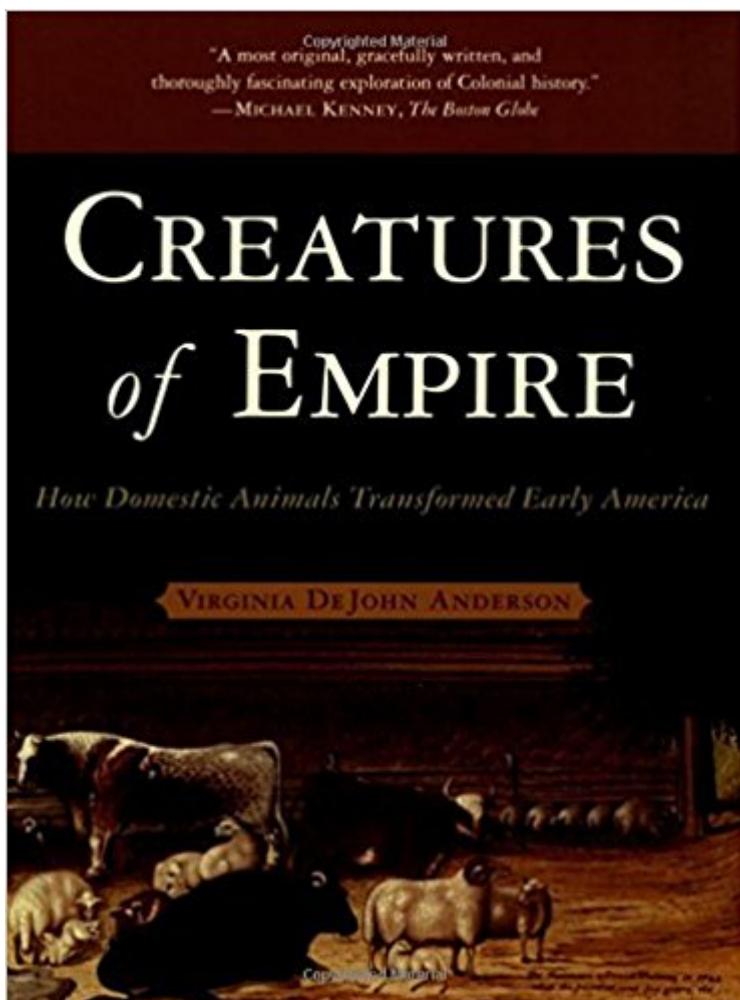


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# Creatures Of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America



## Synopsis

When we think of the key figures of early American history, we think of explorers, or pilgrims, or Native Americans--not cattle, or goats, or swine. But as Virginia DeJohn Anderson reveals in this brilliantly original account of colonists in New England and the Chesapeake region, livestock played a vitally important role in the settling of the New World. Livestock, Anderson writes, were a central factor in the cultural clash between colonists and Indians as well as a driving force in the expansion west. By bringing livestock across the Atlantic, colonists believed that they provided the means to realize America's potential. It was thought that if the Native Americans learned to keep livestock as well, they would be that much closer to assimilating the colonists' culture, especially their Christian faith. But colonists failed to anticipate the problems that would arise as Indians began encountering free-ranging livestock at almost every turn, often trespassing in their cornfields. Moreover, when growing populations and an expansive style of husbandry required far more space than they had expected, colonists could see no alternative but to appropriate Indian land. This created tensions that reached the boiling point with King Philip's War and Bacon's Rebellion. And it established a pattern that would repeat time and again over the next two centuries. A stunning account that presents our history in a truly new light, *Creatures of Empire* restores a vital element of our past, illuminating one of the great forces of colonization and the expansion westward.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The nature of the colonial relationships between the European settlers and the Native Americans has been readjusted to include livestock in a central rather than marginal role in the shaping of

American history. Virginia DeJohn Anderson's *Creatures of Empire* culminates around the way in which the colonial settlers and natives viewed the very nature of animals and therefore the way in which their relative reactions affected their relationships with each other. Anderson seems to say that if Native Americans and settlers were opposing teams in the championship game, then the livestock were as pivotal as the field on which the game was played. Through her research, Anderson is able to reconstruct accurate tales of interaction between the natives, settlers and their imported livestock, which eventually lead to conflict and European expansion. There are three main purposes of *Creatures of Empire* that serve to further illuminate colonial history. The first purpose is deducing how natives and settlers view fauna independently of one another. Second, by analyzing the clear difference in point of views, Anderson is able to realize how conflicts arose and were potentially solved between the two parties, because of their interaction with various animals and finally, she is able to reason how these conflicts or resolutions shaped Colonial America and its future. Virginia DeJohn Anderson received her Ph.D. in History from Harvard University and is currently a Professor of History at the University of Colorado at Boulder as a Colonial and Revolutionary historian. Her previous publications include *New England's Generation* and co-author of the textbook *The American Journey: A History of the United States* ([...]).

While many would agree that animals have been significant to human life and society, few could articulate these dynamics as well as Virginia DeJohn Anderson has done in *Creatures of Empire*. Building on the insights of environmental history, Anderson creatively turns to focus on the role of animals within the relational dynamics between the early American colonists and Native-Americans. She eloquently argues that both Natives and Colonists were guided by distinct cosmological views that deeply guided their agricultural practices. Negotiating these differences became key as the two groups attempted to live near one another. As a result, Anderson claims, "animals not only produced changes in the land but also in the hearts and minds of the peoples who dealt with them." Anderson begins by cultivating a landscape of distinct spiritual/cosmological beliefs that guide each groups' practices with animals. She persuasively argues that Natives merged the physical and spiritual worlds forming a dynamic reciprocity among living and spiritual beings. Conversely, the English rooted their self-understanding as the pinnacle of creation as written in Genesis. A theology of dominion dictated a sharp dichotomy of human and non-human beings leaving humanity as the divinely sanctioned rulers over the land and its creatures. Once this cosmological landscape is set, Anderson turns toward the practices of animal husbandry. Natives had to contend not just with the newly arrived English colonists, but their animals as well. These strange new beasts were slowly

integrated into Native vocabulary, worldviews, and practices; but not always in the ways as the English hoped.

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