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Ann M. Little. *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. xi + 272 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-3965-2; $22.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8122-1961-6.

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Contesting Manhood in Colonial New England

Because so many of the extant sources about contact and conflict among the English, French, and Native Americans in colonial New England were written by the English–particularly by Puritan ministers and propagandists–historians have understandably reproduced some of the English perspective in studies of the period. Ann M. Little's new book, however, goes beyond the familiar, weaving French and Native sources into a skillful analysis of how gender shaped the ways early New Englanders understood themselves, their allies, and their enemies.

From the start, Little shows how gendered assumptions constituted a crucial common ground between the English and northeastern Indians. This claim places her book alongside recent monographs that find similarities where historians once primarily saw differences.[1] The English were outspoken about the superiority of their own views of gender and the family, but the Algonquian tribes with whom they had primary contact in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries shared related standards. Their division of labor differed by task, but both English and Algonquian societies organized families, villages, and communities around gendered ideals. The similarities were even more evident in political diplomacy and military service, over which men had near-total authority in both English and Native cultures. Ultimately, Little argues that the gendered strategies used by the English to discredit their Native opponents (and, at times, their allies) were levied at them in return. And as New England's enemies began to look less like Indians and more like French Catholics, English writers adapted their language to suit the shifting circumstances while maintaining gender as a central component.

For the English and Indians in colonial New England, manhood was defined not only in opposition to women but also to youths, children, and servile creatures. Little demonstrates that both sides insulted their opponents' manhood, and shared enough of a sense of gendered hierarchy to feel the sting of such challenges. Chapters 1 and 2 establish the pertinence of gender in English and Indian conceptions of war, mastery, and defeat. When northeastern Indians captured English colonists they stripped and redressed them as part of a transformation into subjects recognizable within Indian communities–either as victims of ritualized retribution killings or as adopted replacements for fallen tribe members. The English understood enough about the latter ritual's significance to fear its implications for captives and, more broadly, for any of the English in close association with Algonquian and Iroquois peoples. In both Indian and English societies, clothing, armor, and weaponry performed the important cultural work of communicating one's sex, age, status, and identity as English or Native. The kind of "cultural cross-dressing" (pp. 59-60) that took place on frontiers proved threatening to English observers because of what it suggested about the potential blurring of these crucial social markers. Little astutely notes that the adoption of European clothing and blankets had more varied meanings for Indians than the English perceived, and uses a broad range of examples to support her claims about the gendered significance of such incidents on all sides of the conflicts that raged throughout the period.

Little devotes chapters 3 and 4 to English and Indian women whose experiences in captivity have figured less prominently in the historiography, making her contribution all the more likely to influence future scholarship on borderland and imperial wars in New England. The experience of captivity allowed the English to take a closer look at Indian families, and those who returned published accounts marked by considerable ambivalence. Indian men were described both as irrational brutes and hag-ridden fools, while Indian women resembled timid drudges, whores, or harpies. Each of these configurations helped the English to justify their conquest of those they encountered on the northeastern borders. Little manages to extrapolate Indian women's experiences of in-

tegrating English captives into their communities, providing a reading that is both imaginative and grounded in evidence. Another innovation is the book's treatment of English women who chose to remain in French Canada after converting and/or marrying French or Indian men. Little's attention to French Canadian accounts supports her argument that political and cultural differences help to explain why the French encouraged significant numbers of female captives to stay in Canada, while English officials did their best to induce male captives to return (p. 156). The English reluctance to grant inheritance portions to returning female captives, coupled with women's greater economic and legal status in French Canada-which Little is careful not to overstate–helped reinforce this trend.

Chapter 5 follows the development of conflicts among English, French, and Indians into the mid-eighteenth century, as the English responded to the shift from an Indian to a French threat by changing traditionally gendered depictions of war into a newly virulent anti-Catholicism. This transition necessitated an emphasis that relied less upon ideas of manly Christian piety and family headship and more upon a self-conception tied to a sense of soldiering on behalf of the Anglo-American empire (p. 167), complete with images of neo-Cromwellian warriors. Despite these changes, Little finds continuity in the gendered nature of English representations of their enemies. Just as English writers had justified assaults on Indians by describing them as naked and impoverished, they later depicted the French as poor, filthy, and dependent on supplies from France. From the Pequot War in 1636 to the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, Little sees an ongoing commitment to the use of gendered language and practices to justify war, conquest, and imperial competition.

In addition to the strength and breadth of Little's research, *Abraham in Arms* provides scholars of colonial New England with an insightful analysis of masculine and military legitimacy. Too often, historians replicate the inability of English writers to distinguish between the various Native groups with which they engaged in trade, diplomacy, and combat. Little acknowledges the frequent inability (and unwillingness) on the part of the English to distinguish between Indian tribes, and notes the ways Natives capitalized on such patterns in their strategies of diplomacy and resistance (p. 57). This attention to detail, along with careful analysis of the gendered nature of victory, defeat, and mastery, makes Little's book a particularly useful addition to the literature.

Abraham in Arms is enriched by Little's engagement with the existing literature on gender in colonial New England, and her analysis of men and manhood acknowledges the contingent nature of patriarchal mastery without erasing the power dynamics inherent in men's relations with women and other men. Little's early New England is a space in which no group wholly dominated, and in which real men and women acted alongside the roles assigned them by their sex, age, race, and status. The same density of research that supports the argument may make the book challenging as a teaching tool, but its clear and lively exposition recommends it for teachers who wish to provide students with a gendered analysis of events that have traditionally been viewed along political and religious lines.

Note

[1]. Richard Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995); James D. Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); Pauline Turner Strong, *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000); Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003); Nancy Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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