the workhouse for their own safety. In a well-organized assault, the colonists forced entry into the workhouse and then viciously murdered and butchered all fourteen Indians, including eight children. Claiming victory, the Paxton Boys departed Lancaster, whooping and yelling as they went. Not long after, some of the Paxton Boys would attempt to lay claim to the lands at the Conestogas' former town. Their claims would not be upheld by Pennsylvania authorities, but their attempt to take possession of Indian land was an ironic twist. The murdered Conestogas, who numbered among the last of the once-mighty Susquehannock peoples in Pennsylvania, had occupied their town for generations, dating back to the

earliest days of the colony. They had remained and endured, scratching out a meager existence as a rising tide of new immigrants, many Scots-Irish like the Paxton Boys, flooded Pennsylvania's frontiers with Euro-American newcomers who surrounded the small Conestoga community. Now, after a brief but vicious outburst of violence, the Conestogas were no more.¹

It was not a particularly surprising end, given the history of Indian-white relations along the frontiers of Great Britain's American colonies. It is a familiar narrative: westward-moving Euro-American settlers disturb, displace, and, in many cases, destroy the Indian peoples who lie in their path. Intercultural violence was a common component of this process, especially during times of stress and turmoil. But in colonial America much of this cross-cultural violence occurred in New England or in the southern colonies, where the competition for land was fierce and intolerant religious or social conventions dominated societies. The Paxton Boys butchered a small group of Indians who had been living in peace with their white neighbors for decades, and they did it in Pennsylvania, the colony founded by William Penn on the principles of equality. It's tragically ironic. Indeed, among the personal possessions recovered from the burned homes of the murdered Conestogas was a tattered treaty. Signed in Philadelphia in 1701, it was a testament of goodwill signed between the Conestogas and new colony of Pennsylvania; it pledged that the Indians and colonists "shall forever hereafter be as one Head & One Heart, & live in true Friendship & Amity as one People." Signed by William Penn himself, the treaty promised that "He and they will at all times shew themselves true Friends & Brothers to all & every one of ye Said Indians."²

How could Pennsylvania have been the site of such horror? How could this promise of friendship—Penn's own vow at the start of the century—have come to mean so little to frontier colonists like the Paxton Boys by the 1760s? Metropolitan Pennsylvanians at the time pondered similar questions. Benjamin Franklin, among others, derided the murders as having occurred "in Defiance of the Government, of all Laws human and divine, and to the eternal Disgrace of [the perpetrators'] Country and

¹ James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York, 1999), 284–88; Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn's Holy Experiment* (New York, 2009), 1–2.

² Treaty text quoted in Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 288.

Colour.”³ Yet the Paxton Boys believed, according to historian Kevin Kenny, that “the killing of the Conestogas . . . was both necessary and just.”⁴ They even reassembled in greater numbers and marched to Philadelphia in February 1764, intending to sensitize the Pennsylvania Assembly to their predicament and, perhaps, to butcher the more than one hundred Christian Indians who had taken refuge in the city. The marchers were turned back without violence, but Kenny and many other historians have long sought to understand how and why such violent outbursts against Indians could take place in Pennsylvania. In their attempts to understand the Paxton Boys, a recent crop of historical scholarship has delved deeper into the nature and fabric of Indian-white relations in Pennsylvania during the eighteenth century. Its explorations focus on the frontier—on the locations of sustained contact where Indians and colonists met, communicated, and, in the end, collided. It is here, amid the history of Indian-white relations on the Pennsylvania colonial frontier, that the Paxton Boys’ murder of the Conestogas is revealed as the symptom of a more pervasive problem, a single, tragic episode in a larger, more complicated story: the deterioration of amicable relations between Indians and colonists into violence, racial hatred, and murder.

What follows is an assessment of how recent historical scholarship has reconstructed that story. The essay is not intended to be all encompassing, nor will it delve into every problem and challenge of interpreting the frontier experience in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. Rather, the essay will explore how select modern historians have interpreted the complicated interactions between Indians and colonists along the frontier and how their analyses and understandings of the context of those relations shaped events like the Paxton Boys’ killing of the Conestogas. Nor should readers expect to find lengthy semantic dissections of terminology: “frontier” has been utilized in this essay to describe and define the regions of Pennsylvania where natives and newcomers most often interacted with one another. There is no intention to assert the primacy of frontier over other designations: borderlands, backcountry, crossroads, etc. These discussions have their place in academic discourse, but they tend to be subjective and often lengthy. This essay will leave those discussions for another

³ Franklin quoted in Krista Camenzind, “Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys,” in *Friends and Enemies in Penn’s Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania*, ed. William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter (University Park, PA, 2004), 201–2.

⁴ Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 163.

forum, except where a specific construction of terminology clearly relates to an important historical interpretation.

Instead, this essay is constructed around a central question: was there a middle ground in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania? Before this can be considered, an attempt must first be made to understand what a middle ground entails. In 1991, historian Richard White published his original and influential book *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815*. White focused on the interactions of Indians and Euro-Americans along the Great Lakes frontier, an area the French called the *pays d'en haut*, or upper country. He found that Indians and Euro-Americans in the *pays d'en haut* created a “place in between: in between cultures, peoples, and in between empires and the nonstate world of villages.” He called this space the middle ground and defined it as a place where “diverse peoples adjust their differences through what amounts to a process of creative, and often expedient, misunderstandings.” Unlike the Paxton Boys, peoples occupying the middle ground try “to persuade others who are different from themselves by appealing to what they perceive to be the values and the practices of those others. They often misinterpret and distort both the values and practices of those they deal with, but from these misunderstandings arise new meanings and through them new practices.” Rather than colonists butchering Indians, or vice versa, in the middle ground Indian peoples and Euro-Americans accommodated one another in a shared world, “a joint Indian-white creation.”⁵ It sounds harmonious, but White warns that the middle ground was often fraught with peril and conflict. According to White:

The middle ground depended on the inability of both sides to gain their ends through force. The middle ground grew according to the need of people to find a means, other than force, to gain the cooperation or consent of foreigners. To succeed, those who operated on the middle ground had, of necessity, to attempt to understand the world and the reasoning of others and to assimilate enough of that reasoning to put it to their own purposes.⁶

⁵ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York, 1991), x, xiv.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

Thus, the middle ground endured only so long as its principal partners, Indians and colonists, were willing to work through their misunderstandings to find common ground. When that willingness subsided, as occurred in the *pays d'en haut* during the era of the American Revolution, the middle ground quickly eroded and was replaced by an antagonistic environment in which Indians and Euro-Americans marginalized and attacked the other, often culminating in the eradication or expulsion of Indian peoples.

