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Andrew Lipman

Jeffrey Glover. *Paper Sovereigns: Anglo-Native Treaties and the Law of Nations, 1604–1664.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. xii + 312 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$59.95.

Juliana Barr and Edward Countryman, eds. *Contested Spaces of Early America.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. xii + 426 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, and index. \$49.95.

Stephen Warren. *The Worlds the Shawnees Made: Migration and Violence in Early America.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. xii + 308 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$39.95.

Richard White is a historian, not a mad scientist. Yet the career of one of his most celebrated works, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (1991), is rather like the story of Victor Frankenstein and his monster. The book's arrival was an electric moment, thanks to its lightning bolt of a thesis. Its illuminating central metaphor of a "middle ground" charged the entire field of early American history with new energy. White's work countered tired narratives of indigenous defeat with a stunning new portrait of shared cultural spaces that were neither entirely Native nor entirely French and that flourished on inland lakeshores from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth.

White's admiring readers gave his term an awkwardly lumbering life of its own. The nuanced and place-specific thesis soon became an overused "watered down idea about the mechanics of compromise in all kinds of social and political situations."¹ Fifteen years after its release, even White mused about how far his creation had wandered from him. In the very field *The Middle Ground* helped create—North American borderlands—historians now try to keep the concept contained. They argue that the crudely rampant version of the term has damaged our understanding of the past. The concept simply did not apply to every place where invaders and indigenes accommodated each other's cultures. Before the nineteenth century, that happened *everywhere* on

the Americas to some degree, but the balance of Native-versus-European accommodation see-sawed wildly depending on where one looked.

In more recent scholarship, “middle grounds” are hard to find. Colonists were more likely to submit to indigenous rules in Kathleen DuVal’s take on the Arkansas Valley, Juliana Barr’s study of the southern plains, and Pekka Hamalainen’s overlapping work on Comancheria. Conversely, while Natives set a lot of the initial terms of engagement on the peripheries of British colonies, they would eventually find themselves in two discrete worlds rather than a confusingly shared one in places like James H. Merrell’s Pennsylvania woods or Alan Taylor’s Iroquoia. Some new work actively challenges the concept of a “middle ground” on its home turf. Heidi Bohaker, Brett Rushforth, and Robert Morrissey each argue that White’s thesis is an incomplete characterization of French-Algonquian relations near the Great Lakes.²

Yet few things speak as much to the longevity of a thesis than the fact that new books still feel the need to debate it, while others continue to echo it. Though White is never directly cited in Jeffrey Glover’s *Paper Sovereigns: Anglo-Native Treaties and the Law of Nations, 1604–1664*, the book is evidence of how scholars from other disciplines are still embracing *The Middle Ground*’s most basic point: that borderlands encounters involved compromises and reconciliations. Glover, a literary critic, prods us to see early American treaties and treaty-making not just as a process of advancing colonial rule but as dense ritual and textual moments created by both foreign and indigenous authors. He correctly points out how in the first century of English colonization, treaties were haphazard affairs that centered as much on performances and exchanges as the scratch of pens on paper.

With a close reading of the colonial texts of early Virginia and New England, Glover uncovers “a broader world of political communication,” where Native actors quickly learned that “it was not always necessary to read or write in order to influence transatlantic politics” (p. 6). Not only did Indians have a keen interest in European politics, but Glover argues that English attention to Native politics was more careful, curious, and nuanced than we have previously acknowledged. Glover never loses sight of the fact that “treaties were part of a centuries-long attempted genocide” (p. 25). He simply wants to appreciate the uncertain political contexts that created them, even if these texts would eventually help the English to seize much of the eastern fringe of North America.

The book traces the evolving genre of published American treaties and their reception by larger Atlantic audiences. In his first two chapters, Glover reads early treaties between Powhatan and the desperate Jamestown colonists as evidence of English weakness. Treaties were less binding agreements than they were false advertisements of “the Virginia Colony’s control of the Chesapeake” meant to ward off international rivals (p. 71). Glover reads colo-

nists' accounts of Pocahontas' captivity, marriage, and demise as one giant "public relations" campaign, though the 1622 Powhatan Uprising destroyed their carefully crafted images of a "virgin" land being peacefully wedded to its English conquerors. The following chapters turn to New England, where Glover examines negotiations between the incipient colony of Plymouth and the Wampanoag people, the emerging Atlantic Anglo-Dutch conflict over territories and waters, and Narragansetts' canny alliances with religious dissenters in Rhode Island.

