

H-Net Reviews

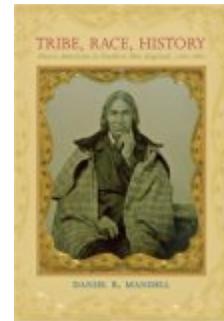
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Daniel R. Mandell. *Tribe, Race, History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1780-1880*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. xx + 321 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-8694-2.

Reviewed by Melissane Schrems

Published on H-AmIndian (December, 2008)

Commissioned by Patrick G. Bottiger



Revealing the Big Picture

In his latest book, Daniel R. Mandell's meticulous scholarship helps illuminate the agency of the Indians of southern New England. Covering the hundred years between the post-American Revolutionary and Civil War periods, he "reconstructs Native communities and their world," taking care not to isolate them from their relationships with each other and those non-natives amongst them and outside their communities (p. xx).

Mandell uses native communities' resolve to accept or reject aspects of a colonially constructed American civilization as a lens through which to examine larger issues of ethnic and social diversity in a region where "emancipation and industry develop simultaneously and where (decades later) abolition offered promises and problems for people of color" (p. xx). He argues for native agency and the importance of native peoples as contributors to the region's history, culture, economy, and politics during a time when they were assumed by the dominant culture to be the remnants of a vanishing people.

This book will be particularly useful to contemporary Indian communities and others working to revive and/or recognize the history of native resilience in the region. It will also be very useful to scholars of this period and region as well as to general readers in U.S. history and diversity seeking a more complete understanding of the American experience. For these reasons, it would make an excellent addition to a graduate level seminar in the

history of native New England and its diversity.

Organized into six pairs of themes, each chapter begins in the late eighteenth century, gradually increasing its scope until the epilogue where Mandell ties his discourse to native experience in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In "Land and Labor" the author focuses on native economies and land ownership. He examines how native communities worked to retain and maintain their traditional lands and their varying degrees of success. He also looks at the ways in which they used the land and interacted with white New Englanders, which became a factor in their employment both on and off the reservation.[1] It is in closing his first chapter that I feel Mandell is his most provocative, insisting that native efforts "to maintain community and identity ... point to how 'friends of the Indians' in the late nineteenth century were *correct* in believing that they had 'to kill the Indian to save the man': to remove Native children from their families, communities and cultures in order to teach them the values of competitive market capitalism and [how to] survive in the modern world. *Those reformers were right*, for Native societies were clearly antithetical to market values, and it was the ability of those communities to maintain different values that made (and continue to make) them so attractive to others" (p. 38). [Italics, author]

It remains unclear to me whether or not he agrees with the "friends of the Indians"—if he means the reform-

ers were right and had no choice but to enact their drastic measures to force native peoples to relinquish their traditional economic world views. The text itself leaves me unsure. The citation seems to ask the reader to recognize that native values were incompatible at some level with capitalism and that native peoples were incapable of accomplishing any kind of adaptation which would have allowed for their retention of some (if not all) of their traditional world views, making necessary programs of cultural and physical genocide requiring the abandonment of the values that had defined them up until that point.

In “Community and Family,” Mandell covers Indian social networks focusing on issues and consequences of exogamous and interracial marriages between Indian women and American men of African and European descent examining the experience from the viewpoints of all three groups (although only the first two groups appear under their own subheading). His inquiry into what role all three groups played in the reshaping of native identity is well reasoned.

“Authority and Autonomy” is devoted to the Mashpee Wampanoags’ quest for limited self-rule in their own territory within the state of Massachusetts. It is a concise treatment of the Mashpees’ struggle. Mandell covers their achievement of district status beginning in 1763 and ending with their successful reclamation of the same status more than seventy years later. Some areas cannot be covered in a way to satisfy micro historians and this may be one. The author seems to cherry-pick his definition of Mashpee traditional life, accepting Rev. Gideon Hawley’s interpretation and his defense of his actions in the silencing the Mashpees’ political voice. Rev. Hawley claimed to have lobbied the Massachusetts General Court for the revocation of the Mashpees’ district status in order to save them from themselves. The reader is left wondering if Mandell agrees with Hawley that the Mashpee tradition of self-government (limited by Massachusetts state authority) was not worthy of protection (p. 79).

“Reform and Renascence” deals with the maintenance and reformation of “relationship(s) between subaltern minorities and those with power, and the connections between religion, reform, race, and class in the first half of the nineteenth century” (p. 105). It may seem curious to some that Mandell refers to “Indian *perceptions* of white racism and bad dealings” [italics, mine] (p. 107). In fact, Mandell’s view of indigenous political struggles through the lens of postcolonial theory leads him to define the Native Americans in his study (quite rightly) as

subaltern. His use of this construct may be somewhat unsettling to readers unfamiliar with it and they may interpret his preference of “perception” over “experience” (reading “they thought it happened” over “it happened”) to indicate a lack of respect for the experiences of his subjects. Even while admitting to the “unpopular” quality of the Guardians’ actions regarding their control of Mashpee land (p. 129), he does not view the actions as unjustified even as he admits that communities “did not actually need guardians to limit the use of resources” (p. 129). His turn of phrase may be more ambivalent than some readers would like.

“Reality and Imagery” covers some of the ways in which New England Indians were interpreted by the dominant culture. Contrasting the realities of native lives that he presents through demographic analysis with the products of authors, artists, and local historians during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, he does a very good job illustrating the dichotomy between the reality of native experiences and the construction of those experiences by others, asserting that those images tell us much more about the creators than the experiences or “truths” they seek to depict. In discussing imagery he refers to a useful overview of “literary and political discourses over Indians” which address the myths of the Vanishing Indian and the Noble Savage, Lydia Maria Child’s *Hobomok* (1824), John Stone’s *Metamora, or the Last of the Wampanoags* (1829), and Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827) among them.

In his final chapter, “Citizenship and Termination,” Mandell examines the “strange mixture of racism and egalitarianism” that encouraged and in some cases forced Indians to reject tradition and embrace a progress requiring their rejection of tribal traditions in favor of full (second-class) American citizenship (p. 195). Here the author highlights the diversity of motives and varying levels of acceptance among tribal members pointing their positive and negatives perceptions of the changes in status.

While I find the limited use of the term “subaltern” to be apt, I have reservations concerning Mandell’s use of postcolonial theory in this interpretation of native agency, in one instance arguing for the rightness of the nineteenth-century attitude necessitating that it was in their best interest “to kill the Indian [in order] to save the man” (p. 38). Native Americans remain a colonized people. They do not exist in a state of postcolonial independence, as their colonizers will never go home, leaving them to deal with the after-effects of the colonial experi-

ence. The adoption of postcolonial theory to tell the story provides too much distance from an ongoing aspect of Native American history.

Tribe, Race, History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1780-1880 offers a broad and comprehensive treatment of the subject matter. Daniel Mandell's research (ably assisted by graduate students and acknowledged by the author) is exhaustive and methodical. His essay on sources alone is no doubt assisting in current research and inspiring new scholars to the field. His tables,

maps, and illustrations are thoughtfully constructed and will provide a useful tool for scholars of the subject. Mandell's research and analysis provides a welcome addition to the historiography, as well as providing a catalyst for discussion, further research, and commentary.

Note

[1]. These local state reservations, begun in the mid seventeenth century as praying towns, offered more freedom in comparison to their nineteenth-century internment-camp-like western counterparts.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-amindian>

Citation: Melissane Schrems. Review of Mandell, Daniel R., *Tribe, Race, History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1780-1880*. H-AmIndian, H-Net Reviews. December, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23021>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.