

# H-Net Reviews

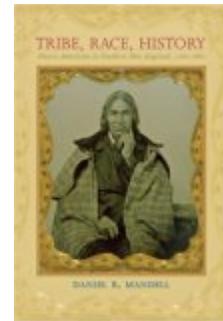
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

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.

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## Intercultural Confluences in Native New England

Consummate and exemplary researcher, Daniel Mandell has once again filled some significant gaps in our collective knowledge on the history of New England Native Americans. Picking up chronologically where he left off in *Behind the Frontier: Indians in Eighteenth-Century Eastern Massachusetts* (1996), this latest work covers the period from the Revolution to Reconstruction, but with more attention to its vital topical themes than to its chronology. Historians and students of early America can find much new ground for further exploration in these pages on topics such as: relations between African Americans and Native Americans in the region; the native struggle to maintain remaining lands, cultural continuity, and tribal sovereignty; the post-Revolution backlash against egalitarianism; the entrenchment of both racism and class division during the period; the problematic nature of “interracial mixture” for those who sought to propagate the mythical paradigm of “race;” and the conflicts between the egalitarian progressive reforms brought on by abolitionism and Reconstruction and the native struggle for cultural preservation and autonomy.

As Mandell explains in his introduction, this book explores “how [Native American] experiences in some ways were distinct from and in other ways mirrored those of their non-Indian neighbors,” while it also “reveals the complexities of and connections between race and class in that part of the United States in which emancipation and industrialization originated and developed simultaneously” (p. xx). While at a few points the narra-

tive gets a little muddled by minutiae gleaned from the author’s exquisite research, nevertheless, Mandell provides us with some important insights into the unique political and economic circumstances of New England natives in the early republic, antebellum, and post-Civil War eras. On the intertwined subjects of race and class, we gain from this book more of a nineteenth-century New England Indian perspective, and to a lesser degree a free African American and Afro/native mixed perspective, rather than the usual analysis in terms of “black” and “white” alone.

While Mandell admits that the structure of this book—especially the first three of its six chapters—is “more thematic than chronological,” there are a few points at which a little more notice of time and chronology would help to better facilitate our navigation through the narrative. The first three chapters deal primarily with the first half of the book’s chronological scope, roughly, from 1780 to 1830, and the last three take us from 1830 (with several back references) to 1880. The epilogue addresses some early twentieth-century developments, mainly New England natives’ attempts to maintain and proclaim their specific tribal cultural identities, in the face of persistent Euro-American declarations that the Indians of New England had all “tragically vanished” nearly a century before. The origins and propagation of that preferred trope, the “now-extinct-noble-savage,” including its connection in this region to the “one drop rule” of African American identity, is deftly explicated in the fifth chapter of

the book, titled, "Reality and Imagery."

One of the great strengths of this book, from beginning to end, is Mandell's inclusion of nearly all of the tribal groups of southern New England, which was clearly made possible by his commitment to painstaking research and by the very long tradition of meticulous record-keeping and record preservation in New England. Since the larger tribes in the region, who had reservation lands and a long history of legal arrangements with colonial and state governments—particularly, the Mashpee and Gay Head bands of Wampanoags of Massachusetts, and the Narragansetts of Rhode Island—are the best-documented; more attention is given throughout the book to those tribes than to the others.

The first chapter, "Land and Labor," deals mainly with the economic circumstances of the Indians of southern New England in the first few decades after the Revolution, illustrating how situations and responses varied between: the larger tribes with considerable remaining land holdings or legally-recognized reservations; the smaller remnant tribes living on or near their former or remaining lands; landless tribes whose members were scattered or transient, yet maintained familial and community connections; and Indians living in urban or small town "colored communities." The author demonstrates well how native economic struggles in the early republic reflected both the general economic distress of that era—which often left the working class of all ethnic groups unemployed, homeless, or transient—and the conditions peculiar to the history and cultures of Indian tribal groups. Mandell describes well how the remaining tribal lands, with their natural resources, were a source of refuge from the economic hard times not only for the tribes who belonged to those lands, but for poor Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans who also found refuge on those lands, often joining and intermarrying with the tribal people.

