

✓ *Era of Persuasion: American Thought and Culture, 1521-1680.* By E. Brooks Holifield. (Boston: Twayne, 1989. xvi + 200 pp. Cloth, \$24.95, ISBN 0-8057-9050-1. Paper, \$10.95, ISBN 0-8057-9055-1.)

One of the more salutary developments in the field of early American historiography in recent years has been the reintegration of the English colonies in America within the broader context of the discovery and settlement of the New World by the major European powers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. *Era of Persuasion* exemplifies this growing concern among historians with English colonial experience within the wider context of European colonizing efforts in North America—such as New Spain, New Sweden, New France, and New Netherland.

Reaching across Indian, Spanish, French, and English colonial cultures, E. Brooks Holifield has attempted to offer fresh insights regarding the intellectual life of seventeenth-century North America. And although he admits that "no common set of ideas or values, no common nationality, no center of loyalty united the motley American" in that period, he claims nevertheless that when looking at the "function of thinking and writing," we may discover "one pervasive characteristic of early American thought—when men and women dealt with ideas, they were usually trying to persuade somebody to do something." This practical and functional approach, which stood in clear contrast to the intellectual life of the cultural centers of Europe where great minds were "possessed by a sheer love of abstract or critical thought," was a product of America's unique colonial experience.

Living on the periphery of their mother cultures and far away from the intellectual centers of western Europe, colonial modes of life determined, to a large extent, the colonialists' modes of thought and conviction. Consequently, as the author claims, persuasive discourse was symptomatic of a colonial society that lacked the "institutional complexity that undergirded intellectual diversity" in Europe. Colonialists in America, therefore, spent a considerable "amount of mental energy" in efforts to justify their presence and to il-

luminare their experience in America to people back home, to different societies in America, and to their fellow colonialists in the colonies. Accordingly, the author examines several spheres in which the settlers directed their efforts in persuasion—promotion of the colonial enterprise in Europe, religion, and governance.

Given this broad and rather amorphous conceptual framework, it is little wonder that the author fails to achieve his main goal of portraying "American thought and culture" in the given period. The concept of persuasion is too general and therefore cannot appropriately capture the variety and uniqueness of the American colonial experience. And how could one deny that the "function of thinking and writing" in every age is always, in one way or another, an act of persuasion. Furthermore, by using persuasion as a constitutive analytical concept, the author is seriously hindered from seeing that persuasive discourse was the outcome of deeper struggles among and within colonies in early America.

This study also fails in another way. Once again, we are faced with a history of early America written almost exclusively from the point of view of Puritan New England, though in past years we have learned that the New England experience was the exception rather than the rule in colonial America.

What was American thought and culture during the seventeenth century? This study offers many hints but no coherent historical picture.

Avihu Zakai  
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

*The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo.* By Russell F. Weigley. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. xx + 579 pp. \$35.00, ISBN 0-253-36380-2.)

What Russell F. Weigley writes, the rest of us read. In *The Age of Battles*, Weigley stretches his interest and scholarly ability to the full by turning to the history of warfare from the Thirty Years War through the campaigns of Napoleon.