Glover's most significant contributions are his suggestions to his fellow critics on how to read treaties; his read on the events that created these documents are sound but unsurprising. Yet the strengths of *Paper Sovereigns* come from Glover's willingness to consider that violence and negotiation were not diametrically opposed processes, while depicting the English advance as both aggressive and tenuous. Or, as he puts it, "guns and treaties went hand in hand" (p. 117) and yet "treaties never had only one meaning, and their outcome was always in doubt" (p. 226). Glover also deserves kudos for his willingness to venture into that fraught zone of misunderstandings and suspicions that lies between literary and historical approaches.

Maps, rather than treaties, are the key documents for many contributors to *Contested Spaces of Early America*, a wonderfully jam-packed conference collection edited by Juliana Barr and Edward Countryman. The book is dedicated to the conference's original planner, the late David J. Weber, the preeminent scholar of the colonial American Southwest whose work both anticipated and elaborated upon White's ideas. Centered mainly but not exclusively on Native-Spanish encounters, this thick volume makes a fine testament to Weber's impact on the field. In their introduction, the editors take a dizzying tour through various historic maps of the Americas made by both Indians and Europeans. The countless moments of collision and cooperation in the volume defy any easy overarching thesis, other than the editors' definition of the early modern Americas "as a single unified space defined by indigenous experience with colonialism" (p. 23). They frame their collection as a call for broader and deeper early American histories, noting "the geography of the western hemisphere's landscapes is covered by layer after layer of historical detritus, just as surely as any place in the so-called Old World" (p. 28).

In the volume's standout essay, Pekka Hämäläinen points out the problem with a place-by-place approach. The result is a "pointillist painting" of early America: "blurred and curiously one-dimensional." He writes: "If older [Anglo-centered] paradigms glossed over larger continental developments, localism is splintering and hiding them from plain sight" (p. 32). Hämäläinen proposes that the theme of "indigenous territoriality" is a uniting concept in explaining how so much of the continent remained in Indian hands up to the turn

of the nineteenth century. He suggests “there was only one early American middle ground”—White’s Great Lakes—since a pattern of “daunting behavioral compromises” was both rare and “unnatural,” as cultural chauvinism remained a powerful force in borderlands (p. 53). Rather, our perspective should be organized not around European empires but rather around a few adaptive and expansive Native groups. He nominates the Iroquois, Comanches, and Lakotas as his key trio of “composite political organizations.” All three “outlasted several colonial regimes and they remained viable, independent powers until the United States’ westward expansion caught up with them” (p. 50). Hämäläinen stops shy of applying his controversial term “empire” to these Indian zones, but it is hard not to read his essay as a call to replace the old color-coded splotches of Spanish, French, and British claims on the map of early North America with sprawling Comanche, Lakota, and Iroquois spheres of influence.

Other essays in the volume appear to revive the old genre of tribal studies with an emphasis on intertribal as well as colonial contact. Elizabeth Fenn offers a taste of her Pulitzer-winning work on the Mandans, a small nation of deeply rooted farmers from the upper Missouri River. Rather than speak to expansive Native ambitions, she emphasizes how elements outside human control—pests, plagues, and droughts—suddenly redrew the Mandan map of the world, showing “the perils of living on [an] ecological cusp” (p. 111). Cynthia Radding finds a similarly complex social and ecological space forming in the province of San Ildefonso de Ostimuri, where the reach of priests, warriors, and caciques could be constrained or expanded depending on topography and climate. Michael Babcock’s essay on western Apaches finds that the once far-ranging people who agreed to form reservations on the Spanish periphery in the late eighteenth century would find new strength in supposedly restricted spaces. Leaping to the South America cone, Raúl José Mandrini argues that lands along Rio de la Plata were much like the mirroring plains north of the equator, as these grasslands remained Native-controlled space for over a century after the colonial arrival. All these authors share Hämäläinen’s concern with indigenous territoriality but not his interest in using broader brushstrokes.

