

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

An Empire of Small Places: Mapping the Southeastern Anglo-Indian Trade, 1732–1795. By Robert Paulett.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5nm12539>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 37(4)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Carson, James Taylor

**Publication Date**

2013-09-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

to notions of blood; and for the Maliseet youth, identity has more to do with community recognition and participation in cultural activities, many of which are now pan-Indian in nature and not distinctly Maliseet. Perley suggests that this shift symbolizes a mechanism for dealing with language loss in the Maliseet community at Tobique, and that the movement away from a distinctive Maliseet identity that included language use toward a more “aboriginal” identity might allow an opportunity for Maliseet cultural survival, thus leaving the opportunity open for future language revitalization.

*Defying Maliseet Language Death* is ultimately an attempt to deal with a dying language in a seemingly indifferent community, and to offer hope for the future by documenting a variety of language revitalization efforts, especially at the elementary school level, as well as by connecting language to distinct notions of culture and identity and highlighting the relevance of one to the other. Perley uses a combination of anthropological theory about language and language death and his own years of fieldwork in the Tobique community to document the complexity of language loss, as well as the wide array of historical and cultural contexts necessary to understand how language is lost, and how it might be regained. While painting a somewhat grim and somber picture of the process, this text also highlights the agency communities have in the process, and leaves the door open to hope for alternative realities that might one day lead to language revitalization.

*Kenneth Mello*

Southwestern University

**An Empire of Small Places: Mapping the Southeastern Anglo-Indian Trade, 1732–1795.** By Robert Paulett. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012. 264 pages. \$69.95 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

In *An Empire of Small Places: Mapping the Southeastern Anglo-Indian Trade, 1732–1795* Robert Paulett reorients our understanding of the deerskin trade in the colonial South. Since Richard White’s 1988 dependency-theory take on the trade in *Roots of Dependency*, a few scholars have studied the subject, including Kathryn Holland Braund, Stephen Oatis, and Joseph M. Hall, Jr. Since White’s book, a novel interpretation of the deerskin trade as a whole has been missing, a study that can reframe our understanding of that trade and the consequences that trailed after the packhorse men who infiltrated the towns and hamlets of the Native South. For his part, Paulett interprets the deerskin trade not in reference to the expansion of world capitalism, but rather

as a local cultural/geographical nexus that shaped life in Creek country and Georgia until the end of the eighteenth century.

Paulett's contribution to the field rests on his use of an historical geographical approach to the subject. He positions Augusta, Georgia, as the key place in the sprawling space of the deerskin trade that linked different people around one of the most important economic enterprises of the colonial South. As the author puts it, the trade embodied "a human geography" where participants in the trade "found common concepts of space and created an improvised system of linked places that defined the shape of southeastern history" (2). Together, English, African, and Creek peoples enacted their own notions of space and place and, in the process, created the landscape of conflict and accommodation that made the deerskin trade possible.

The English viewed the place they named Georgia as a virgin territory populated by savages and in dire need of order. Paulett's discussion of the European cartographic history of the region is excellent and underpins his reconstruction of the crown's imperial gaze. He describes colonial Augusta's founding, reconstructs its untidy geography, and ably charts the factional divisions that pitted wealthy traders against one another and against meddling colonial and imperial agents. When the deerskin trade began to decline, first after the Yamassee War and then most precipitously after the American Revolution, trading houses fell, land speculators swooped in, and a new urban order remade Augusta after the grid-like image of thousands of other early American towns. In many ways, Paulett's book offers the same kind of close local analysis as contained in Joshua Piker's 2004 book on the Creek town of Okfuskee, so that we now have two meticulous portraits of American town life at both ends of the trade route.

Also seeking to construct the trade's landscapes to suit their needs and interests were those Africans stranded on these shores by slavery. In contrast to English imperial order and control of Native spaces, enslaved Africans transformed innumerable foot trails into potential paths to freedom and recast the so-called savage nations as safe havens, though in reality this was hardly the case. Under their eyes the Savannah River, the commercial lifeline of the region, was transformed into a living body of water animated by powerful spirits that dwelled within its depths. Discussing the creolized lives of the African boatmen who plied the Savannah and linked it to Augusta, Paulett well illustrates the existence of a geography of enslavement, which he characterizes as "the Africanization of the Savannah" (70). However, the African antecedents the author draws on to reconstruct the Afro-landscapes of colonial Georgia are discussed only in a brief general paragraph, and one never quite gets an exact sense of how African notions of space and place, if this even can

be described, informed the creation of the multicultural geographies that made the landscape of the deerskin trade both so contested, and contestable (71).