Since the publication of *The Middle Ground*, White's model of frontier accommodation has become the standard against which nearly all colonial and early national Indian-white interactions have been measured, even if that is not what he envisioned when constructing his history of Indian-white relations along the Great Lakes.⁷ But the impact of his work is undeniable. Historians of many different frontiers have applied White's framework to understand the ways in which natives and newcomers have met and adapted to one another.

Certainly Pennsylvania would seem to offer itself readily for scholarly comparison to White's middle ground in the *pays d'en haut*. After all, Pennsylvania was William Penn's "Peaceable Kingdom," a "holy experiment" in which peoples of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, including Indians and colonists, could live together in peace. Yet the Paxton Boys' brutal slaying of the Conestoga Indians certainly complicates attempts to apply the middle-ground framework to Pennsylvania. Historians have demonstrated that the murders were part of a larger pattern of racially motivated violence that characterized much of Pennsylvania by the 1760s. In Pennsylvania, Indians and colonists were killing one another at least a decade prior to the American Revolution and doing so with alarming ferocity. To be fair, White constructed the middle-ground framework from specific conditions he found in the *pays d'en haut*, and applying it to other regions of colonial America requires caution. Variations in the sociopolitical climate must be considered, as these undoubtedly accounted for a different outcome in Pennsylvania. Still, given the principles upon which Penn founded his colony, something had clearly gone terribly wrong in the "Peaceable Kingdom" by the 1760s for frontier vigilantes to murder peaceful Indians with impunity.

⁷ For an interesting conceptual commentary on the middle-ground model and White's intentions for his interpretation, see Philip J. Deloria, "What Is the Middle Ground, Anyway?" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 63 (2006): 15–22.

Such assumptions belie a larger question: was there ever any form of middle ground in Pennsylvania? And if it existed, what was the nature and mechanics of this shared world? More importantly, how, when, and why did it fail? Numerous historians have issued forth recently to explain how and why cross-cultural accommodation failed in Pennsylvania during the eighteenth century. The majority of this scholarship has sought to understand how the mythic "Peaceable Kingdom" of Penn's imagination rapidly devolved into a cultural landscape where, in the estimation of James Merrell, "few Pennsylvanians were interested any longer in communication with Indians beyond what issued from the muzzle of a gun."⁸ In the process, they have challenged, redefined, and, most often, subdued the "Peaceable Kingdom" myth and offered a negative assessment regarding the existence of a middle ground in Pennsylvania, whether they overtly acknowledge it or not.

Any discussion of recent historical inquiry into Indian-white relations on the Pennsylvania frontier must begin with James Merrell's magisterial and multifaceted book, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (1999). With compelling narrative flair, Merrell examines the interaction of Indians and Euro-American newcomers from the early decades of the eighteenth century through the late 1760s. As historical literature, *Into the American Woods* defies easy explanation. Unorthodox in its construction, the book alternates chapters that provide a more or less chronological narrative of cross-cultural diplomacy on the Pennsylvania frontier with chapters devoted to thematic analyses of the nature and practices of negotiation. As historical interpretation, however, the thrust is more direct. Using Pennsylvania's primeval forests as a backdrop, Merrell paints a decidedly dark picture. Like White, he tells a tale of two diverse cultures struggling to find accommodation and commonality through a series of mishaps and misunderstandings. Merrell, however, finds little in Pennsylvania that resembles White's middle ground of the *pays d'en haut*. From the early 1700s, Merrell argues, the colonists' nearly insatiable appetite for land created friction and disharmony between Indians and whites. While this process accelerated significantly between 1744 and 1769, resulting in a near total breakdown of cross-cultural cooperation, Merrell asserts that any semblance of accommodation or hybridity along the Pennsylvania frontier before that was an illusion, as the

⁸ Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 229.

forces that led to the violent clashes between Indians and whites in the 1760s were present in Pennsylvania from the start. Under Merrell's examination, the Paxton Boys were not an aberration or a tragic misstep in Pennsylvania's Indian-white history. Rather, the murder of the Conestogas was a predictable outcome given the deeply strained nature of the relationship between Indians and Pennsylvanians along the colony's frontier.

Merrell's conclusions are tinted with a gloomy irony, considering the individuals he builds his narrative around: the frontier interpreters, mediators, messengers, and negotiators whom Merrell simply and fittingly calls "go-betweens." These are individuals whose very existence would seem to be the byproduct of a middle ground between Indians and colonists. After all, go-betweens traveled back and forth "between" the two sides; by default they appear to occupy ground in the middle. Merrell does not shy away from that understanding. Indeed, he skillfully demonstrates how for a time go-betweens facilitated communication and cooperation between the two cultures, crossing back and forth to secure agreements, resolve conflicts, and promote cooperation. Yet despite their crucial function along the frontier, Merrell warns that go-betweens did little to create an Indian-white middle ground. While many go-betweens adopted the dress and customs of the other culture, learned the language of the other, and occasionally even married someone from the other side, "few, it turned out, really felt at home on the far side." Go-betweens "were not, as it turns out, denizens of some debatable land between native and newcomer; almost without exception, they were firmly anchored on one side of the cultural divide or the other." Any appearances to the contrary, where the "the go-between was some real-life Natty Bumppo, one foot planted—like his famous fictional kinsman, Cooper's legendary Leatherstocking—in each world," was a fictitious construction.⁹

Merrell drives this point home forcefully with his depiction of Conrad Weiser, Pennsylvania's preeminent go-between prior to the 1760s. Weiser, often depicted as a friend to Pennsylvania's Indians, hardly lives up to that description under Merrell's examination. While he lived among the Mohawks and was adopted into one of their communities, Weiser's sympathies toward Indians extended only as far as his own self-interest. He never considered himself an Indian in any manner, and as Indian-white

⁹ Ibid., 300, 37.

relations deteriorated along the frontier during the 1750s and 1760s, Weiser increasingly became involved in land speculation and supported the removal of Indians that stood in the path of his own enrichment. "Swept up in the land rush, Weiser did not envision, did not work toward, did not even want a world in which Indians and colonists were one heart and one body. . . . Quite the contrary: a mingling of European and Indian was his worst fear."¹⁰

While conflict over land fueled the fires of contention, Merrell finds more complex issues smoldering in the ashes of this conflagration. The cultural divide between Indians and colonists never diminished or blurred in any meaningful manner because neither side made any meaningful effort to accommodate the other. In short, they came to know each other well, and neither side liked what it saw. Again, go-betweens played an ironic role in this outcome. Rather than constructing a middle ground, go-betweens allowed natives and newcomers to remain separate through most of the colonial period. There was little need for accommodation so long as the chosen representatives of each culture successfully managed crises and blunted conflicts. Accordingly, cultural biases inherent in each society were never moderated through cooperation, and Indians and whites developed different visions of their futures in Pennsylvania based on their own cultural assumptions. According to Merrell, "Weiser and other colonial mediators, never shedding prejudices that Europeans brought to America, embraced the idea that getting along with Indians was only a necessary step on the road to a brighter future, a time when those Indians would follow the forest into oblivion." Indian go-betweens were no different. While "envoys from Indian country did pursue coexistence . . . it was a coexistence designed to keep colonists at arm's length so that Indian peoples could remain masters of their own destiny." Accordingly, Indians across the frontier sought to control the form and function of cross-cultural diplomacy, mandating that all such encounters follow established Indian protocols. Since neither culture truly wanted to accommodate the other in a shared world, Merrell concludes that separation was the only path to coexistence as peoples. Colonial Pennsylvania was "a land of lines dividing Indians from Europeans, not a place where lines blurred and peoples came together."¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 296.

