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Review of Schutt's "Peoples of the River Valleys: The Odyssey of the Delaware India"

Paul Otto

George Fox University, potto@georgefox.edu

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Peoples of the River Valleys: The Odyssey of the Delaware Indians. By Amy C. Schutt. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. 250 pp. \$45.00, ISBN 978-0-8122-3993-5.)

Community and kin networks. Alliance formation. Shared territories. These are the themes Amy C. Schutt explores in *Peoples of the River Valleys*. Encompassing the Unami-speaking people of the Delaware River valley and the Munsee-speaking people of the Hudson River valley, these “peoples of the river valleys” would later be collectively known as the Lenape or Delaware Indians. Schutt traces the literal odyssey of the Delawares from contact with Europeans through the era of the American Revolution as they migrated from one river valley to the next, from their homelands to new lands, at each stage meeting the challenges of encroaching European settlement, frontier conflict, and European imperialism. Along the way she successfully demonstrates how the Delawares shared new geographic spaces, established new networks, and mediated between peoples.

Like other coastal peoples, the Delawares experienced the brunt of European contact and suffered from the resulting disease and warfare. While they benefited at times from trade with Europeans, pressure for their lands forced them

to migrate westward. They encountered other indigenous groups while never fully succeeding in escaping European encroachments on their land. Against that backdrop, Schutt explores Delaware efforts to control their home and hunting lands and to maintain peace with their neighbors. She argues that throughout their history the Delawares followed similar patterns of social organization and intergroup negotiations, whether among Indians or between Indians and Europeans.

Schutt explains that her initial research into the Delawares “concerned identity and ethnogenesis” (p. 3). She came to understand, however, the difficulty in satisfactorily exploring such topics given her cultural and temporal distance from the historic Delaware people. Complicating matters was a lack of sources that could document such an interpretation and analysis. What the sources did allow Schutt to trace, however, were the “patterns of behavior and approaches to relating to others that told a significant story about Lenapes/Delawares over a substantial period of time” (p. 4).

This approach allows Schutt to align closely her analysis with her sources, to avoid interpretive overreach, and ultimately to present a more convincing argument. In fact, it allows her to lay a foundation on which she returns to her original effort to describe Delaware identity. For at the end of the Seven Years’ War, she argues, Delawares

tried to place themselves at the head of mediation efforts to reestablish peace. As they did so, they drew upon long experience in shaping and being shaped by alliances. . . . By the time the Revolutionary War broke out, the Delawares had gone a long way toward defining themselves as authorities in forming alliances. (p. 176)

The weakest part of the book is in the first two chapters. Here Schutt discusses those we might call the “proto-Delawares”—the Munsee- and Unami-speaking people who, through their migrations and tribulations, eventually developed a common identity, but who, in the early seventeenth century, could not properly be lumped together by language, culture, or identity (although, as she allows, this is a matter of scholarly disagreement). Furthermore, the records that reveal the very

aspects Schutt wishes to trace among the people—their rituals and mediation skills—offer only vague and inconsistent support for her argument. As a result, she regularly employs the subjunctive voice in her analysis in these chapters. To her credit Schutt acknowledges the difficulties, and her honesty in admitting what cannot be known with certainty is to be welcomed over the alternative of overstating the case.

In the end, such seeming weaknesses do not undercut her overall argument, and this volume is recommended for anyone with an interest in the Delaware people. By the conclusion of *Peoples of the River Valleys*, one is left with little doubt that Delawares developed and practiced a tradition of sharing spaces and building alliances, which they carried with them into the nineteenth century. As she concludes, “the Delawares continued to take shape as a people out of long-term processes of building alliances and sitting down with others in many different times and places” (p. 187).

Paul Otto
George Fox University
Newberg, Oregon