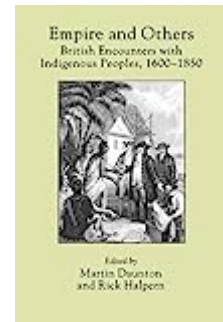


Martin Daunton, Rick Halpern, eds. *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. xii + 400 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8122-1699-8.



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Identity Crisis

According to Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, editors of this volume and authors of its introduction, there is a need for greater trans-Atlantic dialogue about British imperial history. North American scholars, they suggest, can offer to British scholars the experience of having incorporated the history of American Indians within “their own national history,” while British scholars and those in the Commonwealth can provide American Indian and American colonial historians with comparative perspectives. The book is the product of a 1997 conference in London. A heady whirlwind tour of three centuries of global history, it includes eighteen essays by twenty authors from Manitoba to Jamaica to Sydney in less than four hundred pages of text. The result is unexpectedly exhilarating, though like many great trips, it leaves one also with a sense of wonder at missed opportunities.

Including the introduction, three sweeping essays invite the reader into this vast imperial world. Daunton and Halpern submit that the concept of race became central to the construction of a British identity after the middle of the eighteenth century, a point which the essay by C. A. Bayly supports. The editors call for more study of capital-

ism, which, they persuasively argue, has been neglected in the scholarly shift toward the investigation of identity. While not an analyst of capitalism as such, Bayly, like the editors, looks for the forces behind the British quest for empire, and finds them in the exigencies of British military finance, which drove the state from the Seven Years’ War through the Napoleonic era. He also lays out trans-global chronologies for the development of racism and, contrapuntally, humanitarianism. Philip D. Morgan’s essay is less concerned than Bayly’s, Halpern’s, or Daunton’s with causality and process, and seeks rather to establish a taxonomy of encounters, and even – skeptical that one epoch shared attributes across the globe even within the British empire – a taxonomy of chronologies. Some contacts are fleeting, others become regular, often they become violent; the moments of transition from one type to the next will vary from place to place, but the study of one may well inform us about another. The editors agree that such comparative history has value, not the least because it provides historians with sets of alternatives to the course history has taken in any one region.

The rest of the essays get down to particular colonial

regions and to case studies. Most of them discuss British imperial thought and white racism. Kathleen Brown treats the importance of American Indians to the developing English interest in skin color to about 1650. Louis Breen investigates a clash in late seventeenth-century Massachusetts between popular Indian-hating and a more tolerant, cosmopolitan (if somewhat self-interested) approach. Ruth Smandych and Anne McGilivray discuss the European fascination with permissive Indian child-rearing, the British traders' adaptation to those practices, and the colonial state's desire to impose discipline. Heather Goodall's piece on Australia, Catherine Hall's on Jamaica, Andrew Porter's on South Africa and the Pacific, and Andrew Bank's on South Africa all treat the changing approaches of British imperial, humanitarian or evangelical enterprises. Although they differ incrementally about the exact chronology, these essays for the most part work together very well, establishing a brief, vexed, British humanitarian flirtation with the idea of full equality after 1820, and a rapid retreat from it before 1860. Madhavi Kale's (and to some degree Hall's) essay, acknowledging the flirtation, discusses the persistence of hierarchies within the British anti-slavery society, leaving us wondering how influential were the few advocates of equality. Colonizers, far more than the indigenous peoples, are the subjects of this volume, especially of the essays that do not treat North America. Indeed two patterns suggest that historians of North America look more to indigenous peoples than do those who study other continents. First, of the six authors who examine in any detail indigenous agency, five explore North America. Peter Way evocatively describes regular soldiers' and Indian warriors' mutual influences upon one another in the Seven Years' War.

Greg O'Brien and Nathaniel Sheidley separately reveal the role indigenous cultural constructions of leadership and gender played in their negotiations with the British in the Southeast. Ruth Wallis Herndon, Jean O'Brien, and Anne Marie Plane independently bring into focus Indian efforts to cope with New England governments that increasingly denied the natives' existence.

The sixth essay, by Hilary Beckles, is the exception that proves the rule, for though not on North America, it concerns American Indians: the Karifunas (Caribs) of the West Indies.

The second pattern involves identity in a more prosaic sense than that conveyed by this collection. We meet here roughly two hundred eighty individuals with names, of whom some two-hundred-twenty are either Europeans or European-descended settlers, four are twentieth-century politicians, seven are Afro-Jamaicans, five are Caribbean natives, two are Australian Aborigines, one is an African-born freed slave, and, strikingly, forty-three are North American Indians (including two whose fathers were Britons). In other words, historians of North American and Caribbean Indians record individual names, while historians of the rest of the "empire," who nevertheless lace their articles with the names of Britons, do not much bother with the names of indigenous persons.

This is not so much a criticism as an observation; in a volume that is so dedicated to identity, the attention to the names of indigenous individuals on one continent and its attendant islands, and the absence of individual names (unless "British") elsewhere, reveals a sharp difference between English-language scholarly traditions in each hemisphere. In the Western Hemisphere, scholars attend more to the indigenous "experience" – which requires a name – while in the Eastern they work harder to isolate broad historical "processes" and workable chronologies – which require more attention to such impersonal forces as military finance, the drive for wealth, and the massive elaboration of racist feeling. Giving us both traditions, this volume enriches the revived field of British imperial history. Let us hope for more such encounters.

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