¹¹ Ibid., 37–38, 300.

In short, then, Merrell's interpretation implies that there was never a middle ground in Pennsylvania because neither Indians nor colonists wanted one. Cultural separation was desirable and inevitable, driven in part by go-betweens who feigned cooperation while actually furthering the cultural and racial divide. Merrell contends that "while all sought harmony, while they played up similarities, they could not, they did not want to, erase the differences they saw between colonist and Indian. They, too, thought the existence of *English ground* and *Indian ground*, of *us* and *them*, was nonnegotiable." As the eighteenth century matured, and as colonists increasingly sought to make Indian ground into English ground, war became inevitable. Indians and colonists along the frontier began "killing each other with terrible fury," overcome by animosity as "the symptoms of a deeper malaise—blind hatred—became more pervasive." Indians and colonists continued to meet one another and negotiate, but by the 1760s they more often met as victor and vanquished than as equals, and the treaty council, the quintessential representation of Penn's mythic "Peaceable Kingdom," came to represent the division rather than the unification of cultures. As Merrell concludes, "Looking back . . . at almost a century of treaties between Penn's province and its Indian neighbors, it is clear that these gatherings had, at best, an ambiguous legacy. Intended to bring people together, treaties ended up driving them apart. Intended to promote harmony, in the ended they produced dissonance. And while councils did spawn understanding, that understanding ended in hatred."¹²

Merrell's interpretation is complex and persuasive, backed by meticulous research into a deep trove of sources. And, like all good historical reconstructions, it generates as many questions as it answers. Was the Pennsylvania frontier really as dark and discouraging as Merrell contends? Was there indeed never more than a fleeting chance for cross-cultural cooperation and harmonious coexistence? To be certain, Merrell's interpretation is powerful but not unassailable. To some extent, his examination lacks context. Merrell focuses so intently on provincial matters that he offers little analysis of the role that imperial powers—the French and the British—played in the negotiations and conflicts that unfolded along the Pennsylvania frontier. Moreover, his relatively small sample of go-betweens perhaps overinforms his significantly larger conclusions about Indian-white relations on the frontier. Many go-betweens may have been

¹² Ibid., 38, 221, 250, 276.

uncomfortable straddling two cultures, but that does not necessarily hold true for all colonists. Lastly, the pessimism of his account seems almost too fatalistic, railing as doggedly as it does against even the faintest hope that Indians and colonists tried to find a different outcome.

Still, the influence of Merrell's work is profound. Since its publication, *Into the American Woods* has compelled all serious students of the Pennsylvania frontier to engage its arguments. Not surprisingly, a new generation of frontier scholarship has emerged to confirm, challenge, and critique Merrell's interpretation. Some have confirmed his findings, while others have detected elements of a middle ground in Pennsylvania. This is not to say that all recent historical inquiry into the colonial Pennsylvania frontier situates itself firmly on White's middle ground or in Merrell's dark and dangerous woods. Indeed, much of what has been written about the Pennsylvania frontier since 2000 embraces elements of one or both frameworks in a manner that both enhances and complicates the story of Indian-white interaction in Pennsylvania. Accordingly, these historians have given us a broader and more complex picture of the Pennsylvania frontier than either White's middle ground or Merrell's divisive frontier allows, although it is debatable just how far they stray from Merrell's conclusions.

The first work of this new generation to appear after Merrell, and perhaps the most significant, was Jane T. Merritt's *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763*, published in 2003. Merritt's focus is nearly identical to Merrell's: Indian-white relations on the Pennsylvania frontier from the early eighteenth century through the 1760s. Her conclusions are likewise similar: tensions between Indians and whites along the frontier, fueled in no small part by an ever-increasing horde of colonial immigrants hungry for Indian land, erupted in violence that crystallized into racial hatred, assuring that Indians would have no place in Pennsylvania's future. But how she arrives at that world of racial discord and violence is quite different. Where Merrell subtly but steadily urges his readers to concede that there was never any real hope for accommodation between Indians and whites in Pennsylvania, Merritt's interpretation of cross-cultural concourse is closer to White's middle ground. Merritt refuses to assume that the two cultures were polarized from the start and instead argues that "Indians in the mid-Atlantic region negotiated a common space with European settlers along the shifting frontier where roads both literally and figuratively passed

through and between communities, connecting their lives and histories.” Rather than a barrier between cultures, Merritt argues that the frontier was a “like a crossroads, a place where many paths converged, providing divers possibilities and directions to those who passed through.”¹³

For Merritt, these possibilities became reality in Pennsylvania over the first half of the eighteenth century, as Indians and colonists accommodated one another and established the foundation for a shared common society. A powerful factor influencing accommodation was that many Indians, like the early colonists, were newcomers to Pennsylvania, migrants who sought “to negotiate interdependent social, economic, and political relations for their survival.” Imperial rivalries likewise fostered cooperation. During the 1730s and 1740s, the Pennsylvania government allied with the Iroquois Confederacy in an effort to impose controls over peoples they considered to be their subjects along the frontier. Indians and colonists found common cause in resistance to these aspiring imperialists. These and other considerations led Indians and colonists to create a “frontier of inclusion,” where neither group held a meaningful advantage over the other, cooperation proved mutually beneficial, and they resolved differences through negotiation and accommodation.¹⁴

The most compelling illustrations of this “frontier of inclusion” were the shared Indian-white communities created by Moravian missionaries along the Lehigh and Susquehanna Rivers in the 1740s. Merritt convincingly demonstrates that accommodation thrived in these communities and that both Indians and Moravians were willing participants in the formation of a middle ground. Indians selectively embraced elements of Moravian Christianity because its relatively liberal framework allowed for hybridity; “to become Christian, then, an Indian did not have to let go of the past but instead could merely reframe it as a new, yet familiar context for the present.”¹⁵ Religion in turn provided a gateway for Indian acceptance of other European sociocultural conventions, while Moravian missionaries reciprocated by adopting many native social and cultural protocols because it allowed them to integrate themselves—and their religious message—into native communities and kinship networks. Together they created a hybrid Indian-Christian-European community centered on commonalities rather than differences.

