

Separate Peoples, One Land: The Minds of Cherokees, Blacks, and Whites on the Tennessee Frontier

Cynthia Cumfer



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Exploring the mental worlds of the major groups interacting in a borderland setting, Cynthia Cumfer offers a broad, multiracial intellectual and cultural history of the Tennessee frontier in the Revolutionary and early national periods, leading up to the era of rapid westward expansion and Cherokee removal. Attentive to the complexities of race, gender, class, and spirituality, Cumfer offers a rare glimpse into the cultural logic of Native American, African American, and Euro-American men and women as contact with one another powerfully transformed their ideas about themselves and the territory they came to share.

The Tennessee frontier shaped both Cherokee and white assumptions about diplomacy and nationhood. After contact, both groups moved away from local and personal notions about polity to embrace nationhood. Excluded from the nationalization process, slaves revived and modified African and American premises about patronage and community, while free blacks fashioned an African American doctrine of freedom that was both communal and individual. Paying particular attention to the influence of older European concepts of civilization, Cumfer shows how Tennesseans, along with other Americans and Europeans, modified European assumptions to contribute to a discourse about civilization, one both dynamic and destructive, which has profoundly shaped world history.

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