

The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast. By Andrew Lipman (New York: Yale University Press, 2015). Pp. 339. Hardcover, \$38.00.

In *The Saltwater Frontier*, Andrew Lipman argues for the importance of cross-cultural maritime encounters in the early seventeenth-century Atlantic. His scope is limited, however, to a part of the coast of what is now New England. Historians' focus on dry land, Lipman writes, has led them to neglect the crucial role of water in the cooperation and conflict among natives, the Dutch, and the English. Lipman's own account is, for the most part, persuasive and engaging but somewhat marred by anachronism and other problematic uses of language.

Among the wide variety of primary sources that Lipman uses are written texts — such as court records, estate inventories, travel accounts, and diaries — but also maps, historic images of forts and ships, and Native traditions. Lipman stresses, as well, the importance of physical objects as sources. Taking an anthropological approach, he traces the movement of objects such as shell beads from one person to another and one society to another. Anthropological methods inform the book in other ways too: sidestreaming, in which evidence from one group of people is used to draw conclusions about a culturally similar, though distinct, group of people; and upstreaming, in which evidence from a group of people in one period is used to draw conclusions about the same group in an earlier period. Lipman acknowledges the “obvious perils of these slippery methods” and uses them effectively and cautiously.

The book compares and contrasts not only the many native groups along the coast — Algonquian, Hackensack, Narragansett, Wampanoag and so on — but also the Dutch and the English. The latter, Lipman finds, were more willing to enter into alliances with natives and more interested in proselytizing them. The Dutch, on the other hand, “dealt with their neighbors at arm's length,” seeing them as “shadowy, inscrutable figures,” yet were also more willing than the English to buy natives' land rather than just taking it (102).

The Saltwater Frontier emphasizes natives' agency and dispels the notion that the Dutch or the English dominated natives on land or sea. Long before the arrival of Europeans, the native societies from what is now Cape Cod to New York City had an active and well-established maritime culture in which “rivers and trails served as busy arteries binding these mobile communities to the rest of the continent” (25). Europeans introduced their own, very different maritime culture, with caravels, astrolabes, sextants, compasses and other technology that allowed them to embark on long oceanic voyages. The natives, with their dugouts and large canoes, could not go nearly so far, yet they had an intimate knowledge of the coast that the Europeans could not match and watercraft well-suited to their transportation needs. And despite the technological disparity, “it would be a long time before colonizers had a clear advantage over the people they hoped to colonize.” (57) What happened in the meantime was an exchange of knowledge and skills. The English and the Dutch found canoes and dugouts handy for crossing rivers and bays and, besides, were easier to make than the comparable European craft. Natives, for their part, sometimes helped navigate European ships through

coastal waters and came to appreciate the range and capacity of European shallows equipped with sails. Natives also came to manufacture wampum — beads derived from whelks and clams and used as currency — with the aid of European drills and lathes.

The book is also strong on the transatlantic consequences of the Europeans' arrival. Natives became connected to the global economy, which led them to grow more corn and hunt larger numbers of animals for their furs — both market commodities. But there were grimmer outcomes too: Europeans kidnapped natives and took them back to Europe. Though a brutal practice, it was not without benefits, Lipman argues, giving natives, however unwillingly, knowledge of other societies and other parts of the world. A few of those lucky enough to make it home “would learn to survive and even thrive in the cultural spaces forming between canoes and ships” (93). That included the best-known captive, Tisquantum (Squanto), whose adventures Lipman vividly recounts.

Much of the book is given over to military conflicts such as the Pequot War, Kieft's War, and King Philip's War. Lipman's discussion, emphasizing maritime aspects, is lucid and lively, but he does miss an opportunity. In discussing the natives' involvement in the Anglo-Dutch wars, Lipman writes of sachems who “plotted a tricky course between the two empires” and the possibility of a “few Native sachems living at the very fringes of the Western world [inserting] themselves dramatically into a struggle between Europe's two ascendant naval powers” (168). The parallels with the Seven Years War, during which natives and colonials played a central role in a major conflict between world powers, are so clear that it is surprising that Lipman does not at least acknowledge them.

The Saltwater Frontier's major problem, however, is at the level of language. Lipman displays sensitivity to words in some ways, yet, in others, writes jarringly of “Indian consumers” who “shopped with an eye for...beauty and spiritual status” (108-09). Applying the concepts of consumers and shopping to early seventeenth-century New England is questionable at best. A more serious difficulty is Lipman's consistent use of the concept of empire, as in “rival empires,” “empire building” and “tools of empire” (88-90). The European settlements he discusses were, in the early seventeenth century, a long way from being, or even being thought of as, empires, and characterizing them as such is anachronistic. Still worse is Lipman's carelessness in describing people. Though he is to be commended for largely calling native groups by the names they used for themselves, he also uses “Indian,” “Native” and “local” interchangeably so as not to “chase the impossible goal of ridding American English of its colonial legacies” (15). But nobody is asking Lipman to rid American English of any legacies. Rather, it is quite reasonable to expect a twenty-first-century historian of Native Americans to — at a bare minimum — be aware of the different histories and connotations of “Indian” and “Native” and especially to understand how fraught a word “Indian” is and always has been. Though perhaps not indefensible, the use of “Indian” outside quotations requires much more explanation than Lipman gives it. He compounds the problem by claiming that “the use of terms like *foreigners*, *invaders*, *Europeans*, and *colonists* is straightforward” (15). It is anything but. Even in everyday usage, the terms “colonist” and “invader” have widely different connotations that any historian should surely be sensitive to.

Lipman says he intends *The Saltwater Frontier* “to be concise and provocative.” It is concise; it is also well-argued, informative, enjoyable and, for the most part, deftly written. Lipman’s book has expanded the discourse regarding both natives and Europeans in early seventeenth-century New England and alerted other historians in the field to the need to pay attention to water, not just land. Some of the language of *The Saltwater Frontier*, however, is perhaps more provocative than its author intended.

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