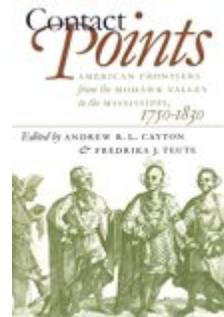


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Andrew R.L. Cayton, Fredricka J. Teute. *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750-1830*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. x + 390 pp. \$27.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4734-3; \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2427-6.

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Contact Points is a collection of papers presented at the Institute's November 1994 conference in New Orleans, "Crucibles of Cultures: North American Frontiers, 1750-1820." Such collections tend to be uneven in quality, and often lack sufficient focus. *Contact Points*, on the other hand, contains a number of threads which knit together the papers into a useful and generally high-quality collection.

Each article starts with the notion of the frontier as a zone of encounters rather than a dividing line between "savagery" and "civilization," and as a contested space rather than as a stage in the progressive European conquest of the wilderness. In their brief and excellent "Introduction: On the Connections of Frontiers," Andrew R. L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute place these essays in the larger context of a shifting historiography of British America, led by New West historians such as Patricia Limerick and northeastern ethnohistorians such as James Axtell. "In this book," they note, "the essence of a frontier is the kinetic interactions among many peoples, which created new cultural matrices distinctively American in their eclecticism, fluidity, individual determination, and differentiation" (p. 2). Cayton and Teute join many of the authors in bestowing wreaths of praise on the current paradigm of frontier studies, Richard White's *Middle Ground*. Yet perhaps one of the most significant aspects of this collection is that, even as some of the authors praise White, they challenge certain aspects of his milestone study.

Of course, within this general sense of the frontier, which is hardly new, the articles have slightly different focuses. Some seem more concerned with the frontier as a place of interaction or cultural melange or personal

fluidity, whereas others focus on the frontier as a place of diplomatic encounter or exchange. A few put women at the center of the picture, while women are missing from others. All but Jill Lepore's concluding piece focus on various sections of the space between Lake Ontario, the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and as far south as Creek Territory. There are two on Pennsylvania and the Susquehanna Valley, one on Iroquoia, two on the south-east, two on the Ohio Valley, and two on the Mississippi Valley. In such a book, a reviewer cannot avoid summarizing each article—which I shall do, followed by a discussion of some general trends in this literature on frontier encounters.

James H. Merrill begins the collection with a look at "Shamokin, 'the very seat of the Prince of darkness': Unsettling the Early American Frontier." Shamokin was a multiethnic village at the forks of the Susquehanna, which even before the arrival of Anglo-Americans included families from various tribes. In 1756, Pennsylvania established Fort Augusta at the village in order to protect their frontier settlements, but the fort's commanders were distressed by the disorder and conflict which continued to plague the settlement. Merrill emphasizes how both the Indian and white settlements shared a volatile and disordered nature, reflecting the description of the multiethnic settlements described by White in *Middle Ground*, and he provides a wonderful look at the development of one particular community. A small group of Moravian missionaries, on the other hand, held their distance and therefore had little meaning for the community. Merrill's unexpected picture of a common frontier culture connecting Native and Anglo soldiers and traders, but marginalizing the earnest Moravian "do gooders," is a wonderfully enlightening view of the social

dynamics of this region and period.

Jane T. Merritt, in “Metaphor, Meaning, and Misunderstanding: Language and Power on the Pennsylvania Frontier,” describes how mutual and creative understanding of metaphors—in direct contradiction to White’s emphasis on creative misunderstandings—were key to Native-Anglo American relations. She notes the often discussed differences between Native and Euro-American modes of negotiations, but stresses that *both* learned by the mid-eighteenth century “to manipulate the metaphors, ritual speech, and the written word in attempts to dominate the spaces of [diplomatic] power” (p. 73). The ultimate irony of this adjustment is highlighted by the frustration of the Delaware leader Teedyuscung, whose efforts to use and control written documents in 1756-57 was rejected by British officials who saw his request as contrary to Native customs! Merritt also focuses, like Saunt and Murphy in this collection, on how Native women played a critical role as agents for communication within the home and community—as cultural brokers. She also joins others who, like Saunt, view missionaries as potential allies of Indian women who sought to use Christianity to “enhance their status” (p. 65), even though in the long-run the newcomers and their religion probably undermined women’s power within their community.

