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Charlotte Perkins Gilman and a Woman's Place in America

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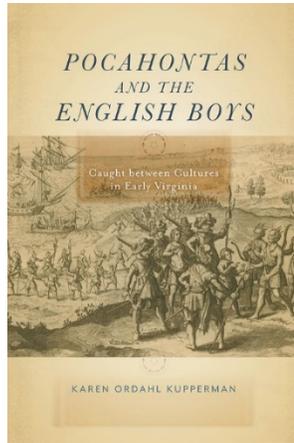
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Pocahontas and the English boys: caught between cultures in early Virginia. Karen Ordahl Kupperman. New York: New York University Press, 2019. ISBN: 9781479825820 (hdb.) 233 p. \$24.95.



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.

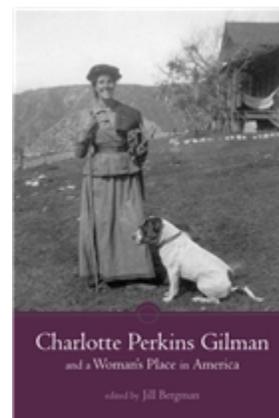
Though they gained power through their interpretive and mediating proficiency, the boys later came to be viewed with suspicion for these same skills. Their allegiance was questioned and they were accused of playing both sides to their advantage. Occasionally used to send false messages between leaders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



Opening this book, I asked myself, “What will I learn about Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935)?”

In my personal life, education and career journey, I heard or read about Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s advocacy for women. Learning about her life, I was encouraged to ask many questions of myself.

“What is a woman’s place? What is a woman’s right to voice personal opinions? What right does a woman have to choose a non-traditional career? Must a woman marry, bear children and be a house/home keeper for her life’s work?”

Little did I know of Gilman’s long and dedicated life of challenging women to seek meaning for their lives beyond traditional marriage, children, and house-keeping. I was to learn from the selections in Bergman’s book, Gilman raised awareness of differing perceptions of women’s roles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, by her writings, speaking and travels in the United States and abroad.

Jill Bergmann presents a collection of essays that explain Gilman’s work and her struggles toward a life of meaning for herself, “A Woman’s Place is Not in the Home” (p.1), “Geography and Biography: Places in and of Gilman’s Life” (p. 13), “Know Your Place: Limits on Women’s Freedom and Power”(p.97) and “Reclaiming and Defining A Women’s Place” (p. 131).

The text is enhanced with photographs, paintings, street scenes, busts of Gilman, and places of Gilman’s travels. Though Charlotte Perkins Gilman committed suicide in 1935, her work can live on in the pages of Bergman’s book. I recommend it for any women’s studies faculty, students, and women’s college libraries. Bergman’s book contains 220 pages, a list of the credentials of the contributors, and an Index on page 223.

An interesting article may be found online: “The utopian ‘feminist apartment hotels’ of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Her idea was regarded as “the most dangerous enemy American domesticity has yet had to encounter.”
<https://www.curbed.com/2019/7/24/20697836/charlotte-perkins-gilman-feminist-theorist-utopian-architecture>

Carol Walker Jordan, Ph.D. MLIS

Thomas Jefferson’s Lives: Biographers and the Battle for History. Edited by Robert M.S. McDonald. Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0-8139-4291-9 (Cloth); 978-0-8139-4292-6 (Ebook). 344 p. \$35.00



As with other authors of our times, it is optional to attend a major academic conference and come away with the presentations in hand to form a book such as *Thomas Jefferson’s Lives: Biographers and the Battle for History*. In this selection for review, Robert M.S. McDonald says he attended a conference, “Jefferson’s Lives”. This conference “featured papers on major nineteenth-and twentieth-century biographers of Jefferson, by major twentieth-and twenty-first-century scholars of Jefferson” (p. Foreword 1).

In the Section, “Contributors”, we can see the names and credentials of 12+ presenters. Of great interest to me is the Contribution by Annette Gordon-Reed’s “Section 12 That Woman Fawn Brodie and Thomas Jefferson’s Intimate History”. Gordon-Reed is “Charles Warren Professor of American Legal History at Harvard Law School and Professor of History in Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Gordon-Reed gained distinction by having won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize in History and the 2008 National Book Award for Non-Fiction, plus 12 other awards including “The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family (2008)”. Noted also is that in the Index, credits are shown that link the writings of the contributors to the topic “Hemings, Sally and the TJ relationships”.

While many topics surrounding the life and times of Jefferson grab our attention and warrant inclusion in biographical writings, the “Hemingses” and Thomas Jefferson present a fascination to which we are drawn and from which we emerge to hold personal opinions. This may be a crucial insight into the writing of biography.

It is said in the leaf of the cover: “The contributors to this book explore how individual biographers have shaped history—as well as how the interests and preoccupations of the times in which they wrote helped to shape their portrayals of Jefferson.” After reading Gordon-Reed’s