When describing the "supposedly Indian characteristic" of "improvidence and inability to plan for the future" which both Euro-American and native sailors often displayed in budgeting their wages, Mandell is careful to keep within its cultural context what other writers sometimes dismiss as simply pathological or evidence of inferiority (pp. 29-30). For traditional native people, there was some deep cultural history that made cash economies, and the sacrosanct "value of the dollar," somewhat alien to them. Thousands of years of living in successful, sustainable subsistence economies, repeatedly harvesting the seasonal bounties of both wild and cultivated natural resources, facilitated in them a sense

of faith in the dependability of the cycles of nature. Although native people also had a tradition of "budgeting," in a sense—drying and storing some foods for winter sustenance, for example—there was no perceived need to store up any more than one would need to last until that resource came back in its next season. The author makes clear that, even though New England Native Americans had dealt frequently with European economic systems since the mid-colonial era, they still maintained some cultural economic traditions and attitudes well into the nineteenth century, as a consequence of the struggle for tribal autonomy and self-preservation.

Additionally, in this chapter we find some helpful information on the increasing economic responsibilities of Indian women in New England tribal communities, as their men were more frequently away at sea working as whalers, traveling the land to find other labor, or disabled by alcoholism. The native women sold handcrafted items such as brooms, mats, and baskets, which were very popular among non-Indian women and had been since colonial times. They also sold their agricultural produce, as well as wild foods and medicines. They also often worked on local white-owned farms as day laborers, contract laborers, or indentured servants. Another economic condition that Mandell illuminates is the continued, and at times increased, use of native children as indentured servants. This occurred during an era when the general American public and American courts were increasingly considering indentured servitude to be a form of involuntary servitude and often a method for veiling slavery in the northern states, where slavery had only recently become illegal. In the early nineteenth century, indentured servitude was also more frequently associated with people of color, as white laborers were the first to be hired in the factories of the burgeoning industrial economy.[1]

"Community and Family," the second chapter of the book, contains its most focused study of the dynamics of "interracial," or interethnic mixing and intermarriage during this era, expanding on many of the themes that Mandell skillfully addressed in a groundbreaking 1998 article.[2] Although interracial sex and marriages were pervasive in colonial America and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in the new republic—as Carter Woodson, Winthrop Jordan, Gary Nash, and others first showed us long ago—the relative lack of record-keeping on the lives of subordinate minorities makes such relations especially difficult to document wherever "whites" were not directly involved.[3] However, the task is certainly not insurmountable and the rewards are great, as shown in the treasures unearthed in recent historiography on this topic. This

fact is aptly stated by Mandell: “Examining relations between Indians and blacks in southern New England illuminates the fundamental flaws of a bichromatic view of racial relations in American history and offers new insight into the complexity, malleability, and uncertainty of ethnic identity and assimilation” (p. 40).

Mandell carefully and clearly demonstrates how Afro/native unions in this region were formed by a broad array of circumstances and led to diverse outcomes, both positive and negative, for Indian cultural and political continuity. During the colonial and revolutionary eras, the absorbing of Africans and Afro-Americans into Native American tribal communities more often brought positive results, such as replacing declining numbers of native males (since most Africans and African Americans coming into those communities were male), and bringing to tribal communities additional expertise on European cultures and technology, since the incoming African Americans had often lived in closer proximity to Europeans than had many natives. In contrast, the post-Revolution and early-nineteenth-century influx of African Americans into Native American communities often brought those communities cultural stress and oppositional Euro-American cultural forms (such as patriarchy), further land loss, and an excuse for increasingly racialized and racist Americans to declassify New England Native Americans and re-label them as “colored people,” or “blacks,” thus gradually nullifying legal protections and property rights peculiar to the status of legally recognized Indian tribes. Additionally, as abolitionists and human rights activists began to win more battles against racial discrimination in the New England states during the two decades before the Civil War, many African American men who were married to native women sold their family allotments of reservation lands (usually to Euro-Americans) and moved with their wives and children into urban American communities in pursuit of better employment and egalitarian dreams, thus further destabilizing some of the remnant native communities that they left behind. There are many complex and competing facets within these circumstances which Mandell articulates very well, keeping mindful of how much of this history is relatively unfamiliar territory to many students as well as historians of the early United States.

