

Friends and Strangers: The Making of a Creole Culture in Colonial Pennsylvania

Review Number:

1067

Publish date:

Friday, 1 April, 2011

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ISBN:

9780812242393

Date of Publication:

2010

Price:

£29.50

Pages:

392pp.

Publisher:

University of Pennsylvania Press

Place of Publication:

Philadelphia, PA

Reviewer:

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John Smolenski, Associate Professor of History at University of California- Davis, begins his tome, *Friends and Strangers: The Making of a Creole Culture in Colonial Pennsylvania* (a work within the Early American Studies series) with an appropriate discussion of and lesson on the complex etymology of the word *creole*. According to the author, modern readers will likely view the word with 'exotic connotations, used to describe cultural, linguistic, or racial migrants', but never 'peoples of European descent' (p. 1). *Friends and Strangers* comes at an advantageous time in the historiography of the Atlantic World and Colonial America as this is the first major work on the founding of Pennsylvania in several decades. In addition, his work fits into the greater trend of the last two decades of educators and interested parties reconsidering their views on the early-American colonies within the context of the Atlantic World and redefining the boundaries of colonial study. Smolenski accurately argues that researchers should broaden their lens to consider the colonial past of North America, and its European migrants especially those of English descent. He contends that these migrants also created and crafted a creole culture in Pennsylvania.

Traditional histories of Pennsylvania painted the endeavor as a utopian colony that showed the world how a colony and settlement ideally should be. Many histories celebrated the narrative of William Penn and the Quaker colony as the 'birthplace of modern tolerance, domesticity, and political liberalism', but according to Smolenski, this story is not 'entirely false' but rather flawed, a tale purposefully propagated as part of the creolization of the colony, a deliberate retelling of the province's origin that masks the inherent unrest present in the transplantation of an ideology and a people into a foreign world (p. 2). Unable to ship their political and legal traditions intact across the Atlantic, the early Quaker settlers had to re-imagine their role

in Pennsylvania, a process that naturally involved tension, coercion, and accommodation-- that is, a creole culture, a hybridity in a colony that, prior to Penn's founding, already contained other non-Quaker Europeans of Dutch, Swedish, and English descent. This process of crafting the narrative represents to Smolenski what he calls establishing a shared civic culture that would ensure Quaker dominance in a manner that seemed meant to occur.

On the contrary, the Quaker colony in Pennsylvania faced five major problems in just the first decade alone. First, Penn found, to his dismay, that English liberties did not survive the Atlantic trip intact and simply reemerge whole in Pennsylvania. Second, the colonial population contained a large number of non-Quaker Europeans who needed education on the English liberties Penn envisioned for them. Third, the English Quakers themselves had differing views on their own theology, at once causing schism within the community itself. Fourth, the colonists had to consider diplomacy with the existing Native American population, a situation made more difficult because of the encroachment of other Native groups from the Northeast, namely the Iroquois, who had their own desires for the region. Fifth, and finally, the ruling establishment had to effectively reinvent an English government suited to meet the needs of the region and the newly arriving immigrants that would need to be accommodated and adapted into the system the elite were attempting to create. The bottom line remained, 'Penn's colony, despite his best hopes, was not born Quaker: it was made that way, through a series of contentious battles fought in various colonial institutions' (p. 4).

Smolenski's narrative proposes to confirm his thesis by examining the creative process with which the Quakers created a provincial culture. They did so through a crafted narrative of the past legitimizing their inheritance. In their cultural lingua franca the Quaker elite sought to establish a set of habits, rules, and expectations that would set expectations for the colonial society. In addition, the elite sought the creation of identities and creole consciousness through this crafted narrative and hoped to impart the legitimation of this creole culture to new immigrants. Smolenski notes that this crafted creole civic culture was inclusive of Europeans but exclusive of Africans and Native Americans, although the latter played an important role in the formation of the colony and throughout its history. The first generation of Quakers first had to develop a civic discourse that established their authority (and at the same time to re-imagine English liberty and their Quaker theology in their new settings), and then to develop a manner in which the body politic could engage in that discourse.