¹³ Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 3, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

Yet fissures existed even in the hybridized Indian-Moravian communities, and the passage of time “exposed many social fractures that threatened their stability.” In the end, this world could not, and did not, survive. It collapsed under the strain of the Seven Years’ War and the pressures it unleashed upon the Pennsylvania frontier. In Merritt’s estimation, the war did not necessarily create new problems as much as it exacerbated existing disputes. As colonial settlers pushed westward, they attracted the attention of imperial powers—the French, the British, Pennsylvania, and the Iroquois Confederacy—all of whom increased their efforts to assert control over the lands and people along the Pennsylvania frontier. Indians, in particular, found themselves under assault from all sides, and they responded aggressively to protect their lands and liberty. More often than not, violent altercations with Pennsylvania colonists resulted. Indians raided frontier settlements, killed and mutilated settlers, and deluged much of the Pennsylvania frontier in blood. The violence created fear among frontier colonists, who sought to retaliate in kind. Violence begat violence, suffering bred hatred, and racism replaced accommodation as both sides used race to “justify violent retaliation during the Seven Years’ War.” Even when the violence abated, the peace that followed was ripe with distrust, fear, and racial hatred. It is not surprising that the Paxton Boys emerged from this dark landscape, given the “racial rhetoric [that] emerged by 1763 to displace the nuanced interactions that had previously characterized relations between native Americans and white settlers in Pennsylvania.”¹⁶

Much of Merritt’s interpretive thrust echoes White’s middle-ground model of Indian-white interaction. Her analysis of the transformation of cross-cultural relations on the Pennsylvania frontier exhibits many of the characteristics of White’s middle ground in the *pays d’en haut*: Indians and colonists accommodated each other as long as they needed one another, but when the competition for land and resources intensified, as occurred during the Seven Years’ War in Pennsylvania, the middle ground crumbled. Yet Merritt’s analysis of how and why the “frontier of inclusion” failed ties into Merrell’s arguments more than it might appear at first. Merritt explains that the shared landscapes created by Indians and colonists prior to the 1750s made the violence of the Seven Years’ War intensely personal. The brutality of the war was all the more terrible because it “was born of their familiarity, even similarity.” Thus, just as

¹⁶ Ibid., 131, 10.

Merrell has argued, familiarity bred contempt. As the violence intensified, accommodation and cooperation gave way to marginalization as the seeds of a racially charged nationalism took root, pitting “us” against “them.” “The hybrid nature of frontier life, the competition for resources, and the tensions of an imperial war had engendered a nationalist sentiment among both white and Indian populations” that transformed Indian-white relations, ensuring that “the differences among Pennsylvania immigrants—whether political, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or racial—once negotiable and often tolerated at a local level, became increasingly characterized by race.” A powerful component of that racism, Merritt concludes, was a deep sense of betrayal, as “native Americans and Euramericans blamed each other for undermining the potential peace embedded in an idealized past.” The result was a complete transformation of the Pennsylvania borderlands away from the “frontier of inclusion” and toward Merrell’s “land of lines dividing Indians from Europeans.” Indeed, much to her own chagrin, Merritt concludes that the intensely personal violence of the era left Indians and colonists “no other solution than to create more permanent boundaries between communities.”¹⁷

Although Merritt arrives at a similar endpoint as Merrell, her view of the interaction between Indians and colonists on the Pennsylvania frontier over the first half of the eighteenth century is very different. Her depiction of the Indian-Moravian communities demonstrates that real accommodation was possible and that it actually occurred. Perhaps the frontier in Pennsylvania was not as dark and depressing as Merrell contends, yet questions persist about the extent to which the Indian-Moravian communities were representative of the overall texture of accommodation on the Pennsylvania frontier. Just as Merrell’s go-betweens may comprise too small of a sample upon which to base his arguments that neither Indians nor colonists were particularly interested in accommodation along the Pennsylvania frontier, the Indian-Moravian communities that Merritt offers as shining examples of cultural hybridity may very well be aberrations, compelling but unique examples of accommodation in an otherwise culturally divisive landscape. It is worth noting that few of the examples Merritt cites when discussing the racialized violence of the 1760s come from the Indian-Moravian communities, leaving one to ponder their true significance for the larger dynamic of Indian-colonial accommodation on the Pennsylvania frontier.

¹⁷ Ibid., 9, 4, 14, 202.

Another potential drawback of Merritt's pseudo-middle-ground analysis is that many of the cracks that she discovers in the foundation of accommodation during the Seven Years' War seem to have been present much earlier in the century as well. This point is underscored by certain selections in *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Wood: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania* (2004). The collection, edited by William Pencak and Daniel Richter, appeared a year after Merritt's *At the Crossroads* and follows a similar interpretive route, seeking to "trace the collapse of whatever potential may have existed for a Pennsylvania shared by Indians and Europeans and its replacement by a racialized definition that left no room for Native people." The organization of the collection, which is divided into three chronological sections of essays—"Peoples in Conversation," "Fragile Structures of Coexistence," and "Toward a White Pennsylvania"—seems to mesh well with Merritt's framework of a pre-1750 middle ground transformed by competition, war, and racism during the Seven Years' War. Some of the essays in the volume lend credence to this construction, but, as the editors concede, "the chapters in this volume provide no easy or definitive answers," and several of the essays suggest that cross-cultural relations were less than favorable from the inception of the colony. Faced with this dichotomy of interpretation, the editors are left little choice but to conclude that prior to 1750 "very real points of congruence between views of the world provided some basis for mutual understanding, but underlying disparities in interests made such understandings—and the possibilities for peaceful coexistence they implied—inherently fragile."¹⁸

Perhaps no essay in the collection demonstrates the fragility of Indian-white relations in early Pennsylvania more than James O'Neil Spady's "Colonialism and the Discursive Antecedents of *Penn's Treaty with the Indians*," which paints a less than complimentary picture of William Penn's early dealings with the Lenape Indians. Spady argues that "the story of Pennsylvania's benevolent origins is an allegory of colonialism propagated by Penn and later colonists that has obscured the significance of both the severe disruption of Lenape life that Pennsylvania created and the resistance of some Lenapes to that disruption." In Spady's estimation, there were difficulties between Indians and colonists from the start of Pennsylvania, and those tensions revolved around land. The Lenapes, in particular, took issue with the land policies of the founder and his

