



Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana (Early American Studies)

By Sophie White



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Based on a sweeping range of archival, visual, and material evidence, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians* examines perceptions of Indians in French colonial Louisiana and demonstrates that material culture—especially dress—was central to the elaboration of discourses about race.

At the heart of France's seventeenth-century plans for colonizing New France was a formal policy—Frenchification. Intended to turn Indians into Catholic subjects of the king, it also carried with it the belief that Indians could become French through religion, language, and culture. This fluid and mutable conception of identity carried a risk: while Indians had the potential to become French, the French could themselves be transformed into Indians. French officials had effectively admitted defeat of their policy by the time Louisiana became a province of New France in 1682. But it was here, in Upper Louisiana, that proponents of French-Indian intermarriage finally claimed some success with Frenchification. For supporters, proof of the policy's success lay in the appearance and material possessions of Indian wives and daughters of Frenchmen.

Through a sophisticated interdisciplinary approach to the material sources, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians* offers a distinctive and original reading of the contours and chronology of racialization in early America. While focused on Louisiana, the methodological model offered in this innovative book shows that dress can take center stage in the investigation of colonial societies—for the process of colonization was built on encounters mediated by appearance.



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Editorial Review

Review

"There is much to be learned from the excellent *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians*—its stories, arguments, and interpretations but also its creative and important methodology. . . . A shining example of the ways in which new forms of evidence, examined in talented hands, have the power to change the way we address big historical questions."—*William and Mary Quarterly*

"White does an admirable job of integrating clothing into a larger discussion of identity formation in this fluid borderland society, demonstrating clearly how understanding the use and ownership of textiles shaped individuals views of themselves and of each other."—*Textile History*

"Drawing on French-language archival sources and an impressively interdisciplinary range of secondary literature, White argues that material culture—clothing and the clothed and groomed body—are central to understanding the complexity of the hybrid cultures of Upper and Lower Louisiana in the eighteenth century. *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians* is a wonderfully original contribution to the English-language scholarship."—Ann M. Little, Colorado State University

"Historians dream of writing a book that will give us a new lens to make sense of the past. Sophie White has done that with *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians*. Her insistence on finding a way to *look* at colonial people allows the rest of us to *see* them with a new clarity that reveals how much we have missed in the contested process that made race in the Atlantic World."—Emily Clark, Tulane University

"An important book. . . . White's work challenges prevailing understandings about how ideas of race took hold and exemplifies how material objects, maybe even more so than archival sources, can tell a story that complicates prevailing notions about the multicultural societies that comprised colonial America."—*American Historical Review*

"*Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians* is a brilliant book. With intelligence and precision, White examines a trove of fresh material culture evidence from the Upper Mississippi Valley and advances a new mode of analysis that goes deep into the possible meanings of Frenchness and Indianness, ultimately

revealing a much slower timeline than scholars have claimed for the progression of racialized categories that foreclosed the possibility of identity transformation."—Kathleen Brown, University of Pennsylvania

About the Author

Sophie White is Associate Professor in the Department of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

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