

# Women at War in the Borderlands of the Early American Northeast

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### Recommended Citation

Meyers, Debra (2018) "Women at War in the Borderlands of the Early American Northeast," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 3 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.20.3.20

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol20/iss3/20>

## Review

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Summer 2018

**Martino, Gina M.** *Women at War in the Borderlands of the Early American Northeast*. University of North Carolina Press, \$27.37 ISBN 9781469640990

Gina Martino earned her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 2012 specializing in gender studies, Native American history, and early modern warfare. She published an important article on Native American women's leadership in the *Journal of Women's History* in 2015— “As Potent a Prince As Any Round About Her”: Rethinking Weetamoo of the Pocasset and Native Female Leadership in Early America.” Martino is currently assistant professor at the University of Akron.

Martino's first book, *Women at War in the Borderlands*, describes the numerous ways in which women assumed wartime roles across the northeast borderlands during the early modern period in the New World. She asks us to embrace the idea of more fluid gender roles for women in a world in which European and Native American women actively participated in wars that helped shape politics, social structures, and ideologies. These women and their European sisters could easily move from maternal to martial roles with ease. In their martial roles, their brutality rivaled any of their male counterparts, but it could often include shaming processions that sought to psychologically emasculate their victims as well.

Arguably, Martino's most important contribution to early modern colonial studies within a transcontinental framework is her ability to take well known traditional sources, such as Increase Mather's writings, the *Jesuit Relations*, and Mary Rowlandson's narrative, to uncover the commonplace acceptance of women in warfare. European men, for instance, documented the power and authority of Native American female leaders, such as the Queen of the Massachusetts people, Manantuck of the Narragansett, and Weetamoo of the Pocasset. These European and Native American warriors, according to Martino, aligned their own self-interests with that of the political and military forces of the day to achieve common community goals. Martino assures us that European women warriors “would become engaged in a transatlantic conversation that sought to reimagine all women's martial roles within a changing relationship between gender and spheres of action.” (pg. 57)

Martino also reminds us of the continuity between these early modern European women in the New World with women who took up arms and provided leadership in turbulent times in the Old World. For instance, the Countess of Derby defended her

husband's Lancashire castle in 1644. And the Countess of Norfolk (c. 1075), the Duchess of Lorraine (d. 1453), and Margaret of Anjou (d. 1482), among many others, all defended their families' holdings in times of war. So why then, we are asked to ponder, have women been marginalized and relegated to the footnotes of warfare histories?

Despite historians' desire to downplay women's martial roles, their commonplace participation in warfare and leadership underscores their support of both expansionism at the local levels and imperialism in line with their homelands. Martino ends this short volume with these words that summarize her work, "fear of death, fear of the Other, or even a desire for personal gain may have been more significant than pure patriotic sentiment. Yet, if women were necessary combatants in the contest for the northeastern borderlands, they were also highly invested participants, complicit in expansionist and colonial agendas." (pg. 161) Martino's review of well-used sources provides us with a nuanced perspective on women's active participation in war as leaders as well as combatants that reminds us how oppressive omissions of women's active participation in the political, economic, and social spheres throughout history have long term negative consequences for all of us.

*Dr. Debra Meyers received her PhD from the University of Rochester and has published six books as a professor of history, religion, and gender studies at Northern Kentucky University.*