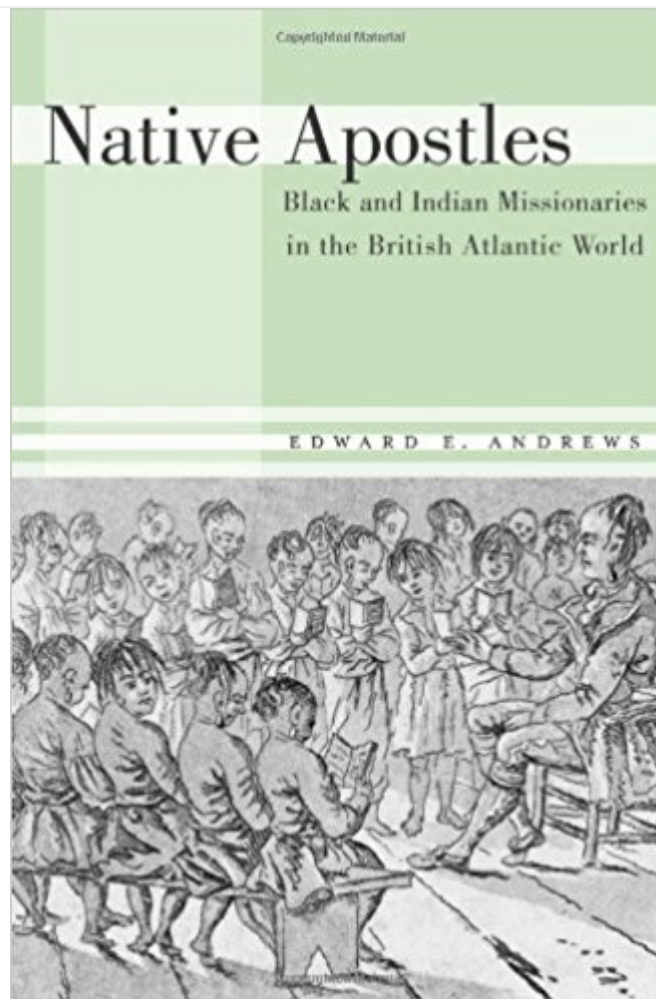


# {essays in history}

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## Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World



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### Reviewed Work(s)

*Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World.* By Edward E. Andrews (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). Pp. 336. Cloth, \$39.95.

*Native Apostles* is Edward E. Andrews' attempt to call attention to the forgotten Amerindian and African missionaries circulating throughout the British Atlantic World. Andrews is an early-American historian at Providence College, and his first book defies the traditional model of highly-focused monograph in favor of a sweeping narrative. He uses the term *natives* to refer to the the indigenous of Africa and the Americas—whose descriptions challenge and resist the other scholars' oversimplification of victimized peoples. Instead, Andrews emphasizes natives as individuals who accepted European Christianity and tried to work within the system of English imperialism to achieve a better life, a new identity, and a voice in the world of Atlantic exchange.

Andrews argues that most of the Anglo-supported missionaries in the British Empire were not English and that this fact alone ought to lead the historian to consider how indigenous preachers fit into the historical narrative of the Atlantic World. Andrews states that missionary efforts ought to be interpreted as a contested “middle ground” rather than a manifestation of overt imperialism. Christianity was not simply a tool of empire, but could be a means of resistance. European-trained Africans denounced slavery while Christian-educated Indians used the Bible to argue against dispossession.

As Andrews seeks to fuse the stories from different continents over the course of 200 years there is not one straightforward narrative, but rather a theme of complex interconnectedness. The book is essentially a survey of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Atlantic missionaries, including both anecdotes and biographical sketches of key figures. For example, the African slave-turned-missionary in West Africa, Philip Quaque, receives 24 pages of exclusive attention. There are several shorter biographical sketches of indigenous preachers like Hendrick Tejonihokarawa, Hiacoomes, John Quamine, Bristol Yamma, Samuel

Occam, Peter Paulus, and Good Peter. As is to be expected, John Eliot and Eleazar Wheelock are cited extensively, but Andrews focuses more on how they used native missionaries and less about their own endeavors. There are very few mentions of Olaudah Equiano—perhaps because so much has already been written on him. Andrews' book also includes a lengthy table of native missionaries including names, dates, denominational affiliation, and brief notes on placements, personality, and other minutia in the appendix

Many Atlantic histories vilify European missionaries and ignore African and Native-American preachers, but Andrews argues that historians ought not to oversimplify the European-indigenous relationship into the usual categories of “oppressor” and “victim.” In giving agency to natives, whether they chose to reject, accept, or merge Christianity with local practices, he maintains that many of them did have opportunities to actively play a part within the British Empire. Native preachers opposed the idea that Christianity was a tool of empire by using their sermons, writings, and European-Christian education to speak out against imperial abuses. Andrews thus contends that native appropriation of Christianity allowed them to protect and evolve their own identities.

Andrews argues that one of the lessons Anglo missionaries learned was that native preachers were unpredictable, as exemplified by Indians who fought for and against the English in the North-American colonial wars. Although a certain kinship and sense of equality based on Christianity developed in North America, it could not be assumed that indigenous converts would embrace British imperialism. It was the native ministers who led the way in resisting English greed for land by writing formal petitions and using scriptural arguments. Andrews claims that by doing this natives juxtaposed themselves as godly against the English. Some Amerindian groups saw evangelism as a much-needed, revitalizing movement to strengthen and unite their peoples. However, there was no widespread, monolithic native culture, and Andrews provides few examples of collective resistance; instead, he emphasizes individuals carving out a place for themselves in this chaotic and confusing world.

One of the most interesting passages in the book is Andrews' discussion of English interpretations of indigenous climate and bodies. European missionaries were not as adept at coping with the “barbarous” conditions of Africa or North America. Ironically, their view of African and

Amerindian bodies served simultaneously as justifications for missionary labor and enslavement.

The work could benefit from greater comparison to non-Anglo missions in the Atlantic. There are a few pages in the introduction set apart for summing up French, Spanish, and Portuguese efforts, but this is primarily to argue that Roman Catholic attempts to train native preachers were limited. Andrews seems to affirm that Protestantism demanded literacy and a “concrete understanding” of the Bible while Catholic missionaries relied on “ritual and casuistry”. He implies that only Protestant missionaries, specifically English, took evangelism seriously.

Perhaps too much credence is given to the idea that native missionaries had much influence in the Atlantic World. Andrews writes about hundreds, not thousands, of indigenous preachers over the course of two centuries and he is hard pressed to put forth evidence that they actually influenced imperial policy or cultural sentiment in regard to dispossession or slavery. Educated, well-connected indigenous preachers did receive more of a voice than the average African or Native American, but their influence had little consequence outside of their own personal ambition and protection.

Andrews struggles to argue that indigenous preachers made any lasting mark on their increasingly interconnected world. There was no sizable conversion among African and Indian communities until after the American Revolution. What Andrews does accomplish is to weave together a loosely woven narrative of multigenerational networks of peoples acting as Protestant missionaries within the context of the British Atlantic Empire. The book has a broad appeal to historians interested in Amerindians, Africans, Christianity, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World. Andrews is currently working on expanding this project into a study of global Protestant missionary activity in the early modern era.

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