William B. Hart’s “Black ‘Go-Betweens’ and the Mutability of ‘Race,’ Status, and Identity on New York’s Pre-Revolutionary Frontier” offers an unusual portrait of frontier New York, as blacks, whites, and Indians mingled in an inventive and often violent arena. His description of Sir William Johnson’s homes as centers for shifting racial and ethnic identities is wonderful, and he draws our attention to how the New York and Pennsylvania frontiers were (and more significantly, were seen as) havens for escaped slaves. He sees the frontier in terms of the “fluidity of social interaction, creativity in cultural borrowing, and the possibility of self transformation” (p. 93). Hart then sets up Anglo-America’s “racialized world view” as its opposite: “fixed, immutable, heritable, and nontranscendable” (p. 94). True. But such rigidity was also built into feudal European social classes, so perhaps, in a broader sense, this is a characteristic of western culture rather than unique to racism. In addition, singling out *behavior* as the crux of Indian identity, rather than race as among whites, is also somewhat problematic. Anglo-American Eve Pickard was burned out of Iroquoia for committing land fraud, true, but similar fraud was sometimes committed by Indians without their being labeled white. These issues do not invalidate Hart’s

fine article; rather they emphasize the elusive nature of the eighteenth-century North American frontier.

Gregory Evans Dowd, in “‘Insidious Friends’: Gift Giving and the Cherokee-British Alliance in the Seven Years’ War,” examines diplomatic relations in a frontier that was “spatial, human, and relational” (p. 117). Like Merritt, he contradicts White’s *Middle Ground* to emphasize how the Cherokees and English understood each other *too* well, for “their increasing familiarity bred less love than disaffection” (p. 123). Focusing on gifts, he notes that those given Cherokee warriors represented underpayment for services rendered or expect. Since both Indians and English had similar understanding of the implications of presents, Dowd asks, why pay so little to such valuable allies? The Cherokees were, he answers, seen as untrustworthy mercenaries by the British, instead of noble warriors. Both sides also had different desires for the bonds represented by gifts: Indian warriors wanted equity, whereas Anglo-American officers wanted Indians subordinated. “Cherokees,” he writes, “interpreted British penury as a clear demonstration of British disdain for them, which it was” (p. 142).

Claudio Saunt, in “‘Domestick ... Quiet being broke’: Gender Conflict Among Creek Indians in the Eighteenth Century,” examines how the distinctions between Creek men and women remained wide even as their social circumstances shifted. The rise of the raw deerskin trade took power from women as the men obtained tin, brassware, and corn directly from traders. The women saw a new opportunity, however, to recapture that power as the American agent seemed to enlist their help to forge a new economic order for the tribe. But the agent sought to place the Creek men in charge of that economy, plowing the fields and running the family’s textile production. Women had some success in carving out a role in the economy through the hickory nut oil trade and prostitution. But Creek men, seeing the potential loss of their masculinity in the missionary’s efforts, displayed increasing hostility toward women, leading to their efforts to target white women during the Red Stick Revolt.

Stephen Aron’s “Pigs and Hunters: ‘Rights in the Woods’ on the Trans-Appalachian Frontier” is a lovely study of how Indian and Anglo-American backcountry residents of Kentucky developed similar mixed economies in the period 1760-1800. Aron calls this a “mutual process of frontiering” (p. 176). At the same time key differences remained, especially the emerging privatization of land and animals which Anglo backcountry folk could accept, but were unacceptable to Indians.

As the Indians left, the mixed economy ended. This is one of the most sophisticated and unique environmental history studies I have read. Aron highlights, for example, the line between subsistence and commerce which caused Shawnees to accept white trespassers (or competitors) who hunted for meat, but not those who hunted for pelts (pp. 187-88). He also notes how, as overhunting and loss of land constricted the hunting territory of Ohio Indians, they “compensated by raising more cattle and hogs” (p. 190). The key difference between Natives and whites was that the latter did not allow women in hunting parties, and treated the hunt as a way to demonstrate their mastery over animals—which were seen as commodities—whereas Indian women played important roles in hunting, and animals were treated with respect as kin.

