

Book Review
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Preston, David L. *The Texture of Contact European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667-1783*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

By skillfully combining and acknowledging previous scholarship in addition to combatting primary sources, David Preston successfully challenges the traditional narrative of Euro-Indian relationships by demonstrating that they were more complex than the mere conqueror-victim trope that dominates late 20th century histories of North American settlement. He argues instead that while violence was certainly an aspect of the Colonial frontier, intercultural and multiethnic co-existence was the norm for most of the 18th century. Preston uses case studies from a variety of “Indian and European communities” to “tell a more complex and perhaps more ambiguous story about early America than the simple morality tale of bad Europeans and Indian victims. They ... for a time, coexisted and created mutually beneficial relationships.” (18)

To challenge these examples, Preston makes four major points. In certain areas like western New York, he intentionally refers to both Natives and whites as “settler” groups because they were both moving into currently uninhabited areas in the 18th century. Second, he holds that the common experience of everyday Euro-Indian relations differed greatly from how colonial and Royal officials perceived them. He claims that shared, mutually beneficial (in terms of trade and social life) cultures were often created. He challenges the statement that the post-1763 colonial frontier was entirely characterized by distinctly racial violence on the part of Native Americans and Euro-Americans alike by citing continued co-existence in the Mohawk valley between the close of the Seven Years’ War and the beginning of the American War for Independence.

Preston employs a wide variety of primary sources to make his points from several different angles. Architecture, clothing, maps, writings, meeting minutes, contemporary illustrations, languages, and place names all contribute to the book's interpretation of intercultural interaction. He quotes original speeches and letters, often in dialog, providing diverse and powerful perspectives. This diversity of contributing primary sources provides a broad scope of supports to his points and thesis. As examples, he cites instances of Hurons who constructed "all their houses after the French fashion" (27) and French Canadians who adorned themselves in the "shoes, garters, and girdles of the Indians." (51) Also, he frequently references the works of those who came before him, sometimes critically, but sometimes acknowledging them as an important academic progress.

One of Preston's greatest strengths is his ability to literally put the words of different groups into dialog with each other. Also, he masterfully uses maps and material culture, not just documentary records, as mentioned above, to buttress his point rather than rely solely on bias-heavy documentary records. He makes a genuine effort to show things from different perspectives. The reader truly gets the sense that no one ethnicity was the aggressor and the other not. However, one minor fault in Preston's work is that he makes some sporadic back-and-forth time jumps when presenting sources for certain topics. Thankfully, he only does so occasionally.

Preston's book is very much a social history. It frames its entire conversation around local communities. Even when he discusses martial campaigns, diplomacy, economics, and the like, these topics are always discussed in relation to individual communities. Preston then uses these quintessential settlements to paint a broader picture of the so-called backcountry from Virginia to New France. Part of the book could also fit into ethnohistory, because he certainly

addresses the attributes of distinct groups such as various individual Native American, German, Irish, Métis, and French ethnicities.