

# H-Net Reviews

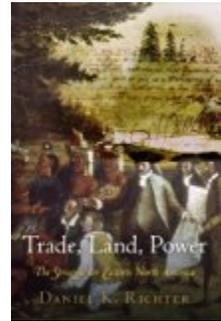
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Daniel K. Richter. *Trade, Land, Power: The Struggle for Eastern North America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. viii + 315 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-4500-4.

Reviewed by David Nichols (Indiana State University)

Published on H-AmIndian (May, 2014)

Commissioned by F. Evan Nooe



## Indigenizing Atlantic Systems, or, Continental History Marches On

In the introduction to this new collection, author Daniel Richter writes that anthologies of one's own essays are signs of "egotism" (p. 1). One is strongly inclined, however, to take a closer look at the essays herein, given the quality and insight of the author's earlier monographs: the magisterial *Ordeal of the Longhouse* (1992), the paradigm-changing *Facing East from Indian Country* (2001), and the provocative study of "America's Ancient Pasts," *Before the Revolution* (2011). Moreover, while most of the chapters in *Trade, Land, Power* have appeared in print before, and several have become famous, others appeared in less widely distributed publications or appear in print for the first time in this volume.

The most famous essay here is "War and Culture" (1983), a now classic *William & Mary Quarterly* article on the "feedback loop" of disease, commercial dependency, and captive-raiding—or "mourning war," a term Richter popularized—that set off the destructive Iroquois wars of 1640-1700. It is an innovative and tightly argued piece, still very readable today, but it also expresses some views that Richter modified or dropped later in his career. "War and Culture" evinces a view of European contact and commerce that is generally negative: alliance with colonial powers brought the Iroquois little good, and trade brought them mostly dependency and weakness.

The approach that Richter takes to European trade, in particular, becomes more complex in his later essays. Commerce, he argues in several of them, did not damage Native Americans but instead provided them with

resources they could shape to their own ends. "Brothers, Scoundrels, Metal-Makers" (1988) uses Dutch narratives to determine what New Netherland's Indians thought of the Dutch, and finds that while Indians freely criticized the newcomers' stinginess they more commonly referred to them as "cloth makers" and "ironworkers" (p. 47), and thus as sources of valuable and prestigious goods. "That Europe Be Not Proud" (2005-09) reiterates Richter's argument from *Facing East* that Indians were "savvy consumers" (p. 56) and used European goods to reinforce pre-Contact trade networks and cultural forms. They prized commodities like tobacco and wampum that had familiar ritual purposes, and used metal wares as funeral offerings or proofs of foreign contact. Chiefs, for their part, used trade goods to build their political influence, turning these commodities into "conduits for the flow of goods and power" (p. 65). "Tsenacomoco and the Atlantic World" (2007) develops this close connection between trade and power by examining the role that "prestige goods" played in the early Powhatan confederacy. Exotic trade goods served as tokens of divine power and tribute payments in the "asymmetrical exchange" (p. 36) that affirmed chiefs' authority. Europeans' failure to recognize this latter fact led to violence in 1570, 1609, and possibly 1622.

At the other end of the anthology's chronological range, Richter's brilliant essay "Believing That Many of the Red People Suffer Much for the Want of Food" (1999) observes that Native Americans, in particular those of the southern Great Lakes, had thoroughly integrated Eu-

ropean trade into their culture by the early nineteenth century. Quaker missionaries and American federal officials, Richter reminds us, viewed Indians as half-starved hunter-gatherers, and wanted to “uplift” them to the level of subsistence farmers, but in fact most had created a diversified economy based on farming, commerce, and consumption. In effect, the vaunted “civilization” program of the early American republic sought to impose upon Native Americans a more primitive economy than the one they already enjoyed. Irony is one of the small but persistent pleasures of reading history, and this article has a keen sense of it.

