



The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors From European Contact Through the Era of Removal

James H. Merrell

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This book is an eloquent account of the native peoples of the Carolina piedmont who became known as the Catawba Nation. James Merrell brings the Catawbas more fully into American history by tracing how they underwent that most fundamental of American experiences: adapting to a new world. Arguing that European colonists and African slaves created a society that was as alien—as new—to Indians as American itself was to the newcomers, Merrell follows the Catawbas from their first contact with Europeans in the sixteenth century until their accommodation to a changing America was largely complete some three centuries later.

Heretofore, scholarship has mostly ignored that adaptation of native Americans to the new American cultural and physical milieu and has instead dwelt on warfare, expropriation, suppression, and annihilation. Attempts to incorporate native peoples into the mainstream of American history have usually taken the form of lists of Indian "contributions" to American culture or, conversely, a solemn paean to Indian respect for nature.

This chronicle of the Catawbas takes note of all of the above. But its center is the Catawbas' encounter with the colonists and their entourage: unfamiliar diseases, crown diplomats, trade goods, and Christian missionaries. Each of those required creative responses, which transformed Catawba life rather than destroyed it. Natives constructed new societies in the aftermath of epidemics, assimilated both traders and their enticing goods into established cultural forms, came to terms with settlers, and fended off missionaries. Through it all, the Catawbas endured—as soldiers in the Revolution, as landlords and landladies on their reservation, as potters and farmers—retaining their Indian identity, remaining in their piedmont home, and becoming a part of the American mosaic.

Absorbing archeology, anthropology, and folklore into his vast historical research, Merrell provides what will be the definitive history of the Catawbas. The book also signals a new direction for the study of native Americans and will serve as a model for their reintegration into American history.

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