Elizabeth A. Perkins, in “Distinctions and Partitions amongst Us: Identity and Interaction in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley,” looks at how distinctions in dress, food, and accents served to mark cultural and social boundaries for subgroups within the supposedly mixed multitude of frontier settlers. She “explores the negotiation—and essential ambiguity—of identity in a fluid frontier setting,” particularly the cultural markers (single elements, such as dress or religion) that serve to signify a whole range of attributes (p. 212). Perkins notes how individuals could, by changing their dress or other markers, actually change their racial or ethnic identities. She concludes that such distinctions soon vanished, in fact, because the lines between groups or individuals never crystallized—with the exception of “encroaching immigrant and dispossessed native”—because the migrants “sorted themselves out several ways simultaneously” (pp. 233-34).

Andrew R. L. Cayton, in “‘Noble Actors’ upon ‘the Theatre of Honour’: Power and Civility in the Treaty of Greenville,” considers the theatre that was the Treaty of Greenville conference. He emphasizes that Americans and Natives came to Greenville with similar needs. The American elite, particularly General Wayne, craved the Indians’ consent to the treaty as necessary recognition of American dominance and beneficence—thereby acknowledging their moral authority—and, for Indians, the ceremonial civility was a way of restoring order and meaning to a world that had become disordered and bloody. Cayton’s essay is noteworthy for its use of literature on public performance to give a new context to the conference, and in highlighting the significance of civility for American elite. I also enjoyed his description of the often tension-filled socializing between Indians and army officers that went on before the actual meetings. But I

had to wonder at his extremely positive view of American motivations and actions, as well as his recycling of White’s notion of creative misunderstanding to interpret Indian expectations. Cayton writes that the Indians believed that the Americans were willing “to mediate the impact of great social upheaval through sentimental language and the creation of traditional fictive relationships” (p. 266). One must wonder, especially after the preceding chapters—you mean they really didn’t know by then?

Lucy Eldersveld Murphy’s “To Live among Us: Accommodation, Gender, and Conflict in the Western Great Lakes Region, 1760-1832” focuses on Indian women as cultural brokers. Women were, she explains, the key to why Anglo-Native relationships were relatively amiable in places dominated by the fur trade but filled with conflict in mining areas. In fur trade communities, women played a critical role of mediating between their people and the immigrants, “creating syncretism on a personal level” (p. 287). Such accommodation never happened in mining communities, such as lead mines in the Upper Mississippi Valley, since immigrant miners came for short periods and had no intention of marrying into local families. They were there solely to grab a fortune and escape the social control of more settled areas. Murphy’s emphasis makes their hostility and violence more a result of youthful misogyny than racism. The ultimate irony, as Murphy points out, is that the relatively stable and peaceful Creole communities were “socially, politically, and economically stratified societies,” with a few elite families exercising “considerable control,” whereas the violent mining groups were highly egalitarian (p. 301).

John Mack Faragher’s “‘More Motley than Mackinaw’: From Ethnic Mixing to Ethnic Cleansing on the Frontier of the Lower Missouri, 1783-1833,” analyzes the area as initially a frontier of *inclusion* which becomes one of *exclusion* as the politics of the movement for Missouri statehood joined with the flood of Anglo-Americans settlers to overwhelm Indian and white natives (p. 305). Both Indians and Anglo-Americans in the region were emigrant communities, most having moved to the area after 1790. As in Aron’s Kentucky, both groups followed similar subsistence strategies which included open-range burning to prepare grazing areas, small farms which featured corn-bean-squash agriculture, stock and horse raising, and hunting. While only a few multiethnic communities flourished, Indian and white communities sometimes shared schools, and families occasionally intermarried. Faragher highlights the key role played by certain individuals, especially Nathan Boone, Henry Dodge, James Rogers, and Louis Lorimier. I wonder whether

any of their wives fulfilled the roles discussed by Murphy; this must have been true of Lorimier. Of course, the ultimate reason for their seemingly blissful relationship was "the modest numbers of Americans" who moved into the area before 1812 (p. 314). After the War of 1812, the trickle became a flood which quickly changed the area's human landscape and grabbed control of the Missouri territory.

