A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America. By Nancy Shoemaker (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) 211 pp. \$29.95

Shoemaker's *A Strange Likeness* is the latest contribution to a growing field of study devoted to tracing the development of racially oriented identities (in this case, "red" and "white" rather than "black" and "white") in early America. This short and eminently readable book surveys the landscape of the British colonies during the eighteenth century, exploring how Lenape, Iroquois, Creek, and many others all came to be "red" and the English, Irish, German, etc., came to be "white." Shoemaker's main task is to demonstrate how cultural differences perceived by American native inhabitants and European newcomers gradually came to be understood as symbolic or representative of essential differences. By the end of the eighteenth century, "white" and "red" people were presumed to be shaped and motivated by essential characteristics of their "race."

Thankfully, Shoemaker is not interested in arguing for the fundamental similarity or innate and intractable difference of Indian and European cultures. Such arguments say more about the contemporary politics of multiculturalism than they do about the development of racial thinking. Shoemaker's aim is to show how "Indian and European similarities enabled them to see their differences in sharper relief and, over the course of the eighteenth century, construct new identities that exaggerated the contrasts between them while ignoring what they had in common" (3). Far from denying cultural differences between people of Indian and European origins, Shoemaker gives us pause to consider why the differences won out and why and how those differences came to be understood as derived from skin color.

Shoemaker's choice to organize the book into topical, rather than chronological, chapters effectively underscores the developmental nature of her thesis. In each of six chapters ("Land," "Kings," "Writing," "Alliances," "Gender," and "Race"), Shoemaker deftly reveals how each of these categories shaped Indian and European cultures, often in parallel, if unrecognized, ways. Especially during the eighteenth century, as the balance of power tipped dramatically in favor of the Europeans, cultural differences came to be understood as indicative of fundamental and underlying differences, which in turn were linked to seemingly biological and immutable racial distinctions. The lively details mined from a formidable body of primary sources keep the pages turning. By the end, having witnessed the same plot unfold six times, readers are left with an appreciation of the tragic momentum of the process of racialization.

A Strange Likeness has deep roots in the field of ethnohistory, building upon the work of previous generations, while pushing in new directions. Most significantly, Shoemaker trains the ethnohistorical lens on her European as well as Indian subjects. The book is at its best and most original when she draws on her previous pathbreaking scholarship on

race and gender. She also offers new insights in her chapter about writing, in which she challenges the continued assumption of fundamental differences in the process of making meaning in oral and literate societies. The virtue of the chapters about land, kings, and alliances lies primarily in their graceful synthesis of current work in the field.

Shoemaker has accomplished so much with this work that readers may wish that she had extended her scope. Surprisingly, she makes virtually no mention of religion in this book, as is the case with much work in the field of ethnohistory. This absence is particularly unfortunate in this case because the analytical framework established in the book would be eminently suitable for a provocative and productive analysis of the changing religious landscapes of both Europeans and Indians during the eighteenth century.

Another absence may prove more frustrating to readers, because its presence is promised by the title, which may have been more aptly subtitled: "Becoming Red and White in *British* North America." The book is confined entirely to the lands east of the Mississippi, focusing primarily on developments within the British colonies, with occasional comparisons drawn to French and Spanish colonies. However, had Shoemaker chosen to include these realms, the book would have sacrificed some of the concision that suits it well to the classroom.

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