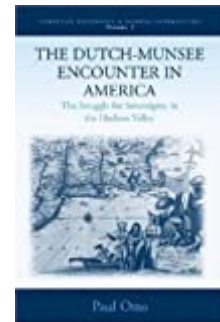


**Paul Otto.** *The Dutch-Munsee Encounter: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Hudson Valley.* European Expansion & Global Interaction Series. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. Illustrations, maps. xv + 225 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-672-6.



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## Dutch and Indian Relations Reconsidered

For many Americans, New Netherland is a more fruitful source of myth than history. From the comical tales of Washington Irving to the lyrical phrases of F. Scott Fitzgerald, writers have imagined Dutch colonists and their Algonquian neighbors as living in a world turned upside down. For a transitory, enchanted moment, bumbling burghers with funny names paid their debts with shell beads and foolish natives gave up Manhattan for twenty-four bucks and a handful of trinkets. Generations of Anglocentric colonial historians largely ignored the Dutch colony, agreeing with the mythmakers that this was a backwards corner of the continent, filled with strange Hollanders and even stranger Indians, none of whom mattered much. They seemed to belong on the fuzzy edges of “real” history, which began when the English arrived, dubbed the colony “New York,” and finally turned this inverted place right side up.

Paul Otto’s new book, *The Dutch-Munsee Encounter: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Hudson Valley* is part of a growing body of work on the Dutch colony that counters years of historical distortion and neglect. This scholarship is exemplified by two well-received recent mono-

graphs: Jaap Jacobs’s *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth-Century America* (2005) and Donna Merwick’s *The Shame and the Sorrow: Dutch-Amerindian Encounters in New Netherland* (2006). Jacobs, Merwick, and Otto all share the goal of presenting New Netherland as a fascinating place that needs to be included in larger discussions of early America, the Atlantic World, and early modern Europe. While Jacobs traces the transmission of Dutch culture to the Hudson Valley settlements and Merwick focuses on how the colonists’ treatment of Indians related to the Dutch ideology of empire, Otto’s main concern is how the coastal Indians themselves responded to the arrival of Europeans. In doing so, he also builds off the last two decades of scholarship on the American West and Native Americans. He employs Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson’s definition of a “frontier” as a zone of cultural contact, competition, and conflict. And, following the lead of James H. Merrell and many others, he examines how Indians creatively adapted to new peoples, new technology, and a new political landscape.

Eschewing the better-known Iroquois Five Nations,

Otto deals exclusively with the natives who lived around the lower Hudson. He calls these Indians “Munsees,” which he acknowledges is a somewhat nebulous cultural and linguistic grouping. Still, “Munsees” is the best word available, because, as Otto explains, the alternative terms “Delawares” and “Lenapes” refer to a later, larger cultural grouping that included the Munsees; using them for this period is akin to calling the Dutch settlers “New Yorkers.” Otto identifies three distinct, but interrelated processes shaping Dutch and Munsee relations: first contact, trade, and settlement. The first contact period stretched from the early sixteenth century to the 1610s. Trading commenced in the 1610s, reached its heyday in the 1620s and 1630s, and then started to taper off slowly. Settlement began in the 1620s, stalled out after a violent war in the 1640s, and then took off exponentially in the 1650s and 1660s. In linking these periods of interaction to the overall process of cultural change, Otto examines Munsee actions with another triad of terms: acculturation, accommodation, and resistance.

In Otto’s telling, all three kinds of interaction have their origins in the robust trade in European goods and furs that relied on shell beads the Dutch called “seewant” and the English called “wampum.” Once the Dutch realized that Indians “prize[d]” these beads “as jewels,” they began to trade intensely with coastal peoples, and then bring the wampum inland, where the Iroquois would gladly exchange furs for the sacred beads (p. 59). The Dutch drew both coastal and inland natives into a complex web of exchange that stretched from the Great Lakes to the Zuider Zee. The Indians supplied fur pelts, surplus maize, and wampum in return for European tools, guns, glass beads, cookware, and cloth, and in Europe, the pelts were processed into felt for fashionable hats.

