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## Pocahontas and the English Boys: Caught Between Cultures in Early Virginia

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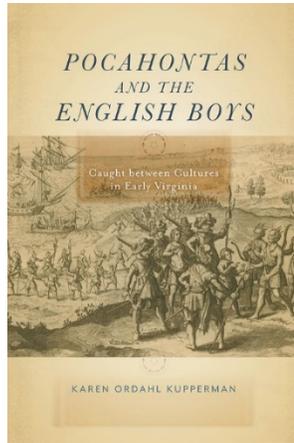
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**Pocahontas and the English boys: caught between cultures in early Virginia.** Karen Ordahl Kupperman. New York: New York University Press, 2019. ISBN: 9781479825820 (hdb.) 233 p. \$24.95.



The 1607 founding of Jamestown ultimately resulted in the tragic near genocide of the Powhatans in Virginia. The establishment of the English fort and the subsequent clash of cultures is a story replete with apocryphal tales and mythologies. Most well-known of these involve two principal players: explorer John Smith and the Powhatan princess, Pocahontas. More unfamiliar, but just as intriguing, are the stories of three English boys sent to live with the Powhatans to learn their language and serve as interpreters and cultural mediators. The story of Pocahontas, like those of the boys - Thomas Savage, Henry Spelman and Robert Poole - reflects a passage from innocence to experience as she initially served as an intermediary between the two cultures, but eventually was acknowledged as a powerful agent in her own right.

In *Pocahontas and the English boys: caught between cultures in early Virginia*, Karen Ordahl Kupperman, a respected historian and author, draws on a wealth of primary source material to illuminate the lives of the English boys, pointing out similarities and differences in their experiences and giving context to Pocahontas's life story. Of the three youths, only Henry Spelman left behind a written record of his ordeals and observations of the Powhatans and Patawomecks, providing a first-hand description and some understanding of American Indian rituals and practices. Religion, marriage, healing and warfare are but some of the topics covered in his memoir.

The three teenage boys, who arrived at the settlement at different dates, were sent by their superiors to live with the Powhatans. Ostensibly traded to learn the language and customs of the indigenous Americans, by virtue of their assimilation in the tribe's daily life they naturally came to experience divided loyalties between their own people and the Chesapeake tribe who fed them and treated them warmly. Kupperman, based on extensive research, notes the great differences in child rearing between the

Powhatans and the English, and describes how the Native people provided a nurturing environment for their young.

Though they gained power through their interpretive and mediating proficiency, the boys later came to be viewed with suspicion for these same skills. Their allegiance was questioned and they were accused of playing both sides to their advantage. Occasionally used to send false messages between leaders for both sides, the boys were forced to question their own loyalties and protect themselves from betrayals and potential attacks.

Pocahontas, Powhatan royalty, served first as an emissary and interpreter for her father, Powhatan, and her tribe. Later, after capture by the English, conversion to Christianity and marriage to a prominent planter, she was recognized as a powerful cultural ambassador in her own right. Though selflessly intervening to save both John Smith and Henry Spelman, she also had to deal with tragedy, and eventually came to see the potential harmony between her people and the English dissipate through betrayal and violence.

Pocahontas and the three boys all exerted influence as interpreters, both in language and culture, helping to forge alliances between the colonizers and the Native Americans. In time, however, the clash of cultures proved transformative for both sides, primarily to the detriment of the Powhatans. Through meticulous research, Karen Kupperman brings to life the stories of these three boys and how they fared, providing additional context to Pocahontas's experience. With copious notes, a detailed index, and a helpful section on appropriate terminology for indigenous Americans, this title is recommended for academic libraries.

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**Charlotte Perkins Gilman and a Woman's Place in America.** Edited by Jill Bergman. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2017. 978-0-8173-1936-6 (Cloth: \$59.95); 978-0-8173-9070-9 (E-book: \$59.95); 978-0-8173-5953-9 (Paper: \$29.95). 240 p.