The English quest for order and the African search for freedom found fuller expression as the two groups of newcomers encountered an actual land with thousands of years of its own human history. In the collision that followed the founding of Georgia, various indigenous leaders sought to assimilate the newcomers as quickly as possible into preexisting alliances and exchange networks, but in telling the story Paulett too often writes about “Indians” at the expense of other more particular historical indigenous identities. When Paulett concludes, for example, that “trade undermined Indians’ traditional village life” or when he asserts that “Indians and traders” created a “pidgin” geography, his analysis succumbs to the pitfalls of the umbrella term *Indian* (171, 23). Regardless of its public currency, as a category of analysis in a study that focuses on local peoples and events the term is problematic because of its Columbian origins and hemispheric scope. Scholars should strive to use indigenous categories of identity instead because myriad town, clan, and marriage divisions cut across the region’s first peoples. Such divisions provided challenges and opportunities, and the powerful leaders, clans, and intercultural networks that emerged within the trade resisted any political centralization—colonial or indigenous—that might impinge upon their autonomy and their special relationships with the trading houses. To lose such intricate local stories under the cover of “Indian” works against Paulett’s intent to uncover the important places that comprised the space of the deerskin trade.

Another generalization that would benefit from more specific attention to individual cases is Paulett’s characterization of the sons of Native women and Anglo-American traders as accommodationists who facilitated American expansion. “They thus used,” he asserts, “their dual position to enrich themselves, sometimes at the expense of their Indian kinsmen” (177). Treating such men as a biracial caste harkens back to early nineteenth-century notions of “mixed-bloods” duping “full bloods,” and ignores the exigencies of the chiefly leadership such men typically practiced. Whether in terms of their particular and individual histories, or in reference to recent and wide-ranging debates among scholars about bloodedness, identity, and behavior in the Native South, in light of recent scholarship the book’s treatment of the children of the trade warrants rethinking.

Paulett’s ideas about creolized life on the Savannah and about broader trends that involved the “ongoing dissolution and reformation of identity” in the making of Georgia’s colonial landscape reveal the power and utility of the historical/geographical approach he has taken (116). Indeed, undertaking the challenge of writing an integrative multicultural history of the colonial South is no small feat, one for which he is to be congratulated. Missing, however, is

the kind of cultural depth and specificity that scholars can bring to the indigenous players in the story. Paulett never really achieves a level of detail about the Creeks, or the Africans for that matter, that is equal to his exposition of the English imperial gaze and the cultural compromises that the colonists struck after their first years on the ground. Had he drawn more fully from Robbie Ethridge's 2003 book *Creek Country*, or even this reviewer's *Making an Atlantic World: Circles, Paths, and Stories from the Colonial South* (2007), an attempt to frame the colonial history of the American South in reference to competing notions of space and place between the region's indigenous, European, and African founding peoples, Paulett might have crafted a more fully realized sense of the African and Creek places that were so important to the places and spaces that constituted the Augusta deerskin trade, and that so challenged the English grip on the land.

James Taylor Carson  
Queen's University

**Finding a Way to the Heart: Feminist Writings on Aboriginal and Women's History in Canada.** Edited by Robin Jarvis Brownlie and Valerie J. Korinek. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012. 264 pages. \$31.95 paper.

*Finding a Way to the Heart* has a pleasantly collaborative feel to it that is fully in keeping with the focus of historian Sylvia Van Kirk's work, which is not on the accomplishments of prominent men but rather on their lives as lived within personal, familial networks. Collectively, the twelve authors included make up a network of scholars with pedagogical and professional ties to each other and to Van Kirk, connections that are also personal and familial. The origins of the volume date to a 2007 meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, where a roundtable discussion took a retrospective look at Van Kirk's pioneering work on the role of women in the Canadian fur trade and its imprint on the study of women's and First Nations' history. Of course, a 2013 reader might ask, "how could one possibly study the North American fur trade *without* looking at the role played by Native American women and their families?" But Van Kirk's students, colleagues, and heirs assure us that once this was so.

Adele Perry describes the Van Kirkian project as "making women historically visible" by reexamining archival sources (84). In Van Kirk's 1975 PhD dissertation she mined the records of the Hudson's Bay Company for information about the Native women who married and raised families with European fur traders. Her approach produced a different historical narrative than the then-standard masculine accounts of "Hisland" (Susan Armitage, quoted