¹⁸ Pencak and Richter, *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods*, xvi–xvii, x–xi.

colonists. Based on their past experiences with Swedish and Dutch colonists, the Lenapes expected “colonial expansion would be modest and manageable, and that often it might fail completely.” Penn sought not only large tracts of land, but also to reorient the usage of the land away from traditional native practices. Indeed, “once Penn purchased the land, mutual use was impossible as forests became fields and thousands of Europeans insisting on exclusive possession filled the area.” Seeing no other acceptable alternative, many Lenapes withdrew from the region, seeking refuge from any other vestiges of Penn’s benevolence. As Spady argues, “after Penn’s founding of Pennsylvania, compromise was increasingly a Lenape obligation, and brotherhood and friendship increasingly required Lenape subordination.”¹⁹

Interestingly, Merritt finds evidence of a similar dynamic at work on the Pennsylvania frontier seventy years later. In the wake of the Seven Years’ War, a veritable flood of new settlers deluged the frontier seeking land and opportunity. Much like their colonial ancestors, these new immigrants tipped the power balance along the frontier in favor of the colonists and forced Indians to compromise or withdraw, although the methods and forms of that compromise differed dramatically from those of Penn’s era. Many of the Euro-American immigrants to the Pennsylvania frontier in the 1760s were preconditioned to distrust and despise Indians. They had been exposed to stories and newspaper reports sensationalizing the brutality of the Seven Years’ War, and they quickly and easily fell under the sway of the incipient racist nationalism emerging on the frontier. Not surprisingly, they believed the submission of Indians, which in this scenario required their dispossession and removal, was an absolute necessity for the settlers’ security and prosperity. They called on government entities to create new boundaries and remove the Indian threat from their midst. When provincial or imperial authorities failed to meet their expectations in this regard, frontier colonists took matters into their own hands. They attacked and killed Indians wherever they could be found, as in the massacre of the Conestogas by the Paxton Boys. Provincial and even imperial authorities eventually caved to the demands of the frontier population—and also pandered to the parallel interests of influential land speculators—by coercing Indians into accepting treaties that defined them as subordinate peoples and corralling them behind arti-

¹⁹ James O’Neil Spady, “Colonialism and the Discursive Antecedents of *Penn’s Treaty with the Indians*,” in *ibid.*, 19, xii, 20.

ficially imposed borders, first in 1763 and again in 1768. Some Indians, determined to maintain what little lands they still held, responded by embracing movements for pan-Indian unity in the Ohio Country and beyond, seeking strength in numbers, both at the negotiating table and in any future conflict. But unity proved elusive, and as often as not, Indian peoples departed contested regions for the relative but temporary security of new lands further removed from the ever-expanding colonial settlements.

Westward-moving settlers may have been the force that steered Indian-white relations on the Pennsylvania frontier toward violence, but Merritt and the essayists in *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods* argue that the complex process that initiated this transformation began with the Seven Years' War. Indeed, the war looms large over Merritt's "frontier of inclusion" as the crucial turning point that destroyed the fragile forms of accommodation previously found along the Pennsylvania frontier. Merrell also recognizes the central importance of the war, arguing that "the bloodshed and anguish forever changed the face of the frontier, leaving Penn's peaceful vision little more than a memory."²⁰ Nor are these scholars alone in placing the war at the center of the breakdown of Indian-white relations in Pennsylvania. Matthew Ward's *Breaking the Backcountry: The Seven Years' War in Virginia and Pennsylvania, 1754–1764*, published the same year as Merritt's *At the Crossroads* (2003), reaches a similar conclusion. While Ward's study covers much more than Indian-white relations on the frontier, he too situates the Seven Years' War squarely at the heart of the racism that divided Indians and colonists in Pennsylvania after the war. Ward, like Merritt, highlights the brutality of the conflict, noting that the intensely personal nature of the war rendered any chance of resuming the primarily peaceful interactions of the prewar days impossible.

Ward goes into slightly more detail about the brutality of the war, but, more importantly, he also demonstrates how Indian military tactics contributed to the eradication of accommodation. Asserting that "the Seven Years' War reveals the extent to which the Indian peoples developed effective patterns of warfare," Ward illustrates how Indians dictated the tempo and temperament of the war, striking fast and without warning, often deliberately targeting colonists settled on former Indian lands along the frontier. But there was more to Indian strategy than revenge.

²⁰ Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 36.

According to Ward, "Indian raiders consciously waged psychological warfare. . . . [Along the frontiers of Pennsylvania, Indian raiders mutilated the bodies of women and children, displaying them at crossroads or other locations where they would be sure to be discovered."²¹ The goal was to terrorize and intimidate the colonists into vacating contested lands. Moreover, the tactics worked. Settlers were traumatized and thousands fled, yet there were unintended consequences as well, one of which Ward offers as an interesting sidebar that may have larger ramifications for the Pennsylvania frontier than he implies:

The war may have also played a vital role in the "arming" of the backcountry. . . . Before the war many backcountry settlers had no need for arms. . . . However, during the war, and then again during Pontiac's War, the descent of Indian raiding parties on the frontier meant that backcountry settlers needed to be armed. With every reason to possess arms for their own protection, backcountry settlers acquired guns and began the process of arming their communities.²²

The acquisition of firearms set a dangerous precedent, especially since the major impact of the Indians' psychological terrorization of the frontier was the rapid onset of hatred for Indians. In the wake of the war, Ward argues that "the region's settlers . . . [had] concluded on the basis of a decade of suffering and bloodshed that the only good Indian was a dead one."²³

The Seven Years' War was without question a profoundly transformational event in Pennsylvania's history. Based on the interpretations of much recent scholarship, the war was more than just a border conflict between Indians and colonists living along the Pennsylvania frontier: it was the apocalypse. But was the war, as recent scholarship suggests, so devastating that there was no chance for accommodation between Indians and colonists in its aftermath? The easiest way to test the war's impact on Indian-white relations along the Pennsylvania frontier would be to examine them over time after the war's end. Unfortunately, a common characteristic of Merrell, Merritt, Ward, and most of the collected essays in the Pencak/Richter anthology is that they do not pursue their analysis beyond

²¹ Matthew C. Ward, *Breaking the Backcountry: The Seven Years' War in Virginia and Pennsylvania, 1754–1764* (Pittsburgh, 2003), 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 258.

²³ *Ibid.*, 257.

the 1760s. While they offer important commentaries on the development of a racially bifurcated frontier in the immediate aftermath of the war, they decline to carry their interpretations into the revolutionary era, preferring to utilize the Paxton Boys' murder of the Conestogas as the culminating episode in the degeneration of the Pennsylvania frontier into racial armageddon. Nor do they hint at any hope for accommodation or even coexistence over the final third of the eighteenth century. Instead, the Paxton Boys and the violence they unleashed become monolithic symbols of a world without hope, where all that remained between Indians and white Pennsylvanians was hatred, war, and death.

