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Review of Van Zandt's "Brothers Among Nations: The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America, 1580–1660"

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Brothers Among Nations: The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America, 1580–1660. By Cynthia J. Van Zandt. (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. xii, 252. \$49.95.)

Focusing upon the oft-neglected and easily overlooked decades prior to 1660, this book explores the way various individuals and groups built alliances in early America. Europeans, Indians, and Africans “created a world of international alliances . . .” and “[t]hey did so in part by mapping one another, marking the boundaries of cultures, spaces, and worldviews,” writes Cynthia J. Van Zandt (6). This intriguing volume provides a fresh perspective on early American history. Although it does not quite fulfill its promise to demonstrate “that webs of alliances shaped all of the regions this study covers and entangled everyone in one way or another,” it nonetheless offers valuable insights into new world encounters in the earliest years of colonization (13).

To accomplish her goal, Van Zandt first explores how Europeans “developed ideas about the centrality of mapping and cultural observation” (20). From there she examines some “of the earliest and often ignored European colonial ventures” to consider the first tentative and experimental efforts at networking and alliance building, touching on Roanoke, George Weymouth, Martin Pring, European kidnapping of Indians, language issues, and early encounters in New Netherland (44). The remainder of the book consists of a series of important case studies of various alliance-building efforts, including the Powhatan Indians and English in Virginia, Isaac Allerton and Plymouth, Captain William Claiborne and the

Susquehannocks in Virginia and Maryland, Africans in New Netherland, and the Susquehannocks and their neighbors in the mid-Atlantic region.

Van Zandt's book has much to offer. It is far too easy, but misleading, to look at early America from the perspective of a particular colony or particular ethnic group. Doing so prevents seeing the dynamic interrelationships that crossed ethnic, colonial, and national boundaries. In *Brothers Among Nations*, the author helps address this myopia and opens up new perspectives on this early period. Van Zandt's focus on the first faltering steps of colonial America is also a plus. Too often the earliest year of the colonies are skipped over for what is perceived to be the more substantial story emerging in the late seventeenth century. But for several generations Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans interacted in ways unique to their time and in ways that laid the foundation for later relations. Finally, Van Zandt's focus on intercultural alliances and mapping is provocative and insightful.

Unfortunately, this work does not go as far as one would hope. Van Zandt's insights into early American alliances are intriguing, but limited. She explains more than she actually shows, leaving the reader wishing for more details and examples. Further, the volume is more a collection of various episodes of alliance building than a comprehensive or in-depth exploration of this phenomenon throughout early America. Perhaps this was not the author's goal, but as Van Zandt explores the networks in this book, she naturally invites readers to wonder about the breadth and depth of such interactions. However, if failing to chart all of the territory it could, *Brothers Among Nations* nevertheless identifies new lands and provides a useful map for exploring them.

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