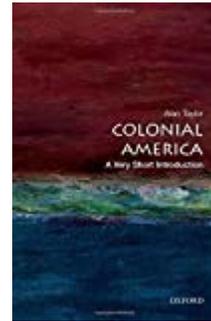




Alan Taylor. *Colonial America: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xv + 151 pp. \$11.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-976623-9.



Reviewed by Jacob Clauson (Minnesota State University Moorhead)

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

In the book *Colonial America: A Very Short Introduction*, author Alan Taylor tells the story of how the American continents were transformed by the European newcomers, African slaves, and their interactions with the native peoples. *Colonial America* looks at many different aspects of colonial life, including culture, economics, and warfare, among others. Taylor ties global events and processes to the formation of colonial America. He also demonstrates how European nations developed their own America based on their own economies and strategies for colonization. The author is a professor of history at the University of California Davis. Taylor has written numerous other works on colonial America, including *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (2006), *Writing Early American History* (2005), *American Colonies* (2001), and many others. He is also the winner of a Pulitzer Prize in History for his work *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (1995). This book is geared toward a wide range of readers. It could be used both as an introductory text at the high school or college level. This book would also be a valuable resource for a teacher who needed to find preparatory information and gain a good base of knowledge before delving into a unit on colonial America in

his/her classroom.

The book sets out to examine how each of those colonial ventures interacted in distinctive way ... all of which contributed to the later United States. It also conveys how colonial conditions produced an unprecedented mixing of African, European, and Indian cultures (p. 7). Taylor's purpose is to tell the story of colonial America and ensure that it is understood as far more than a simple story of the English becoming Americans (p. 7). He starts with the early Native American settlements, then transitions to the first encounters of Europeans with different native groups. Throughout the book, Taylor does a good job of not only detailing the events that happened in colonial America, but also connecting them to different events that were occurring across the globe. A good example of this is in the first chapter, where Taylor discusses how Europeans longed to break out and circumvent the Muslim world (p. 15). Taylor conveys the message that increased globalization affected the colonization of America.

Once contact between Europe and the Americas has been established, Taylor examines each colonial power separately, considering French and Spanish settlement and then the British colonies. In each chapter, differ-

ent facets of the histories of each colony are touched upon, including demography and economics. For example, Taylor shows how the economic dependence of the West Indies and Carolinas on slavery shaped the culture and society of these colonies. The chapters also include something that many books which cover this topic leave out, and that is the viewpoints of Native Americans. He shows that the interactions between the colonists and the different native groups were not one-sided, with the natives merely benefiting from European technologies. Taylor gives a fresh perspective of Native American involvement in the colonies and their interactions with the Europeans, creating a complex picture that belies the imperial fantasies of textbook maps where the claims of vast European empires cover the continent, prematurely submerging the many native peoples (p. 8).

As mentioned before, this book is a valuable resource for somebody looking to gain a broad knowledge base on colonial America. While the book does not go into great detail on any specific subject, that is not its intent. It is ideal for educators looking to refresh their knowl-

edge of a particular subject before presenting a lesson or unit to a class. The book itself is not too challenging a read, using easily understandable terms and maintaining a nice flow throughout. Taylor uses an immense number of secondary sources to support his thesis. For a reader who enjoys citations, the bibliography can be a little dense and hard to follow. Footnotes would have been a helpful addition. That said, the sources successfully add to the author's ideas and help facilitate his different arguments. The book is organized in a fashion that makes it easy for the reader to follow and see how each European nation colonized and made its America. Taylor ends the book with a look at continuing colonization by the United States as it pushed into the Pacific Ocean and into Cuba. The book also includes a timeline of events from the first Paleo-Indian migrations to the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands by the United States in 1889. Overall, Alan Taylor's *Colonial America: A Very Short Introduction* presents an excellent, concise overview of colonial America from many different points of view.

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