

David W Fletcher, January 2006

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COLIN G. CALLOWAY'S *THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN:
INDIAN VOICES FROM EARLY AMERICA*

Colin G. Calloway's *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices from Early America*¹ is a primary source reader from The Bedford Series in History and Culture edited by Natalie Zemon Davis and others. The slender book seeks to give voice, from a variety of extant records, to the Native Americans who occupied the eastern United States and who had their "world turned upside down" by the invasion and presence of Europeans and their descendants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Calloway, a professor of history and Native American studies at Dartmouth College, recognizes the difficulties of finding authentic and reliable dialogue from Indians who relied predominately on oral communications and had their messages and traditions filtered through the perspectives of European writers. But he rightly stresses that the Indian peoples "were anything but silent. Many of their words survive for us today, if we know where to look for them and how to read them" (v).

Calloway does an admirable job of extracting the voices of mostly tribal leaders and those who had been "educated" by Christian missionaries or in colonial schools. He assembles a diverse assortment of representative speeches, letters, personal narratives, deed records and one will, formal agreements or treaties, and petitions to authorities. He concentrates his focus on the perspective of Native Americans, as he organizes his collection around six major themes: origin

¹Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1994, 208 pages with preface, introduction, seventeen illustrations, chapter notes, epilogue, appendices, questions for further study, selected bibliography, and index.

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stories and first impressions of Europeans, cultural conflicts and confluences, the problems associated with land and trade, native perspectives on the wars for empire, the impact of the American Revolution on natives, and native voices from the new nation. In his effort to disengage the story of colonial history away from its Anglo-centric mooring, Calloway knows well that his compact compilation and its concerns—“loss of land, war and peace, missionaries and Christianity, the education or reeducation of Indian youth, the inroads made by European technology and European alcohol, political changes within Indian societies—represent a part of Native American historical experiences in early America; they are not the whole story” (vii).

Calloway weighs the evidence carefully and cautions against naive acceptance of total reliability in the documents. Even when a European was “a reliable observer and an accurate recorder,” Native American oratory contained too many nuances and hidden meanings. He notes, “In translations that rob them of nuances and fluency, Indian speeches display oratorical power and testify to the richness and importance of the spoken word in Native American cultures” (11). As Benjamin Sherwood points out, Calloway knows the limitations of his source material as well as its substantial value. To enhance the usability of the book for the general reader, he provides “wider information in his preface to each piece, and these prefaces also serve to give deeper context and meaning to the individual articles.”² This is important, since the scope of the work runs about two hundred years, or, as noted by Harry Klaff, “from Powhatan’s ‘Speech to Captain

²Benjamin Sherwood, “Early American Social History book review,” 14 January 2005. At: http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/bensherwood/entry/early_american_social/trackback/. Accessed 28 January 2006.

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John Smith' (1609) to a 'Proposal to Maintain Indian Lands' transcribed from various Indian representatives in 1793."³ As both reviewers detect, Calloway takes a wide swath in order to do much more than just show that Indians talked to white men for the course of two hundred years.

Calloway's goals are: (1) broadly, to argue against historiographical omission of Native Americans and their speeches; and (2) specifically, to argue against misconstrued representation of Native Americans and their speeches. As Klaff suggests, "Written histories from the Indian perspective are . . . difficult to come by."⁴ And Sherwood concludes, "Ultimately, *The World Turned Upside Down* is about Native American history from a Native American perspective, deconstructing stereotypical images, and destroying the idea of the savage."⁵ Both reviewers believe Calloway's work, from the Native American point of view, to be a fine accomplishment.

³Harry M. Klaff, "The World Turned Upside Down . . ." Review, *Seventeenth-Century News* 53 (Spring-Summer 1995): 35.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Sherwood, "Early American Social History book review."

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Other Reviews (Not consulted)

American Indian Culture and Research Journal 19 (February 1995): 226.

New York Times Book Reviews (10 October 1994).

Religious Studies Review 22 (July 1996): 261.

Reference and Research Book News 10 (September 1995): 12.

Western Humanities Quarterly 25 (Winter 1994): 555.