Smolenski divides his work into three parts. In the first portion, he explores the origins of Quakerism in England and the Society of Friends as a 'dynamic and adaptable faith that drew its strength from its ability to incorporate elements from a variety of other dissenting faiths while establishing institutional mechanisms to maintain a coherent spiritual identity' (p. 9). The second part of the book establishes William Penn's utopian visions and the 'Holy Experiment' coupled with the realities of the early years of Pennsylvania. The third and final discussion examines the aftermath of the first decades of instability as Quakers sought to create a legitimate creole civic identity in their print culture through the narrative whereby Smolenski argues, 'memorializing Pennsylvania's early history played a crucial role in solidifying a creolized Quaker identity and Quaker political rule' (p. 10). This introduction aside, the remaining seven chapters and conclusion include a dizzying array of primary sources and intricate details that provide a thoughtful and challenging analysis of both the individuals' impulses in the project and broad bigger picture snapshots of the time period in question.

Of particular interest throughout Smolenski's work is the notion of creating a collective voice, a collective narrative and identity within a religious plurality, both in England prior to the settlement and then in Pennsylvania in the colonies' first decades. That Penn himself hoped for religious toleration in his colony likely played a role in some of the discord. However, Smolenski makes a compelling argument for the existence of factionalism, and that there was political as well as spiritual wrangling within the early Quaker elite. Quakers in England had to standardize their faith to accommodate by the mid-1650s a 'growing institutional structure' and did so through a network of itinerant ministers, an organized Quaker meeting structure, and most importantly, through the regulation of their publishing tracts (pp. 28-9). By creating a standard body of Quaker theology, they hoped to craft a church that contained no contrary opinions, never

lacked certainty in matters of conscience, and was infallible when united under Christ' (p. 41). Naturally, these high aspirations ran into opposition and concerns in England but for leaders such as William Penn, the most important goal for a cohesive Quaker identity was to create an entirely new society. Pennsylvania would be the 'ultimate expression of Quaker values' where a 'different kind of citizen, 'shut out' of the old, 'great nations' across the Atlantic' could prosper' (pp. 57, 63).

With the narrative of the Quaker past firmly established, Smolenski spends the rest of the book exploring Quaker publications in some depth. Penn wrote the constitutions of the colony in England in 1682, hoping that a written constitution would help in the process of assimilating the body politic to the new world. Smolenski points out the flaw that in crafting the identity of the colony prior to settlement, the Quaker elite neglected to consider how they would change in the settlement process, how they would be creolized. Almost immediately, the Quaker settlers and their proprietor clashed over the process and form of government. In the process that emerged from the debates over government the Quaker elite sought to craft laws to create a 'legal speech community they hoped would produce common standards of socially appropriate speech', to standardize authority and legitimacy through the 'regulation of interpersonal interactions between magistrates and citizens', and thereby regulate behavior, crafting a cohesive body politic (pp. 70–1). Among their important deliberations were early attempts at prison reform, a early method of penance for criminals to shape their 'interior 'selves' through the forced embodiment of appropriate civic and social behaviors' (p. 72). Through the legal order chosen by the Friends, Smolenski argues, they 'picked and chose with English precedents they wished to import', an important and conscious effort to create new identities, a process which was in itself creole and creolizing to incorporate new immigrants and to respond to new situations in North America (p. 73). To encourage settlement, promoters and pamphlets spoke of the orderly world created in Pennsylvania, the easy naturalization for existing European populations and future immigrants in the territory and favorable conditions of the province.

Interestingly, while there are numerous examples of the differences between perceived expectations on paper and reality, the policies of the early Quaker elite seemed to be deliberately ignorant of the reality that 'despite their best efforts to explain the meaning of the civic ordered they had created', one for immigrants and for the existing European and Native populations as well, 'they could not control how ordinary colonists performed the roles they prescribed' (p. 103). For Penn, the question remained as to how he could order his colony and reconfigure the settlement back to his original intentions. Smolenski asserts that Penn grew increasingly worried about controversial court cases, scandalous behavior among the leading Quaker elite, and conflict within the government itself, writing, 'I am sorry at heart for yr Anemositys, for the love of god, me & the poor Country, be not so Governmentish, so Noisy & open in yr dissatisfactions' (p. 104). Knowing that words themselves were actions, Smolenski suggests Penn knew that words could become objects of power and disorderly confrontations among the elite and would not create an orderly society. In short, because religious cohesion in the origin of the elite did not translate directly to political civic cohesion, the governing elite had failed to 'develop an authoritative political language' (p. 111).