A couple of authors abandon tribal and regional frames in favor of comparing English speakers with their European rivals. Allan Greer contrasts Protestant colonizers’ tendency to purchase land from Indians with Catholic invaders’ seizures of territory, arguing that commercial exchanges and the evolving practice of treaty-making were key tools of British empire. Though he is cautious not to revive the “Black Legend” of Spanish tyranny versus British benevolence, the legalistic chapter skates around the question of vastly different ratios of colonial to indigenous populations, not to mention the very idea that Native powers could also be expansive. Alan Taylor explores British, Spanish,

and American attitudes towards assimilation at the turn of the nineteenth century. Slaveholding migrants from the overflowing new republic would overwhelm the Spanish provinces of Louisiana and Texas, resist acculturation, and campaign for U.S. annexation, while "a more tractable and less bellicose" population of American immigrants in the British realms that are now Canada would slowly assimilate back into the imperial fold (p. 226). Taylor and Greer both excel at pointing out the distinctive features of Anglo-American colonial cultures while simultaneously rejecting crude exceptionalism.

Other chapters look to new methods of understanding borderlands. Brian DeLay views Diné (Navajo) and New Mexican conflicts through the lens of "blood talk," the rhetoric of "us," "them," and "why" that borderlands neighbors used over centuries to make "wars terrible but intelligible and therefore brief, rare, and useful in settling grievances immune to peaceful negotiation" (p. 231). Elsewhere on the fringes of New Spain, Chantal Cramaussel traces the long-distance movements of Indian laborers and captives being pulled to the boom-and-bust of mining centers in Nueva Vizcaya and Sinaloa. Neither a "Native ground" nor a "middle ground," the lands north of Mexico featured fraught chasms between colonial and indigenous worlds, connected by moments of trauma and the forced transfers of people.

Other authors in the *Contested Spaces* volume use more interdisciplinary approaches to borderlands history. Birgit Brander Rasmussen explores the literary odyssey of the Kiowa man Etahdleuh Doanmoe with a close reading of the physical text. Ned Blackhawk offers a similarly in-depth reading of two painted hides that traveled from Nuevo Mexico to Switzerland and back, finding entangled narratives of "imperial power" in conflict with "indigenous autonomies" as evidence of mourning, redemption, nostalgia, and resilience, all resting uneasily on the surface of painted animal skins (p. 298). Samuel Truett closes out the collection with an essay on westward-moving Americans who encountered evidence of the continent's ancient indigenous history. "Ruins, relics, and histories of lost words . . . offered a bridge to a deeper past," but, Truett cautions, "they also marked what made *this* America different" (p. 301). Past empires, whether indigenous or European, were not erased from the landscape, but rather trivialized as curious examples of previous folly. Quaint stories of wandering Welsh princes, Aztec warriors, and mysterious mound-builders allowed nineteenth-century Americans to miniaturize the continent's past, thus making themselves feel bigger.

Seeing the continent's history over a longer time scale is a central concern for Stephen Warren in *The Worlds the Shawnees Made: Migration and Violence in Early America*. The Shawnees have long been known as one of most intriguing yet elusive indigenous peoples of eastern North America. Their migratory patterns led colonists to describe them as "Stout, Bold, Cunning, and the greatest

Travellers in America" and "a People of no Settlement," while Shawnee leaders declared in 1779 that they "have always been the frontier" (p. 76). Warren, author of a previous monograph on Shawnees in the nineteenth century, has worked extensively with present-day tribal elders. His ethnographic approach differentiates his book from a fine shelf of recent and forthcoming titles on the Shawnees by Colin Calloway, Sami Lakomäki, Laura Keenan Spero, and Ian K. Steele.³

Warren is particularly concerned with the Shawnees' origins. His opening chapters argue that their ancestors belonged to a dense cluster of sedentary maize-growing villages, known as the Fort Ancient tradition, that flourished on the upper Ohio Valley from the tenth to the seventeenth centuries. (His clear secondary motive is affirming the modern Shawnees' desire to claim the Fort Ancient remains under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.) Warren's case here is convincing, even though he admits the cultural link is difficult to prove definitively. The early chapters are also where he unveils the book's central argument that Shawnees were "parochial cosmopolitans" both before and after colonization (p. 21). Warren's key phrase evokes the "small but sophisticated" character of Shawnees' political culture: leaders seldom exercised any sway beyond the reach of their home villages, but nonetheless engaged eagerly with the larger world as political allies and economic partners (p. 26).