Into this breach has come an even more recent body of scholarship that has carried the declension model of the Pennsylvania frontier forward, both confirming and complicating existing arguments about Indian-white relations on the Pennsylvania frontier and offering new conclusions about the viability of a middle ground in Pennsylvania. The racial hatred unleashed on the Pennsylvania frontier by the Seven Years' War continues to be an important consideration for this scholarship. It lies at the heart of Peter Silver's book, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (2007). Despite the misleading subtitle (the book is primarily about Pennsylvania), Silver offers an interesting assessment of how frontier settlers created a shared identity in Pennsylvania in the decades after the Seven Years' War. Fear was the force that divided Indians from colonists. Like Merritt, Silver asserts that frontier colonists developed a pervasive hatred of Indians during the Seven Years' War. This hatred was created by fear of Indian attack. The brutality of the war, especially the mutilation of men, women, and children, produced intense fear and paranoia among Pennsylvanians living along the frontier. In this regard, Silver echoes Ward in arguing that "the violence that provincial Americans found themselves first dreading and then experiencing was, in the most literal sense, terroristic. It had been carefully planned and carried out by the Indians with whom they were at war to induce the greatest fright possible." But where Ward concentrates on a tactical analysis of Indian warfare's psychological elements, Silver focuses on the aftermath of the brutality. Indians, he argues, did not achieve the ends they envisioned. While some colonists fled the frontier, many remained, and as Merritt has demonstrated, an entire host of new immigrants arrived. Silver illustrates how these frontier colonists, old and new, found common identity in their shared fear of Indians. That fear germi-

nated into a pervasive hatred for all Indians that burned at the core of a nascent racial nationalism among frontier Pennsylvanians, a process that matured during the American Revolution as Pennsylvanians of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds came together to see themselves as “the white people.” Indians were marginalized and reclassified by frontier whites as “our savage neighbors,” demonstrating Silver’s contention that “fear and horror, with suitable repackaging, can remake whole societies and their political landscape.”²⁴

Although he traces the deterioration of Indian-white relations in Pennsylvania to its climax during the American Revolution, Silver’s conclusions are very similar to Merritt’s. What sets Silver’s work apart is his analysis of how this racial construction of the frontier emerged. War with Indians and the fear it spawned was certainly the catalyst, but the creation of a separate “white” identity among frontier Pennsylvanians was engineered through literary mechanisms. Silver demonstrates how frontier colonists in Pennsylvania used rhetoric to articulate their fear of Indians. They created what he terms “the anti-Indian sublime,” a literary construction of Indians as treacherous, bloodthirsty killers who lurked in the woods awaiting any opportunity to murder and mutilate white colonists living on the frontier. It was a method of “writing and thinking about Indians . . . shaped by the pathetic sublime, a mode of writing engineered to overwhelm the reader with emotion at the sight of suffering.” Newspapers and pamphlets, in particular, during and after the Seven Years’ War, focused on graphic depictions of Indian violence against colonists, attesting to “the existence of a suffering, victimized community” along the frontier. This “magnetic rhetoric of suffering, one fixed on the sight of the attacks and not their causes,” bred fear and loathing of Indians in the colonial frontier settlements, with colonists increasingly calling for retribution and the removal of all Indians.²⁵

Silver argues that this process escalated even further during the American Revolution and implies that it correspondingly had a politicizing effect on white Pennsylvanians living along the frontier. This consideration forms an important part of the interpretation offered by Patrick Griffin, whose book *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and the Revolutionary Frontier* (2007) in part explores how the lack of centralized

²⁴ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York, 2007), 41, xviii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 83, 74.

authority along the frontier was responsible for the degeneration into violence and racial hatred. During the 1760s, British authorities concluded that Indians could evolve into valuable subjects of the empire if only they were protected and allowed time to become civilized. This benign view of Indians was entirely at odds with the views of colonists along the frontier, where “they now killed [Indians] because, in an increasingly violent state of war, most believed that the civility model was fundamentally flawed.”²⁶ The Paxton Boys, remember, argued that there was no such thing as a friendly Indian. Moreover, the British lacked the resources to enforce the separation of Indians and colonists along the frontier, and the violence continued in fits and spurts until the Revolution, when it exploded once again into open war. Violence during the Revolution not only deepened the Pennsylvanians’ Indian hatred—and further expanded Silver’s “anti-Indian sublime”—it also politicized the white frontier population. Whereas Indians and colonists had worked together during the 1740s to resist imperial efforts to assert control over them, Griffin argues that the process completely reversed during the revolutionary era, as frontier whites called for the new American government to impose control over the frontier. They were motivated once again by fear. In Griffin’s estimation, frontier society in Pennsylvania had descended into a world of violence and disorder of the variety theorized by Thomas Hobbes in his 1651 work *Leviathan*, which argued that when man exists alone in a state of nature, society will invariably degrade into a “war of every one against every one” where there is “no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”²⁷ Overwhelmed by fear and consumed by violence, Griffin asserts that frontier settlers “were beginning to argue that only the state could deliver them from their state of war and its attendant evils.” They sought security and stability above all else, and they believed only a powerful governing entity—Hobbes’s *Leviathan*—could protect them from Indians. This was the maturation of the racist nationalism that Merritt sees emerging from the Seven Years’ War. Griffin argues that this mentality spread well beyond the Pennsylvania frontier to become a core component of the early national frontier in the United States. In his estimation, by the 1790s, when “defending the West, for men and women on

²⁶ Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and the Revolutionary Frontier* (New York, 2007), 154.

²⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, quoted in *ibid.*, 95.

the frontier, implied ridding the region of Indians . . . nearly all westerners subscribed to protection as the fundamental right of society.”²⁸

All of which leads back to the Paxton Boys, who emerge from the pages of recent historical literature as the poster boys for the arguments of Silver and Griffin. They remain the most prolifically studied example of how the breakdown of Indian-white relations impacted the Pennsylvania frontier. It is thus surprising that it took until the 2009 publication of Kevin Kenny’s *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn’s Holy Experiment* for a modern book-length analysis of the Paxton Boys to appear. There have been several impressive articles written about the Paxton Boys, including Krista Camenzind’s excellent offering in *Friends and Enemies in Penn’s Woods*, but Kenny offers a fuller treatment and contextualizes the Paxton Boys’ violent outbursts within the larger framework of deteriorating Indian-white relations in Pennsylvania during the eighteenth century.²⁹ Much of what Kenny finds conforms to scholarly interpretations discussed in this essay. Land issues lay at the root of contention between Indians and colonists in Pennsylvania, as differing understandings of land transactions produced tensions from the time of William Penn’s first acquisition of Lenape lands. Relations were further strained by Scots-Irish immigrants who illegally squatted on Indian lands and defied all attempts made by provincial authorities to remove them. When the Seven Years’ War erupted, Indians resorted to violence to drive off these settlers while provincial authorities bickered over how to defend them and who would bear the expense, with the proprietors initially hesitant to fund defense of squatters who paid no taxes and had not legally purchased title to their lands. Quakers, too, questioned the legitimacy of defending squatters who had stolen land rightfully belonging to the Indians. The result was the formation of frontier civilian militias—the Paxton Boys were drawn from one such group—who took defense into their own hands. Driven by fear and hatred, they did not care to distinguish between friendly and enemy Indians, leading to the grisly murder of the Conestogas.