The most interesting and provocative chapter in Smolenski's work is his discussion on the Keithian Schism of 1691–3. Here Smolenski makes his most compelling case for the struggle to establish political legitimacy present in the early years of the colony. For example, the very public debate over the light within, the nature of the body of Christ within, showcases how creolization and colonization can shift supposed accepted norms and identities. George Keith, a firebrand of sorts, an itinerant minister to other colonial communities, began asking for confession for membership. By doing so, Keith hoped 'through these reforms, 'the faithful among us' would be blessed 'with a spirit of discerning' that would enable them to ensure that the outward tests of membership reflected inner fellowship with God' (p. 155). The Keithians, then, 'hoped to restore the Meeting from its present fallen state', a state of degeneracy brought on by the colonization effort 'in which it was 'more like Babylon than a Church of Christ' – to its former glory' (p. 157). In the very public battle that emerged from these debates among the ministry one can see the struggle to transplant the Quaker body and its institution to North America. On each side, the use of British precedents from the Society of Friends are interpreted in very different ways while both sides had the same basic thrust: to maintain their Quakerness in the wilderness.

The realities of the new world – the wilderness, Indians, and competing colonial religions and interests – did much to shape a creole identity for the Quakers. Smolenski's next several chapters focus on specific narratives and documents to illustrate this fact and his inquiry and analysis is quite compelling. At times, the Anglican minority in the colony provided a threat by reporting back to London the amount of disarray in the colony. Of particular concern was the threat to British hegemony in the region posed by the lack of military defense. French-allied Indians raided throughout the region and Anglicans accused the Colonial Friends of economic liaisons with French pirates. By 1692 these threats appeared serious enough that colony was under royal direction in an effort to increase administrative control over the territory in the heart of King William's War. Despite these efforts, however, Smolenski makes it quite clear that to the leading Colonial Friends, 'imperial authority stopped at the water's edge', with the example that one Quaker, David Lloyd, publicly mocked the royal seal and English authority (p. 183). A question that emerges from these readings is how pacifism could be expected to survive in the New World, with the constant threat of European rivalries and the threat of Native trade wars. While the traditional narrative paints the early years of Pennsylvania in a positive light regarding the Native population, Smolenski indicates that the situation was much more tenuous. For example, Quaker James Logan indicated to William Penn at one point that the colony was 'nearly 'destitute of Indians'', and said this because 'he worried that the colony would have no Indian allies to protect it in the event of a French attack on the western frontier' (p. 211).

Smolenski's work is an authoritative and enlightening take on the mythmaking process of the early settlements and the differences between realities and histories written after the fact which illustrates an agenda driven mythology. Regarding the portrait of Penn as a benevolent benefactor and friend of the Natives, Smolenski is not revisionist, per se, but he does suggest, accurately, that the reality was filled with more tension than a painting of happy Anglo-Indian relations in the colony portrays. Primarily the issues between the two arose regarding trade, land, miscommunications, disagreements, and missed opportunities, but of great interest is the issue of the Iroquois and their role in the colony. Here is where it would be possible for Smolenski to expand his dialogue on the subject. While a great deal of information is present in the endnotes on the continuing discussion of Iroquois influence on the region (especially concerning the Walking Purchase), it would be interesting to see that dialogue within the body of the narrative itself in more detail. This is not a fault of Smolenski, rather, a preference of the reviewer. Despite this minor concern, Smolenski makes a strong argument for the solidifying narrative of accepted history as legitimising the Quaker present. For example, Smolenski writes about the Walking Purchase fiasco and the Penn sons, 'their ability to reshape Pennsylvania's Indian policy relied on the steadfast support of the 'traditions' laid down by their father. Their use of the past ratified proprietary power in their present' (p. 285).

The last example Smolenski provides is the narrative of Caleb Pusey, an unfinished project entitled 'historical account of the first settling and continuance of the Christian people called Quakers in the provinces of Pennsylvania and West Jersey', a piece of literature that had a 'long afterlife' and influence although it was never published (pp. 287, 288). As a final example of the deliberate crafting of a usable past,

Pusey's narrative presented Pennsylvania as a plain and straightforward but deceptive shaping of history, a 'mixture of remembering and forgetting' that included forgetting the problems Penn faced as a proprietor or Pusey's own role in the Keithian debacle as one of the most vocal anti-Keithians (p. 289). As an intimate read of a number of important episodes, persons, and documents Smolenski's work provides a much-needed reflection on the very real experience of creolization in this post-Restoration middle colony. And as such a document, it is a welcome revision to the traditional Quaker Pennsylvania narrative and its genesis tale.

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