Warren claims his work stands apart from many scholars—White and Merrell in particular—whom he criticizes for exaggerating the "schism" (p. 13) between Indians' pre-contact and post-contact cultural worlds (pp. 30, 236n51, 239n8). Yet it is difficult to see any daylight between Warren's argument and theirs, as he too describes significant cultural differences between colonial-era Shawnees and their forbears.⁴ The main arc of the book is "an impressive story of adaptation" (p. 15), the tale of how "one of the most agrarian and place-bound peoples in the world became one of the transient and adaptive" (p. 13). Fort Ancient societies "fell apart" and were "largely abandoned" when disease and Native predations "devastated" Shawnees (p. 13). "Being Shawnee" meant adopting fluid "reimagined" identities, as these "far from monolithic" people regrouped in "waves of migration and coalescence, even as they intermarried, migrated, and ultimately adopted characteristics of their allies" (p. 20). At various points in the colonial period, Warren describes the Shawnees as a "culturally varied" people (p. 79) going through first "a seismic change" (p. 91), then "a sea change" (p. 194).

The disruptive forces of contact—epidemics, the Indian slave trade, and the fur trade—propelled groups of Shawnees from their Ohio Valley homelands across the eastern woodlands. The book's central chapters trace the scattered mentions of "Shawnees" across many colonies' papers. There they are in the Carolina piedmont, then on the Illinois lakeshores, then at the headwaters of the

Chesapeake Bay, participating in depressingly similar cycles of slave-raiding, alliance-making, alliance-breaking, and horrific violence that was perpetrated by Indians and colonists alike. Often acting as middlemen in the slave trade, the mobile Shawnees were key brokers for both colonial and Native leaders. Warren even discovers that their relatively easy-to-master language often served as a *lingua franca* in the eastern woodlands.

As Shawnees turned the exodus from their homelands into a deliberate strategy of migration, Warren argues this made them “the principal architects of intertribal alliances east of the Mississippi River,” creating a deep cultural backstory for famed pan-Indian Shawnee leaders like Tecumseh (p. 223). The far-reaching Shawnee story defies what Warren calls “the paradigm of place”—the cliché of Indian survival being linked to land (p. 21). Contrary to Hämäläinen’s push to center the story on expanding indigenous realms, Warren’s work suggests we might understand colonial North America better by following the mobile and smaller Indian polities that thrived in the dangerous spaces between larger European and Native powers. The earthy phrases used by historians—“middle grounds,” “Native grounds,” or even “indigenous territoriality”—can only take us so far.

So has White’s once-rampant concept finally been slain by a scholarly crowd bearing pitchforks and torches? Not quite, though it is now a much more modest and restrained thesis than it once appeared. Meanwhile, there is no reason to worry about the fate of the indigenous-centered geographic approach to early America that both White and Weber helped spark. Without a doubt, it’s alive.

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1. Richard White, “Creative Misunderstandings and New Understandings,” Philip J. Deloria, “What is the Middle Ground, Anyway?” both in *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (January 2006): 9, 15.

2. Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (2006); Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (2007); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (2008); James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (1999); Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (2006); Heidi Bohaker, “Nindoodemag: The Significance of Algonquian Kinship Networks in the Eastern Great Lakes Region, 1600–1701,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (January 2006): 23–52; Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (2012); Robert Morrissey, *Empire by Collaboration: Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country* (2015).

3. See Laura Keenan Spero, “Seeing Shawnees in Early America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 72 (April 2015): 351–66.

4. Warren claims historians who describe the colonial era as “a new world” for Indians are arguing for a “near-total rupture” (13). Yet the originator of that phrase, James H. Merrell, devotes the final chapter of his study of the Catawbas to exploring how this tribal nation kept “the core of their ancient culture” intact. Merrell, *The Indians’ New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (1989), 226–75; quotation on 271.