Kenny’s major accomplishment is situating the Paxton Boys in the recent historical literature of the Pennsylvania frontier. His account does not end with the murder of the Conestogas, or even with the less well-known Paxton Boys’ march on Philadelphia in 1764. Rather he charts the

²⁸ Ibid., 185.

²⁹ Camenzind, “Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys,” 201–20.

story of the Paxton Boys through the era of the American Revolution, offering them as a compelling example of how the processes described by Silver and Griffin played out in a specific group of people. After their aborted campaign to kill the Moravian mission Indians who had been granted asylum in Philadelphia, the Paxton Boys returned to the frontier and became engaged in a literary war with the provincial government and, in particular, Benjamin Franklin. Kenny illustrates how, through numerous pamphlets and petitions, the Paxton Boys decried the violence of the frontier, indicted the Pennsylvania government for failing to protect them, and justified their actions by denying that there was any such thing as a friendly Indian. As revolutionary agitation gained momentum in the early 1770s, the Paxton Boys underwent a remarkable transformation by remaking themselves as patriots who had secured the frontier from not only Indians but the imperialistic designs of the now-exiled Penn proprietors for the new American nation. They became, in short, the embodiment of Griffin's politicized frontier population who demanded "land, personal security, and vengeance against Indians."³⁰

Collectively, Silver, Kenny, and Griffin illustrate that the maturation of Indian-hating in Pennsylvania during the American Revolution provided a foundation for the emergence of a distinct frontier mentality that strongly influenced early United States Indian policies. Although it is not the stated objective of their work, they also largely confirm the findings of Merrell, Merritt, Ward, and others that after the Seven Years' War there was no longer any realistic possibility of accommodation between Indians and whites in Pennsylvania. All remaining vestiges of the "Peaceable Kingdom" had been eradicated by violence, war, and racial hatred. Yet questions remain, especially about the distinctiveness of this process in Pennsylvania. Penn's colony has long been thought to have been unique among the original thirteen American colonies because of its tolerant landscape and the relatively peaceful coexistence of Indians and colonists. That construction of Pennsylvania has been demolished, but might the inverse be more sustainable? Perhaps what distinguished Pennsylvania among its colonial neighbors was not that a climate of accommodation reigned supreme in the colony but, rather, that it crumbled so dramatically into hatred and war. After all, Pennsylvania is the only state among the original thirteen to have no Indian reservations and

³⁰ Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 231.

no federally recognized Indian tribes today. As of the 2000 census, only 0.01 percent of the state's population self-identified as Native American—the lowest percentage in the nation.³¹

These statistics are compelling, but they alone are not sufficient to demonstrate that the declension model of Indian-white relations on the Pennsylvania frontier is exceptional. Such an assertion will require further analysis, as a common criticism levied against many of the works covered here is that their authors fail to place the events they cover in the proper context of eighteenth-century America. However, at least one recent study has attempted to offer some comparisons. David Preston's *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667–1783* (2009) explores Indian-white relations at several contact points on the perimeters of the Iroquois Confederacy, including two different locations along the Pennsylvania frontier. Preston acknowledges that “recent studies of Pennsylvania, for example, suffer from their lack of contextual attention to New France and New York,” and he argues that “what is true for Indian-white relations in Pennsylvania is not necessary true for those in New York or Canada.” Although Preston hopes to offer an alternative to the unavoidable conflict interpretation dominating Pennsylvania frontier scholarship by demonstrating that that interactions between Indians and colonists “were far more complex and, at times, more harmonious and stable than other histories have allowed,” he is more successful in demonstrating that the Pennsylvania experience was fairly unique among its mid-Atlantic neighbors. Like Merritt, Preston finds examples of accommodation between Indians and colonists along the Pennsylvania frontier prior to the Seven Years' War, but he struggles to prove that “despite a vicious cycle of killings and murders, and continued conflict over land and authority, colonists, Iroquois, and Algonquians who lived there still dealt with one another in peaceful ways.”³² Indeed, most of Preston's findings for Pennsylvania fall into step with the conclusions of Merrell, Merritt, Silver, and the others who chart the near total disintegration of Indian-white harmony after the Seven Years' War. By comparison, however, his analysis of Indian-white relations in New York and along the Canadian border demonstrates that the violence that characterized the Pennsylvania

³¹ Pencak and Richter, *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods*, xix.

³² David L. Preston, *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667–1783* (Lincoln, NE, 2009), 17, 5, 20.

frontier did not make its way north. Accommodation continued, to varying degrees, in these communities up to—and, in some cases, during—the American Revolution. Preston offers numerous reasons for the divergent outcomes in Pennsylvania and the north, the most significant of which may have been differing land policies, but the presence and influence of the Iroquois Confederacy as a stabilizing force, at least until the Revolution, was a critical factor in mitigating violence and racial hatred in New York.

Based on this admittedly limited sample, there is an evidentiary foothold for arguing that the breakdown of Indian-white accommodation in Pennsylvania was unique, at least among the middle colonies during the eighteenth century. The role of the Seven Years' War in creating such deep animosities between Indians and colonists also seems to have been exceptional in Pennsylvania. Moreover, while this essay has focused primarily on the breakdown of Indian-white relations along the Pennsylvania frontier, this process has broader implications that are also fairly distinctive to Pennsylvania in the mid-Atlantic region. Much of the scholarship discussed here has highlighted to some degree the ways that provincial and imperial power brokers co-opted the violence on the Pennsylvania frontier to push forward their own political agendas. Silver and Kenny, in particular, have illustrated how antiproprietary factions in the Pennsylvania Assembly used the violence on the frontier as justification for turning Pennsylvania into a royal colony. The Quaker Party in the assembly asserted that the proprietors' inability or unwillingness to defend the frontier constituted "betraying the province to the Indians" and mandated that they be removed from their position of authority in Pennsylvania.³³ Yet the push for royalization was in part an effort to deflect criticism away from Quakers, who had come under heavy fire for their sympathetic views of Indians and their pacifist principles during the Seven Years' War. As both Silver and Kenny have shown, critics of the Quakers—including defenders of the Paxton Boys—argued that frontier whites had "defended the province militarily, while Quakers hid behind the smokescreen of piety and principle." Claiming that "the Quakers' pacifism . . . had utterly degraded their ability to govern," anti-Quaker factions used violence between Indians and whites on the frontier as grounds for driving Quakers from the halls of government.³⁴ Silver out-

³³ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 217.