This traffic altered the patterns of everyday Munsee life and fueled further Dutch settlement. It also relied on mutual accommodation of cultural values, for “while the Dutch believed themselves involved in a branch of the European fur trade, in reality they had become middlemen in a native system of reciprocity and exchange which had significance beyond the apparently straightforward economic transactions understood by Europeans” (p. 59). The Amsterdam merchants in the Dutch West India Company first envisioned the colony as a fur-trading factory, but very soon they realized that a more permanent footing was necessary to provision and defend their inland trading posts. Both farming and trading drew not just Dutch migrants, but also English, German, French, and Scandinavian colonists. As these newcomers began to sprawl outwards from Manhattan, they

increased their day-to-day interaction with Indians and thus raised the odds of a violent confrontation. While in the initial years of settlement, “the Munsee people found certain Europeans very accommodating to Indian culture and protocol.... [they] would soon learn, however, that not all the Dutch understood and treated Indians the same” (p. 100). But even as Otto stresses the importance of face-to-face diplomacy, he never ignores how larger impersonal forces shaped all negotiations on the New Netherland frontier.

In examining the first major war between the natives and newcomers, Otto is careful to refer to it as the “First Dutch-Munsee War,” rather than its traditional title of “Kieft’s War.” He argues that the notion that Director-General Willem Kieft was primarily to blame for this 1642-1645 conflict “is only half right” (p. 106). Otto considers how the spread of European settlements and diseases created a mounting crisis between colonists and Indians, while at the same time, a generational divide opened up within Munsee villages. Younger warriors tended to argue for outright resistance against the Dutch, while elders looked to continue the strategy of accommodation to maintain the peace, and Kieft’s inept and imperious brand of diplomacy brought this stew to a boil. When the Dutch governor ordered a pair of brutal attacks, he sparked a series of bloody Munsee counterattacks. The resulting war dragged on for three years, taking the lives of sixteen hundred Indians and an untold number of colonists. In the wake of this devastation, Munsees on the whole were more inclined to compromise. And after Petrus Stuyvesant replaced the disgraced Kieft, expansion of New Netherland’s territory and sovereignty resumed at an even faster pace.

Over a decade later, two more Dutch-Munsee wars broke out, but these were shorter and less violent than the first, and “one by one, most Munsee bands came to the realization that military resistance was not an adequate long term solution to their problems” (p. 134). The study ends in 1664, the year the English took over the colony. This choice leaves the Munsees’ story in an uneasy place; they had lost most of their earlier political and military leverage, but they still retained “much of their precontact cultural outlook and practices” (p. 167). In the years following, some stayed in shrinking villages by the coast, while others formed the northern branch of the “Delaware” or “Lenape” people. Over the next two centuries, their descendants would continue to migrate west, first to the Ohio Country and eventually to Oklahoma, acts that Otto sees as “the only means left to resist” European culture and colonial rule (p. 176).

Although Otto's conceptual frameworks are borrowed and his language is familiar to anyone who has read widely in Native American history, his research is still quite valuable. The book never claims to put forward a purely novel interpretation; rather, it offers a thoughtful investigation of understudied peoples and events, and on that count, it is wholly successful. There are a few minor flaws, as well as points that beg for further discussion. The maps are rendered in a muddy grayscale and are difficult to read, which does a disservice to Otto's admirable attention to geography. (Their low quality and small size also seem inexcusable given the book's exorbitant price.) A final afterword that compares the Hudson colony to the Dutch settlements on the Cape of Good Hope is intriguing, but far too short—it seems more apt for a stand-alone article. Still, while Otto is concerned with the colony's place within a larger Dutch empire,

he is particularly effective when he steps back to relate the developments in New Netherland to parallel events in New England and New France (pp. 18-20, 71, 84-85, 99, 124-125). He demonstrates that some aspects of this encounter were shaped by specifically Dutch ideas and intentions, and others bore much resemblance to nearby frontiers. With this useful book, Otto shows how historians of early America can both "face east from Indian Country" and tell the story "with the Dutch put in." [1]

#### Note

[1]. Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Early American History with the Dutch Put In," *Reviews in American History* 21.2 (1993): 195-201.

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