



## Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies

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When exploring the links between America and postcolonialism, scholars tend to think either in terms of contemporary multiculturalism, or of imperialism since 1898. This narrow view has left more than the two prior centuries of colonizing literary and political culture unexamined. *Messy Beginnings* challenges the idea of early America's immunity from issues of imperialism, that its history is not as "clean" as European colonialism. By addressing the literature ranging from the diaries of American women missionaries in the Middle East to the work of Benjamin Franklin and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and through appraisals of key postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, the contributors to this volume explore the applicability of their models to early American culture. *Messy Beginnings* argues against the simple concept that the colonization of what became the United States was a confrontation between European culture and the "other." Contributors examine the formation of America through the messy or unstable negotiations of the idea of "nation." The essays forcefully show that the development of "Americanness" was a raced and classed phenomenon, achieved through a complex series of violent encounters, legal maneuvers, and political compromises. The complexity of early American colonization, where there was not one coherent "nation" to conquer, contradicts the simple label of imperialism used in other lands. The unique approach of *Messy Beginnings* will reshape both pre-conceived notions of postcolonialism, and how postcolonialists think about the development of the American nation.

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