Sacred Borders
David Holland
Published in print: 2011 Published Online: May 2011
Item type: book

What belongs in the Bible? Could a New World inspire new chapters of scripture or render old ones obsolete? This book shows that these questions factored more prominently into early American history than we have appreciated. It depicts the boundaries of the biblical canon as a battleground on which a diverse cast of early American characters, from elite theologians to charismatic slave prophets, fought for their versions of divine truth. Puritans, deists, evangelicals, liberals, Shakers, Mormons, Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists and Transcendentalists took distinctive positions on how to define the borders of scripture. This book recreates those canonical borderlands, reconsiders the colorful figures that occupied them, and reflects on their place in the cultural topography of early America. By carefully exploring the history of this scriptural boundary, it provides a new angle of inquiry onto such matters as religious freedom and textual authority, national identity, and historical consciousness. It offers a fuller view of early America and of the Americans—male and female, white and black, enthusiastic and educated—who shaped a new nation.

They Will Have Their Game
Kenneth Cohen
Published in print: 2017 Published Online: September 2018
Item type: book

They Will Have Their Game explores how sports, drinking, gambling, and theater produced a sense of democracy while also reinforcing racial, gender, and class divisions in early America. Drawing on unparalleled research into the personal papers of the investors behind sporting events, Cohen demonstrates how investors, participants,
and professional performers from all sorts of backgrounds saw these "sporting" activities as stages for securing economic and political advantage over others. The book tracks the evolution of this fight for power from 1760 to 1860, showing how elites gradually conceded their hopes for exclusive gentility and embraced a more democratic and commercial mass sporting culture while maintaining power by agreeing to limit access according to race and gender as well as incubating respect for wealth and offices won on the allegedly open and level playing fields of electoral “races” and the “game” of business. Compelling narratives about individual participants illustrate the negotiations by which sporting discourse and experience created opportunities for self-assertion across class, racial, and gender boundaries even as they also normalized economic and political inequality along those lines. In the end, Cohen’s arguments question the influence of ideas such as “gentility” and “respectability” in the standard narrative of commercial popular culture, and put men like P.T. Barnum at the end instead of the beginning of the process, unveiling a new take on the creation of the white male republic of the early nineteenth century that puts sporting activities at the center rather than the margins of economic and political history.

Memory Lands
Christine M. DeLucia

Published in print: 2018 Published Online: May 2018
Item type: book

This book reassesses the nature and meanings of King Philip’s War (1675-1678), a major Indigenous resistance movement and colonial conflict that pervasively reshaped the American Northeast and has reverberated among regional communities for centuries. It focuses on specific places that have been meaningful to Native American (Algonquian) peoples over long spans of time, as well as to colonial New England residents more recently, and how the waging and remembrance of violence at these locales has affected communities’ senses of past, place, and collective purpose. Its case studies reinterpret intercultural interactions and settler colonialism in early America, the importance of place and environment in the production of history, and the myriad ways in which memory has been mobilized to shape the present and future. It emphasizes that American history continues to be contested, in highly local and sometimes hard-to-perceive ways that require careful interdisciplinary methods to access, as well as in more prominent arenas.
Unscripted America
Sarah Rivett
Published in print: 2017 Published Online: November 2017
Item type: book

From their earliest encounters in the Americas, Europeans struggled to make sense of the words spoken by the numerous indigenous tribes that surrounded them. Unscripted America recounts a colonial struggle between peoples of European descent who aspired to map native languages according to Christian and Enlightenment cosmologies and indigenous resistance to this ascribed meaning. Unscripted America reconstructs an archive of indigenous language texts in order to present a new account of their impact of comparative philology on the formation of US literary culture. American Indian language texts reveal poignant and contradictory histories of preservation through erasure: each stands as a record of colonial destruction as well as an archive ready for recovery and recuperation. Unscripted America places American Indian languages within transatlantic intellectual history, while also demonstrating how American letters emerged in the 1810s through 1830s via a complex and hitherto unexplored engagement with the legacies and aesthetic possibilities of indigenous words. What scholars have more traditionally understood through the Romantic ideology of the noble savage, a vessel of antiquity among dying populations, was in fact a palimpsest of still-living indigenous populations whose presence in American literature remains traceable through words.

Children of Uncertain Fortune
Daniel Livesay
Published in print: 2018 Published Online: May 2018
Item type: book

This book traces the lives of more than three hundred mixed-race Jamaicans who left the Caribbean for Britain in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Born to free and enslaved women of color and wealthy white men, these individuals fled Jamaica owing to its lack of schools, legal restrictions, and colonial prejudice. In Britain they lived with paternal relatives, attended expensive boarding schools, and apprenticed with their father’s extended networks. Many used this refined British upbringing as a launching pad for an eventual return to Jamaica, or to venture to other parts of the British Empire, in order to establish themselves as elite members of colonial society. This study is
the first to trace the group’s migration back and forth across the Atlantic. It argues that family status played a central role in one’s racial category, in both the Americas as well as in Britain, during the long eighteenth century. Because of their kinship to wealthy and influential individuals as well as their intermediate racial status, migrants of color were critical actors in the debates around race, family, and belonging in the British Empire. Using thousands of wills, hundreds of legal petitions, dozens of family correspondences, and a number of inheritance lawsuits, this study shows the deeply complex evolution of Atlantic racial ideas, even in the most nakedly oppressive of slave societies.

Counting Bodies
Molly Farrell

Quantifiable citizenship—in the form of birth certificates, census forms, and immigration quotas—is so ubiquitous that today it appears ahistorical. Yet before the modern colonial era, there was neither a word for “population” in the sense of numbers of people, nor agreement that monarchs should count their subjects. Much of the work of naturalizing the view that people can be represented as populations took place far outside government institutions and philosophical treatises. It occurred, instead, in the work of colonial writers such as Mary Rowlandson, who found, in the act of counting the “vast numbers” of Indians who held her captive, a way to imagine fixed boundaries between intermingling groups. This book explores the imaginative, personal, and narrative writings that performed the cultural work of normalizing the enumeration of bodies. By repositioning and unearthing a literary prehistory of population science, the book shows that representing individuals as numbers was a central element of colonial projects. Early colonial writings that describe routine, and even intimate, interactions offer a window into the way people wove the quantifiable forms of subjectivity made available by population counts into everyday life. Whether trying to make sense of plantation slavery, frontier warfare, rapid migration, or global commerce, writers framed questions about human relationships across different cultures and generations in terms of population.