

## Book Reviews

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Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

Modern scholarship shifted from a Eurocentric focus on the early settlement of North America to focusing on the reaction of the natives and how contact with the Old World affected their lifestyle. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, in *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America*, further expanded on this new scholarship of early American encounters between the natives and the English. Kupperman's book attempted to transform the popular opinion of the English colonists as conquerors to the more accurate description of the English colonists as uncertain settlers who needed help from the natives to survive. Through social, religious, and political constructs, Kupperman portrayed the complex relationship between the Native Americans and the English by utilizing eyewitness accounts.

When the English colonists landed in America, it was a new world to them. The people were exotic, the crops were unknown items, and the climate was different. The English did not know the land or the language; thus, assistance from the natives was needed for the English to learn how to provide for themselves and to understand the new land. Due to the ambivalence exhibited by the English colonists, they tended to mold the Native American culture and society into European standards. For example, Native Americans were depicted as "naked", however they did not walk around unclothed. Rather, they wore fewer clothes than the English. In the European mindset, the simple clothes and lack of elaborate dress were deemed as "naked." Moreover, the English also looked for hierarchy in Native American society. The English hierarchy was centered on inheritance, wealth, and power, all of which were exhibited through fashion and mannerisms. By observing the natives' manners and traditions, the English were able to observe how the Native Americans showcased socioeconomic status. Flaunting of copper necklaces, badges, and ear piercings were all emblems the natives used to show their rank in society. While some English settlers and commentators in England deemed the natives "savages", the majority simply viewed the natives as social people (they had laws, village life, and a language) with the English settlers as having the more superior way.

Moreover, while the English began to understand the natives by using European points of reference, they attempted to Christianize the natives. The early settlers did not forcibly convert the natives. Rather, the early settlers were more tolerant of native religious practices and transcribed their observations of the customs. Due to the communication barrier and difference in religious customs, the early Native American conversions rarely worked, in part because the Native Americans twisted Christianity to correspond with their own religious practices.

Native American religious practices became understood through diligent observations. The same could be said about how the English were able to understand Native American tribal government. The early settlers related what they knew about their native country's government to relate similar concepts to Native American government. The English viewed the tribal leaders as

kings due to the powers they exhibited and the authority they had. Moreover, the “queens” of the tribe were related to as strong ruling women, such as Boudicca. The Native American nobility were further compared to English nobility in the way they were adorned with jewelry and wore finer clothing. Furthermore, the legal system among the tribes was viewed as a reflection of common law, the unwritten laws in England. The laws were not codified among the natives due to lack of a written language, but there was an understanding of the legal system and the punishments if the unwritten laws were violated. From this, the English were able to better understand the Native Americans and their lifestyle.

Kupperman posed unique research in early English settlement in America. Rather than keep with the belief of the English as only conquerors in North America, Kupperman highlights the untruths in the blanket statement. The early English settlers were not conquerors at first, according to Kupperman, the settlers were the opposite, and they were timid and ambivalent. The English were uncertain of how to survive in this new area. Instead of conquering the native peoples, the settlers reached out and attempted to understand the people and culture of the new land. The uncertainty the settlers faced allowed for better bilateral relationships with the natives than if the English were as confident as the Spanish *conquistadors*.

Kupperman’s avid use of eyewitness examples justified her argument. She proved her claim by utilizing accounts from the early settlers and the circulation of the news in England. Moreover, the accounts Kupperman used reveal some of the biases’ circulating during the time. For example, Henry Spelman was sent away to live with the Patowomeck Indians when he was a child. Because of Spelman’s anger at the situation, he viewed the Patowomeck’s in a negative light, calling them savages and unlawful beings.

The joining of many different eyewitness accounts during the early settlement period was masterfully done. The primary sources Kupperman utilized lived in all the major early settlements in America and showed both how some biases towards Native Americans originated (as Spelman demonstrated) and the curiosity by the English to understand Native American life. At first, there was virtually no animosity between the two people groups. This contradicted everything the high school history books say. History books in American schools leaned toward the argument that the English were always aggressive towards the Native Americans. The books never hinted at any sort of acceptance or desire to learn about the Native American cultures as demonstrated by the eyewitness accounts used by Kupperman. Kupperman succinctly debunked the popularized but inaccurate idea of English colonialism as a strictly imperialistic movement in the American colonies through eyewitness accounts.

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