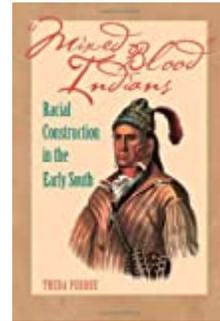




**Theda Perdue.** *"Mixed Blood" Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003. x + 128 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-2453-1.



**Reviewed by** Michael P. Morris (Department of History and Foreign Languages, Jacksonville State University)

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In her latest work, Theda Perdue tackles the subject of ethnicity among the southern Indians. Just as race helped define identity and social status among southern Whites and Blacks, so it does among Southeastern Indians and especially for those of biracial ancestry. The work seeks to determine the status and place of mixed heritage Indians from the Colonial period into the Jackson Era. The research is heavily based upon the rich backcountry travel accounts of people like James Adair, Bernard Romans, and John Lawson and is the culmination of a series of lectures resulting in three chapters on the subject. In her preface Perdue calls for more investigation of the topic in order to better understand Indian societies of the time period described above.

The initial chapter focuses on the Indian world of the late eighteenth century, one viewed by Europeans as heroic if not eccentric. This chapter sets the stage for the appearance of biracial people among the Southern tribes. It effectively explains the relatively cut and dried world of Indian kinship in the fact that either one was kin or one was not. Having no ties to an Indian community meant more than just missed opportunities, it marked someone as an enemy (p. 9). Thus, neither Indian trader nor Indian agent could enjoy success without kinship ties to their host communities. Case in point, single Indian women were relatively free to pursue a love

life of their own making. Yet, when non-Indians pursued Indian women, the decision to allow romance or not involved the woman, her extended family, and tribal leaders (pp. 14-15). Perdue proceeds to establish what both parties, the trader/diplomat and the native woman, received from intermarriage. Interestingly, she notes that Indian women may have perceived their mixed heritage children as extinguishing or transforming the whiteness of their husband (pp. 25). While this notion would have thoroughly disgusted ethnocentric Europeans, it is probably a fitting rebuttal to the European view of explorers as lusty suitors ravaging a prostrate and vulnerable America.

The work's middle chapter focuses on mixed heritage Indians themselves. Some tribes considered these young people their future leaders. Others viewed them as lacking in even the most basic skills, graces, and abilities of either culture. Whether a person's label was demon or savior depended on one's point of view. U.S. Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins found mixed bloods so reliable, he regularly hired them to deliver the U.S. mail (p. 52). Analyzing the mixed blood Indians from an economic perspective, Perdue notes that it was often these Indians who owned slave plantations, inns, and ferries (pp. 58-62). Pursuant to the economic analysis is an interesting count of slaves held by various tribes.

The final chapter takes a look at those same mixed bloods from the eyes of the U.S. government or its agents who often found mixed heritage people to be behind the government's troubles with Indian peoples. Nineteenth century Romanticism may have forged this negative identity (pp. 80-81). The Romantics said that each culture was marked by distinct and inherent characteristics and some U.S. citizens may have believed it impossible to transmute Indian characteristics. For the most part, transforming southeastern Indians meant assimilating them and Perdue recounts some of the more interesting methods proposed. Robert Beverly noted that the early English should have followed the model established by John Rolfe in the early James Town settlement to marry Indians and take Indian land via the marriage bed (p. 73). Missionary work was another avenue by which the American government hoped to transform the Indian. The author notes, however, that Indians often abandoned their newly acquired churches when they sensed that membership would not stop the removal of their tribe in the early 1800s (p. 79). In the closing chapter, Theda Perdue highlights a concept that ultimately shows the impact of Euroamerican culture upon South-

eastern Indian culture. She notes that the southern tribes had no word at all for mixed-blood peoples until after close association with the intruding white culture (p. 90).

Although this work holds few surprises in new information for those who work in this field, it is a welcome addition to the literature on the subject. It would make an excellent primer for graduate students entering the field and a handy summary for veterans in need of a quick refresher course. Since the book tackles topics thematically, it jumps between Colonial America, the Early Republic period, and the Jacksonian era, occasionally at a dizzying pace. Briefly identifying some of the lesser-known characters mentioned in the book, both Indian and Euroamerican, would add clarity to some passages. Perdue is correct to call for more inquiry into this subject. The field of Southeastern Indian studies has been long plagued for want of the ethnographic sources left by some highly organized trading firm like the Hudson Bay Company or some proselytizing order like the Jesuits. Both groups left the field of Northeastern Indian studies a rich depository of information, sadly lacking in the South.

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