One may summarize a second theme shared by several of the pieces in this volume with Thomas O’Neill’s phrase “All politics is local,” a precept that applies even to conflicts that appear primarily national or imperial. “Brokers and Politics” (1988), an essay which readers of *Ordeal of the Longhouse* will find familiar, links the rise of the “Anglophile” faction in Iroquoia to power struggles within Iroquois communities and to the influence of Dutch diplomatic brokers in Albany. “Land and Words” (2007-11), in implicit tribute to the late Francis Jennings, analyzes a famous early William Penn letter and argues that one of the main functions of Pennsylvania’s early land purchases from the Delawares was to shore up the colony’s boundary claims against those of neighboring Maryland. “No Savage Should Inherit” (2005) follows the history of Pennsylvania’s Indian relations to the era of the Covenant Chain and the Walking Purchase, both of which Richter argues were principal causes of the Seven Years’ War. For Indians like the Delawares and Shawnees whom Pennsylvania officials had intimidated and dispossessed, alliance with France in the 1750s became their “least-worst” option. (Richter also provides in this piece a significant modification to Peter Silver’s argument in *Our Savage Neighbors* [2007]: when Indians and Pennsylvanians went to war in 1755, they felt obliged to dehumanize one another because they had lived in such close contact and on such favorable terms earlier in the century.) “Onas, the Long Knife” takes up the story of Pennsylvania-Indian relations after the Revolutionary War, focusing on the small but influential community of Allegheny Senecas. The Senecas’ attempts to peacefully negotiate and trade with the Americans caused them to become the U.S. government’s catspaws at the Treaty of Fort Harmar (1789), and to lose the vital Erie Triangle three years later. The United States’ post-Revolutionary “conquest theory,” Richter argues, developed and unfolded on a highly local, even personal, level.

I have mentioned that irony is one of the small

pleasures that all scholars can derive from well-written history. Appreciation for contingency is another, and Richter displays this appreciation in two quasi-counterfactual essays, “Dutch Dominos” and “The Plan of 1764” (both 2006). The first of these argues, successfully, that despite its light demographic footprint the colony of New Netherland helped maintain a balance of economic and political power in eastern North America, a balance which it might have continued to hold had not England conquered the colony in 1664. As matters subsequently developed, the decline of Dutch trade undermined the economic power of New England Indians, helping create the crisis that ignited King Phillip’s War, while the closure of the Dutch market for Virginia tobacco created the economic depression that gave rise to Bacon’s Rebellion. Richter introduces a more directly counterfactual analysis in “Plan of 1764,” which analyzes the British Board of Trade’s unsuccessful attempt to revoke colonial Indian laws, create a system of trading licenses funded by a fur-export tax, and commission local chiefs as their nations’ legal representatives in interethnic disputes. Had this plan succeeded, the author argues, Indian country might have “more resembl[ed] the raj than the rez” (p. 194), but unfortunately it touched every colonial nerve rubbed raw by the imperial confrontation of the 1760s—by new taxation, the Navigation Acts, and threats to colonial self-government—and the plan essentially failed even before its repeal in 1768. Deleterious changes in Indian-white relations, however, were by no means inevitable.

The relevance of *Trade, Land, Power* to students of Native American history should be obvious enough, but the anthology also has much to offer scholars of early America, whose primary sources—official correspondence, missionaries’ reports, exploration narratives—Richter employs in his essays but interprets in innovative and provocative ways. Richter is one of the founders of the school of early American history known as “continental history,” which focuses on the interests of and connections between indigenous societies and colonial settlements throughout the North American continent. Influential members of this school now include Alan Taylor (*American Colonies*, 2001), Elizabeth Fenn (*Pox Americana*, 2001), Kathleen DuVal (*Native Ground*, 2006), Juliana Barr (*Peace Came in the Form of a Woman*, 2007), Pekka Hamalainen (*Comanche Empire*, 2008), Christina Snyder (*Slavery in Indian Country*, 2010), and Brett Rushforth (*Bonds of Alliance*, 2012). The current volume helps develop this approach to early America by exploring one of the central dynamics of continental history: the capture and modification of transatlantic systems by local

American interests. European trade widened local chiefs' channels of political power without dramatically altering Indian societies, imperial alliances grew out of intra-community political rivalries, grandiose Indian treaties served as bargaining chips in local intercolonial disputes, grand plans for imperial reform wrecked themselves on the rocks of colonists' political fears, and imperial wars, when they broke out, became intensely personal affairs. Richter chronicles these collisions with deep insight and considerable authorial panache. While some of the essays in this collection are old enough to be considered classics, the book as a whole belongs within a cutting-edge historiographical oeuvre that Richter himself did much to inspire and create.

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**Citation:** David Nichols. Review of Richter, Daniel K., *Trade, Land, Power: The Struggle for Eastern North America*. H-AmIndian, H-Net Reviews. May, 2014.

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