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Sommario/riassunto	The emphasis on practical experience over ideology is viewed by many historians as a profoundly American characteristic, one that provides a model for exploring the colonial challenge to European belief systems

and the creation of a unique culture. Here Jim Egan offers an unprecedented look at how early modern American writers helped make this notion of experience so powerful that we now take it as a given rather than as the product of hard-fought rhetorical battles waged over ways of imagining one's relationship to a larger social community. In order to show how our modern notion of experience emerges from a historical change that experience itself could not have brought about, he turns to works by seventeenth-century writers in New England and reveals the ways in which they authorized experience, ultimately producing a rhetoric distinctive to the colonies and supportive of colonialism. Writers such as John Smith, William Wood, John Winthrop, Anne Bradstreet, Benjamin Tompson, and William Hubbard were sensitive to the challenge experiential authority posed to established social hierarchies. Egan argues that they used experience to authorize a supplementary status system that would at once enhance England's economic, political, and spiritual status and provide a new basis for regulating English and native populations. These writers were assuaging fears over how exposure to alien environments threatened actual English bodies and also the imaginary body that authorized English monarchy and allowed English subjects to think of themselves as a nation. By reimagining the English nation, these supporters of English colonialism helped create a modern way of imagining national identity and individual subject formation.

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