This book also tells the story of the twentieth-century contributions of land-grant colleges to the research and economic development of aviation. Caltech and MIT claim a high percentage of Nobel Prize winners, but public schools, such as Purdue, have been responsible for educating and training a significant fraction of the people who would go on to assemble and maintain the technological steamroller of aviation in this country. Purdue was the first university to construct its own airfield, to hire a female professor of aeronautical engineering (Amelia Earhart), and to equip her with the finest research aircraft of the time (which, unfortunately, she piloted to her death in the South Pacific). Purdue was also one of the first colleges to own an airline—one of its four jets was the infamous Playboy plane of the 1960s (apparently Earhart's feminist message did not sink in).

There are several deficiencies in the book's presentation. For example, early in the book the author notes that “every breakthrough in aviation and space would be captured on film” (p. 8), however, the book displays only a few pages of images to accompany its rich descriptive text. The experienced reader is probably aware of the look of early aircraft, but the novice reader (at whom the book appears to aim) would benefit from some visual images of the early days of aviation. Overall, however, the book is an excellent read and well-researched. While the accolades to Purdue wear thin after a few chapters, the reader does sense the “can-do” attitude that infected many of these Midwestern aviation pioneers.

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Facing East from Indian Country
A Native History of Early America
By Daniel K. Richter

Because Daniel K. Richter's Ordeal of the Longhouse (1991) remains a standard in the field, scholars in frontier and American Indian history greatly anticipated this follow-up monograph. To be sure, Richter does many things equally well in this newer book, bringing in environmental, cultural, medical, religious, economic, and agricultural history as well as linguistics, anthropology, and archaeology. Focusing on cis-Mississippi- and on cis-Appalachia-America, Facing East begins in A.D. 1002 and ends in
Boston in 1836. Richter considers how the Indians viewed their lives, cultures, religions, and societies prior to European contact. He establishes the Indian understanding of the world and then gradually brings in the European (and sometimes African) cultures, ethnicities, religions, and personalities.

By alternating between a native voice and an objective voice, the author demonstrates how one culture and people encountered and shaped another. Richter writes well—even hauntingly—from the Indian perspective. He expertly interweaves the impersonal and personal, the meta- and the micro-histories. Indeed, Richter is a very good storyteller and whether he writes of Pocahontas ("mischievous girl"), the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha ("The Lily of the Mohawks"), or William Apess, each figure becomes not only a well-realized person but also a key figure in North American history.

My only criticism of the book comes from Richter's seeming inability to give serious credence to European cultures, religions, and ideas when he writes in a more objective voice. At his weakest moments—and, admittedly, they are very few and far between—Richter focuses so much on the Indian point of view that the book reads as a simple morality tale: Indians happy and noble, Europeans dour and exploitative. This is true in his discussions of both the Roman Catholic theology of sainthood and traditions, and of the results of American republican thought in the founding period.

Richter is, of course, writing mainly about American Indians, with issues such as republican theory on the periphery. But what is said at the fringes can be revealing. For example, in dealing with Apess's history of America, Richter writes: "Apess remained silent on the racial beliefs and practices of the slaveowning Washington" (p. 248). To dismiss Apess for this silence is to discount Washington's importance in the eventual destruction of the institution of slavery. Such dismissals do Richter's otherwise fine scholarship a disservice.

Regardless of this criticism, Richter's is a brilliant work of American, Indian, and frontier history, dovetailing nicely with the path-breaking Indian history works of Bernard Sheehan, David Edmunds, Susan Sleeper-Smith, and Richard White. While perhaps not as profound as Ordeal of the Longhouse, it has much to offer and will remain a significant work for some time to come.

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