Jill Lepore's "Remembering American Frontiers: King Philip's War and the American Imagination" is a boiled-down version of the two concluding chapters to her award-winning book, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*. Her article focuses on the mid-nineteenth-century play *Metamora*, a melodramatic depiction of the last armed resistance to the Puritan invasion, King Philip's War. The play served the United States' romantic nationalistic needs in two ways, first by creating a unique style of theatre with a uniquely American symbol, and second by justifying past and present policies towards its Natives. *Metamora* began with the assumption that Indians had disappeared from New England, made it clear that this was inevitable even if tragic, and foretold that other Indians would inevitably disappear before the march of Anglo-American civilization. Lepore's real story, however, is the irony of this play being performed as the Mashpees rose in armed revolt on Cape Cod, and the double irony of their leader, William Apess, utilizing the romantic image of the Indian and opposition to Cherokee removal in order to gain support among white New Englanders for his community. As one might expect, this is only part of a much more complex picture presented in her book.

Certain shared themes emerge from *Contact Points*. First, Hart, Perkins, Merrill, and others emphasize how this frontier served as an arena where individual identities and community stability were uncertain, flexible, and contested. This has long been considered a key part of the unique American character. In fact, one could say that, while contemporary historians of the frontier tend to flay Frederick Jackson Turner, such studies tend to reconfirm some of his ideas even as they paint a far more complex picture. Second, as Aron, Murphy, and Faragher emphasize, the economies and some other cultural aspects of Natives and newcomers overlapped in some ways and differed in others, particularly in their attitudes towards animals and in the roles of women, suggesting the causes for both cooperation and bitter conflicts. The significance of women in interethnic relations is, in fact, the third shared theme. Their role on this frontier went far beyond the women-to-women connections

which have interested some historians of women's experiences on the western plains—in fact, none of these studies even discusses such relationships.[1] Instead, women were prominent as nodes of interethnic and interracial connections, including marriage. Perhaps they could play this role as long as racial barriers did not grow so high that they became part of the nation's social and geographic margins, as they apparently did after 1830. Women are also an important part of a fourth theme, which is that diplomacy between Natives and newcomers was a far more complex affair than usually depicted. Murphy and Merritt make it clear that women were absolutely essential, informal ambassadors between families and cultures, while Dowd and Cayton emphasize the theatrical and conceptual overtones that characterized more formal diplomatic relations between the male representatives of the two peoples.

As I noted at the beginning, some of the best articles in this collection challenge White's notion of the "creative misunderstanding" that fueled the Middle Ground. Dowd, Merritt, and others point to how, at least by the eighteenth century, Indians and whites understood each other very well. One group may have pretended not to understand, or pretended that the other did not understand, but the notion that both groups were all too familiar with the other's culture seems undeniable. As a result, Cayton's view that such misunderstandings persisted among the Miami and others in the Ohio Valley seems somehow out of place. Of course, such misunderstandings did not help create a Middle Ground. Instead, in silent affirmation of White's view that misunderstandings aided peace, this deadly knowledge, like the famed fruit in the Garden of Eden, seemed to explode or undermine good relations between the Natives and the no-longer-newcomers.

A number of the articles in *Contact Points* are also noteworthy for their use of various conceptual frameworks to find new or different meanings in a supposedly well-known event. Cayton's article not only gains new perspective on the Greenville conference by focusing on the importance of virtue to the contemporary American elite, but more importantly analyzes the meeting and its treaty as a play that both sides tried to choreograph. Aron's discussion of the way Natives and settlers shaped and used the Kentucky landscape makes for a useful piece of environmental history, but goes farther than other scholars to highlight the feedback between human cultures and their environment. Murphy and Faragher both compare frontiers of inclusion and exclusion, a concept first advanced by historical geographer Marvin Mikesell:

the first looking at two contemporary but distinct communities, the second showing how the latter replaced the former in the same location. Finally, Lepore's consideration of the shaping and uses of mythology among Anglo-Americans and supposedly vanished Indians offers new insight into how ideas and actions are intertwined. All in all, this collection demonstrates convincingly that the term ethnohistory (emphasizing intimate connections between anthropology and Native history), as James Merrill[2] has suggested, might best be discarded, or perhaps supplemented by a term which points to the use of sociology, literary analysis, and other analytical frameworks as well as anthropology.

The Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture and its associates are to be congratulated for gathering and publishing this thought-provoking collec-

tion. Historians of the west, Native Americans, British America, and the Early Republic will all find it useful and instructive.

Notes:

[1]. See, for example, Glenda Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), esp. 167-78.

[2]. James Merrill, "Some Thoughts on Colonial Historians and American Indians," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 46 (1989), 94-119.

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