³⁴ Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 179, 178.

lines a related process that took place during the American Revolution, where the British, like Indians, were labeled savages. The “anti-Indian sublime” was applied to the British because of their alliances with Indians during the Revolution and because long ago “the inhabitants of Britain had been blue-painted savages, more or less indistinguishable from New World Indians.”³⁵ The violence between Indians and colonists not only impacted these political and ideological developments in Pennsylvania but also had an influence on conflicts between white settler groups. Paul Moyer, in his book *Wild Yankees: The Struggle for Independence along Pennsylvania’s Revolutionary Frontier* (2007), argues that violence between Indians and colonists in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania during the 1750s and 1760s had a profound effect on struggles between rival colonial factions in the valley during the American Revolution. Pennsylvanians (Pennamites) and Connecticut settlers (Yankees) “built on a bitter history of Indian-white conflict by engaging in a struggle that was not just violent, but *deadly*. That a legacy of interracial contention added to the Wyoming controversy can be deduced from the fact that other regions which experienced conflicts over land and jurisdiction, but did not possess Northeast Pennsylvania’s recent history of Indian-white warfare, saw much lower levels of bloodshed and death.”³⁶

Understanding that Indian-white relations on the frontier were central to many other aspects of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania helps to substantiate the continued exploration of that relationship. There is more to this story yet to be told, especially from the Indian perspective. The historical literature discussed in this essay has done a remarkable job charting the dissolution of intercultural accommodation in Pennsylvania from the colonial side of the equation, which is understandable given the dearth of Indian primary sources, but few explore the impact that the violence had upon Indian peoples. Similarly, native motivations and mechanizations remain largely absent from the process, despite the efforts of some historians—Merrell and Ward most notably—to include Indians in their discussions as something more than the object of white colonists’ hatred. Emerging ethnohistorical studies of Pennsylvania Indians may not completely alter what we currently understand about the Pennsylvania frontier, but they will undoubtedly further complicate an

³⁵ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 251.

³⁶ Paul D. Moyer, *Wild Yankees: The Struggle for Independence along Pennsylvania’s Revolutionary Frontier* (Ithaca, NY, 2007), 24.

already complex equation. Indeed, they might offer new possibilities for accommodation or add depth and detail to those limited examples already uncovered.³⁷ Similarly, local histories of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania frontier communities are likely to both confirm and challenge elements of the existing interpretive framework. Such studies very well may confirm David Preston's assertion that "these communities tell a more complex and perhaps more ambiguous story about early America than the simple morality tale of bad Europeans and Indian victims."³⁸

These are stories yet to be told and episodes yet to be interpreted. Based on recent existing scholarship, how then are we to answer the fundamental question: was there a middle ground in Pennsylvania? The historical scholarship discussed in this essay demonstrates that any such construction was nearly impossible after 1750, but prior to the Seven Years' War, the possibility of a middle ground existed, or, perhaps more correctly, the possibilities for many middle grounds existed. Some succeeded for a time, others did not. None endured as long or was as encompassing as the middle ground of the *pays d'en haut*, but Richard White's original middle ground, like the deterioration of Indian-white relations along the Pennsylvania frontier, was molded by a unique set of conditions. Some of those conditions may have existed in Pennsylvania during the first half of the eighteenth century, but they were beset by serious disagreements and almost constantly subjected to external pressures from colonists and empires seeking possession of and dominion over Indian territory. In short, the limited middle ground found in Pennsylvania could not long endure with such stresses woven into its fabric. Indeed, all recent scholarship on the Pennsylvania frontier agrees that the Seven Years' War, and the racial violence it unleashed, tore that fabric beyond repair. As the editors of *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods* have concluded, "had the Seven Years' War not occurred, it is possible to imagine a

³⁷ For example, see Amy C. Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys: The Odyssey of the Delaware Indians* (Philadelphia, 2007). Schutt adds depth and detail from the Indian perspective, especially with regard to alliance building, but her conclusions largely reflect the declension model advanced by Merrell, Merritt, and the essays in Pencak and Richter. Stephen Craig Harper, *Promised Land: Penn's Holy Experiment, the Walking Purchase, and the Dispossession of Delawares, 1600–1763* (Bethlehem, PA, 2006) is a more focused ethnohistorical account that also largely conforms to the declension model.

³⁸ Preston, *Texture of Contact*, 18. While its limited discussion of Indian-colonist relations mostly conforms to the dominant framework of recent Pennsylvania frontier scholarship, Judith Ridner's *A Town In-Between: Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the Early Mid-Atlantic Interior* (Philadelphia, 2010) is an excellent example of recent frontier community study.

Pennsylvania frontier where Indians and Whites interacted peacefully or solved their differences to general satisfaction,” but because the war eradicated those possibilities, “it remains a moot question as to just how powerful these interethnic grassroots ties were and whether they could have survived.”³⁹ The latter portion of their conclusion perhaps goes too far—should examples of accommodation be disregarded simply because they failed?—but, as Peter Silver has asserted:

It seems like common sense that everyday social contact between members of different groups should break down their shared stereotypes, improving not only individuals’ views of one another but intergroup relations as a whole. But almost nothing about the history of the early modern middle colonies suggests that this hopeful view of contact between groups is true. With few exceptions, living together made the different sorts of people there feel frightened of one another’s intentions.⁴⁰

All of which returns us, after a fashion, to Merrell’s pessimistic view of Indian-white relations. We may all wish for a happier story with a more uplifting outcome, but, as Merrell concedes, when “plotting the trajectory of how Native America became Penn’s Woods . . . it is hard not to wind up in a dark, bleak place, with Indian-haters in full cry and Indians themselves in full retreat.”⁴¹ Recent scholarship on the Pennsylvania frontier has expanded and complicated that trajectory, but it delivers us, mostly, to those same dark woods.

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³⁹ Pencak and Richter, *Friends and Enemies in Penn’s Woods*, xvii.

⁴⁰ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, xix.

⁴¹ James H. Merrell, “Afterwards,” in Pencak and Richter, *Friends and Enemies in Penn’s Woods*, 266.