The third and fourth chapters both focus on native political struggles with state governments and their agents, mainly over land rights and the tribes’ inherently sovereign autonomy, during the two time periods into which the book is divided. One of the stronger points of the third chapter is how Mandell clearly illustrates

the ways in which the New England state governments (Massachusetts especially), along with the older mainline churches, in their attempt to tighten their grip on their authority over the tribes, were motivated in part by the general Federalist/elitist concern with maintaining class deference and authority over *all* of the lower classes and castes, not just Indians. Egalitarian dissenters, “New Light” and other evangelicals, as well as the rebellious, overly assertive working class, such as those who participated in Shay’s Rebellion, were all suspect and feared by the elites. Aside from those who upheld class deference and status quo power relationships, there were also the benevolent paternalists who often focused their attention on Indians and other people of color. Both elements came into play in the Indian guardianship system, a leftover from colonial times which was meant to serve both as a controlling force on native tribes, as well as functioning as a protector of native rights and property. The guardian system often failed in both regards, and met substantial resistance from many tribal leaders in the nineteenth century as they pursued independence and autonomy. Mandell gives special attention to the Mashpee Revolt of the 1830s, in which William Apess played a major role, as a prime example of such resistance. But he also highlights how other tribal leaders attempted to use the protective function of the system to their tribes’ advantage. Helpful examples are also given of how tribes variably responded to the states’ attempts to move them towards individual ownership of land allotments, as it seemed to some to be a way to protect their lands, while in other cases tribal leaders saw continued sharing of tribal lands as essential for cultural continuity.

Throughout his description of these struggles for autonomy and economic and cultural survival, the author highlights native agency, adaptability, and resourcefulness. Numerous examples of Indian strategies for adapting to increasingly difficult and often hostile social pressures are given throughout the book. For example, playing on the increasingly popular “vanishing Indian” trope, Mohegan leaders told the Connecticut state assembly in 1827, “that they should be allowed to keep their reserve for now because they would soon be extinct anyway” (p. 188). The Mashpee Wampanoags had the best trout stream in Massachusetts on their reserve, so they sold fishing licenses and hired themselves out as guides to non-Indian sportsmen to raise revenue. Of the many stories Mandell has to tell, most are fascinating and helpful in illuminating the big picture of Native American relevance to the larger developments in nineteenth-century America. In a few places, though, the narrative flow gets

a little lost in some minutiae from the author's massive amount of research findings, which is, of course, a problem that all of us must forever navigate. On the other hand, some minutiae can be enjoyable, like the discovery that there was a well-established precedent to Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West show in the 1840s and 1850s in New England, including a Wampanoag woman sharpshooter who foreshadowed Annie Oakley!

*Tribe, Race, History* will certainly be very useful to the growing number of historians of this genre for generations to come. It will be a catalyst for many vital discussions and hopefully provoke some very important new research and writing. It has already given me a couple of good ideas for future projects.

#### Notes

[1]. Robert Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

[2]. Daniel R. Mandell, "Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity: Indian-Black Intermarriage in Southern New England, 1760-1880," *Journal of American History* 85,

no. 2 (September 1998): 466-501.

[3]. Carter Woodson wrote and published many articles on the topic of what was then referred to as "miscegenation" in *The Journal of Negro History*, between roughly 1915 and 1940. See also Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (reprint, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Gary B. Nash, *Red, White and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992); Nash, "The Hidden History of Mestizo America," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 3 (December 1995); Nash, *Forbidden Love: The Secret History of Mixed-Race America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1999). Of course, a host of other works in this and related genres have followed in the last twenty years. See, for example, Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); James F. Brooks, ed., *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

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