Andrew Lipman’s eye-opening first book is the previously untold story of how the ocean became a “frontier” between colonists and Indians. When the English and Dutch empires both tried to claim the same patch of coast between the Hudson River and Cape Cod, the sea itself became the arena of contact and conflict. During the violent European invasions, the region’s Algonquian-speaking Natives were navigators, boatbuilders, fishermen, pirates, and merchants who became active players in the emergence of the Atlantic World. Drawing from a wide range of English, Dutch, and archeological sources, Lipman uncovers a new geography of Native America that incorporates seawater as well as soil. Looking past Europeans’ arbitrary land boundaries, he reveals unseen links between local episodes and global events on distant shores. Lipman’s book “successfully redirects the way we look at a familiar history” (Neal Salisbury, Smith College). Extensively researched and elegantly written, this latest addition to Yale’s seventeenth-century American history list brings the early years of New England and New York vividly to life.
What people say about this book

B.C. Booth, “An Excellent Book that Illustrates the Importance of the Coastal Waters of New England during Colonization. The central goal of Andrew Lipman's The Saltwater Frontier is to have readers reassess their understanding of the term frontier. Rather than land, Lipman argues that the first frontier between Europeans and Native Americans was the waters along the Atlantic coast. The decisions and opinions of Natives, Lipman contends, were important factors in the development of European colonies. Above all, Lipman claims that three things shaped this saltwater frontier: seafaring, violence, and Atlantic geopolitics. In The Saltwater Frontier, readers will discover that the coastal waters of New England were of vast importance to both arriving European colonists and the indigenous peoples who lived there. Because of the abundance of wealth in the form of fish, whales, and shells, “the shape and character of [Algonquian] politics… were tied to the spaces where the continent met the ocean” (35). When the English and Dutch arrived, they recognized the effectiveness of the skills and techniques used by Native mariners, and adopted the canoe as an “essential part” of their daily lives (84). Trade relationships between Natives and Europeans blossomed, and a trade network, that involved colonists trading European goods for wampum beads and fur, developed. Yet, whenever two such diverse cultures meet, misunderstandings are unavoidable, and violence was often the tool used to resolve disputes. According to Lipman, for thirty years a pattern of offshore violence occurred between different groups of Natives, the Dutch, and the English. The Pequot War started after Natives attacked European traders who wished to free kidnapped kin, to drain the European vessels of material wealth, and to avenge the death of a murdered leader. On these coastal waters, Europeans were at a distinct disadvantage as Indian vessels were more maneuverable, and held more men. In response, the English took their fighting inland. As the slaughter of Mystic Fort illustrates, “the Pequots, so accustomed to facing seaward to deal with colonists, never saw the English soldiers coming” (137). When Philip's War began, the English so feared the fighting capabilities of Indian mariners that they banned canoes, and had soldiers destroy every enemy craft they came across. As a result, Philip was stripped of his navy, and the damage inflicted by Indians on the colonists was greatly reduced. But these wars also had a geopolitical aspect. At the end of Philip's War, many of the captured Indians were sold into the Slave trade; their fate bound to the Atlantic. When the English chose to go to war with the Pequots, it was not in order to secure justice for the slain tradesmen, but “to protect an important sea passage that connected English plantations together” (134). But Native contributions to geopolitics was not limited to warfare: Europeans traders also depended on Native mariners for fur, corn, ferrying, and sending messages. Without Indians, the social and political worlds of Europeans would have been far less pronounced. The Saltwater Frontier is an excellent monograph that helps portray the importance of the coastal waters during the colonization process of the New England territory. However, when compared with Michael Oberg's Native America: A History (2010), an inconsistency reveals itself. According to Oberg, trade was intertwined with concepts of
alliances for Native Americans. However, Lipman writes about the Dutch staying at arm’s length with Natives, being too “hesitant to make binding alliances beyond the level of simple trading partnerships” (104). Another critique is that Lipman portrays the coastal region as being abundant in food. However, Katherine Grandjean (2015) argues that hunger served as a motivational factor for the Pequot War. Lipman does mention that the English burned corn fields and split the spoils of war—in this case, corn—with their Indian allies. However, Lipman never considers hunger as a motivational force.

Other Works Cited:


Scot F. Kostiw, “In the introduction the author states that he offers a .... In the introduction the author states that he offers a new way of thinking and understanding the history of the region and a novel explanation of how the English would eventually dominate the area. These statements seem grandiose, however the author is in fact, far too modest. This book is not a mere synthesis of historical records and documents as others have done before. The author brings the reader closer to understanding the contact period and the seventeenth century in this region as no author has ever done before. Coastal New England, Long Island, New York City, the Hudson Valley, and northeastern New Jersey are treated as a single unit. This is the correct approach as the Natives, Dutch, and English were clearly in contact and contending with one another. He successfully shows the relatedness of the Pequot and Kieft's war. These were not isolated events but interconnected through a complex series of provocations. The author regularly shows the Native American point of view and their reaction to various challenges. The occurrence of gruesome and bloody events are placed into proper perspective. Throughout the narration he uses the correct tone and disposition. He successfully argues that the seacost played a major role in shaping the events that occurred in this region.”

Amanda Hanson, “Valuable resource on Eastern coastal indigenous tribes. Well researched and interesting read. This book is a valuable resource for the Eastern coastal Native American tribes during the early colonial period.”


terrance aldridge, “good history. great book about little known aspect of native history”

John A Strong, “very useful for my. well researched, very useful for my research”
Laurence J. Bloom, “Worthwhile venture into American Colonial History. Worthwhile coverage of a part of colonial American history long neglected. This book answers several questions along the line of “I wonder why that happened? It doesn't make sense to me.””