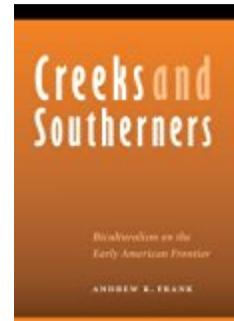




**Andrew K. Frank.** *Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xiii + 192 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-2016-4.

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## The Thickness of Blood

Andrew Frank has written a short book on a big topic. Although only about eight hundred English men lived among the Creeks during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they and their Anglo-Creek offspring enjoyed a disproportionate influence in southeastern colonial history. More importantly, their documentary prominence allows Frank to discuss the nature of Creek-European interactions and the utility (or lack thereof) of modern conceptions of race for Early Modern Americans.

In his examination of these last two points, Frank is offering a new approach to an important debate in Native and colonial history. Where one camp understands people with ties to Anglo-American and Native American societies as disruptive intruders who were neither Indian nor European, others contend they were full members of the matrilineal Native societies into which they were born. For his part, Frank contends that these people exercised their bicultural backgrounds to gain acceptance in and provide valuable services to both societies.

This is an important new contention, if only because it debunks the persistent misconception that Anglo-Americans did not have intimate ties with Native Americans. Frank also improves our understanding of what these relationships meant for early American history. Theda Perdue has recently pointed out the inappropriateness of the terms “mixed blood,” “half-breed” and their synonyms. Because of Native kinship norms, the offspring of Euro-Indian unions were considered fully Indian by their Native kin.[1] Frank takes this contention

further, along two paths, first by offering particular details about Creek norms for adopting outsiders and second by showing that these Creek offspring were also considered members of the Euro-American society of the coast. In the process, Frank complicates the racialized categories of “Indian” and “white” for early American history, adding his voice to those who contend that culture and not ancestry divided invaders and indigenes in the colonial period.

It would have been interesting to see how these relationships worked not just with English and Anglo-American Indian countrymen, but also with French, Spanish, and African immigrants to Creek country. Similarly, important work remains to be done on the poorly documented presence of European and African women in Creek country, but even so, Frank offers us plenty to consider.

He begins this argument by describing how the Creeks’ process of coalescence during the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries involved a regular practice of incorporating outsiders. The book then focuses on the experiences of Indian countrymen and their children in the century and a quarter before the U.S. government forcibly removed the Creeks to Indian Territory in the 1830s. By examining the ways that Creeks incorporated outsiders as kin and neighbors as well as the lessons that Indian countrymen and their children learned from and imparted to both Anglo-American and Creek societies, the book shows how these people succeeded and struggled in two worlds simultaneously. Most of the doc-

uments for this story come from the period after 1763 and many will be familiar to students of southeastern Indian history, but Frank leavens these records with details from oral history that provide Creek glimpses of kinship, adoption, and an emerging racialized identity.

Although much of his argument depends on details culled from disparate sources ranging over a century and half, he focuses this analysis with several short biographies, including those of the famous Mary Musgrove Matthews Bosomworth (also known as Coosaponakeesa) during the 1730s and 1740s, and William McIntosh (also known as Tustunnuggee Hutkee) in the decades before his death in 1825. These and other similarly skilled individuals were able to change identities in much the same way they changed clothes. Familiarity with both cultures was key, but their success also depended on the fact that “many Creeks and European Americans believed that the offspring of intermarriages were members of their own communities” (p. 77). Because the members of both societies oversimplified Anglo-Creeks’ allegiances as either Anglo-American or Creek, they granted these bicultural mediators influence, in part, on the basis of a misperception.

From scattered details and brief biographies, Frank tells us much, but I was often left asking for more analysis. For instance, Frank does such a good job outlining Creek attitudes towards European Americans that I wish he had expanded his useful, but sometimes uneven, discussion of Euro-American attitudes towards Indians and racial difference more generally. He claims that eighteenth-century European Americans “shared a belief that immutable differences separated humankind into several races” even as they “accepted the reality that a racial barrier did not permanently prevent European Americans from becoming Indians” (p. 6). Although he explains portions of the second part of this dichotomy quite well, how was it possible for “immutable differences” to not “pose a racial barrier?” The answer to this apparent paradox is crucial to understanding the limits and the opportunities to membership in Indian and Anglo-American societies. It is also crucial to understanding the “racial definition of whiteness” (p. 114) that suddenly appears after 1800 and brings an end to his story of people who defied such simple divisions. Even as he glosses over this conceptual shift, Frank makes clear that Creek history offers an important window onto it.

Anglo-Americans were not the only ones to radically rethink their understanding of the world during the period of his work. As Claudio Saunt has argued, Creeks at

the turn of the nineteenth century debated with increasing vehemence whether property and power should reside in the matrilineal clan or the patriarchal nuclear family.[2] Saunt believes some Indian countrymen and their children fueled the debate by amassing large personal fortunes and insisting on patrilineal rather than matrilineal inheritance. Frank’s disagreement rests heavily on the fact that these immigrants and their children “lived under the same clan-based regulations that governed all residents of Creek villages” (p. 36). This is true to a point, but what Frank does not discuss is that these clan-based regulations were changing at the turn of the nineteenth century. Equally important, the Creeks’ European kin were responsible for many of those changes. In other words, perhaps Frank’s focus on a universal “Creekness” of all residents of Creek towns has smoothed over Creek conflicts rooted in differential ties to Anglo-American society.

The beauty and the weakness of this work lie in its brevity. Frank compiles useful details on Creek kinship structures during the late colonial period and these, in turn, enable him to explain the intimate connections that linked them—to a point—with their Anglo-American neighbors. His work joins a number of others that promise to bring Creek history into the forefront of a number of scholarly discussions regarding Natives’ adaptation to colonization, the limited utility of tribal or racial categories for understanding Native identities and actions, and the interconnection of Native and colonial societies during the century and a half before Removal.[3] I hope Frank elaborates in the future on some of the larger processes of Creek adaptation to colonization and Euro-Americans’ racialized response to Creek inclusivity, but even in these incomplete stories he has suggested some important ways that Creek history can improve our understanding of American history more generally.

#### Notes

[1]. Theda Perdue, *“Mixed Blood” Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

[2]. Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[3]. Robbie Ethridge, *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and Their World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Steven C. Hahn, *The Invention of the Creek Nation, 1670-1763* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Joshua Piker, *Okfuskee: A Creek In-*

*dian Town in Colonial America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Julie Anne Sweet, *Negotiating for Georgia: British-Creek Relations in the Trustee Era, 1733-1752* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

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