H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Frederick E. Hoxie, Ronald Hoffman, Peter J. Albert, eds. *Native Americans and the Early Republic.* United States Capitol Historical Society. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999. x + 370 pp. $22.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8139-1913-3; $49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-1873-0.

Reviewed by Wendy St. Jean (Department of Social Sciences, Springfield College)

Published on H-SHEAR (September, 2000)

Native Americans and the Early American Republic, 1780s-1840s

Native Americans and the Early American Republic, 1780s-1840s

This book grows out of a 1993 symposium sponsored by the United States Capitol Historical Society entitled "Native Americans and the Early Republic." The editors maintain that Native Americans were a focal point of American politics and culture in the early national period. While real Indians stood in the way of white Americans' expansion, fictional Native Americans dominated constructions of a newly emergent American identity. In three decades, the United States defeated Native Americans, squeezed them onto substandard lands, and pushed them to the margins of American society.

Some major themes run through the essays. One theme is the diversity of peoples that characterized nineteenth-century America. The authors carefully differentiate between the views and interests of frontiersmen and eastern leaders; between acculturated metis and more traditional-minded Indian individuals; between Christian believers and non-believers. In " 'A Watchful Safeguard to Our Habitations': Black Hoof and the Loyal Shawnees," R. David Edmunds examines factors such as acculturation and the desire for peace that led Black Hoof and most other Shawnees to favor accommodation with the U.S. government. Joel W. Martin's "Cultural Contact and Crises in the Early Republic" considers some ways that Cherokees and Creeks preserved their distinctiveness in the face of dramatic challenges to their cultural integrity posed by missionaries and other civilization agents. He suggests that metis leaders shielded their less acculturated neighbors from "an imposed order of threatening values" (235). Although Edmunds and Martin analyze Creek and Shawnee resistance movements, the topics of Native American religion and nationalism warrant further investigation. Martin's essay is the best example in the book of an attempt to uncover Native Americans' motives, traditions, and beliefs.

Second, the authors pay great attention to calculated misrepresentations about Native American societies. In "The Continuing Revolution in Indian Country," Colin Calloway deflates "the fiction that all Indians had fought for the British in the Revolution" (31). According to Calloway, this myth "justified massive dispossession of Native Americans in the early republic, whatever

their role in the war" (31). Calloway's general overview of Indian alliances and diplomacy convincingly demonstrates that the war for American Independence divided Native American nations and communities. Daniel H. Usner's "Iroquois Livelihood and Jeffersonian Agrarianism," explores the impact on Native Americans of another myth perpetuated by self-interested whites. Jeffersonians knowingly disseminated the false notion "that Indian societies of the eastern woodlands, such as the Iroquois, needed to become agricultural despite abundant evidence that agriculture had long been an integral part of their economic life" (201). Policymakers used the images associated with hunting to liken Indians to savages and thus strip them of their agricultural lands.

Other contributors examine the popular imagery of Native Americans that grew alongside increasingly punitive U.S. Indian policies. In Vivien Green Fryd's analysis of the Indian paintings that adorn the Capitol's rotunda, she concludes that these "images buttressed the removal philosophy" by perpetuating stereotypes about white America's superiority (329). Elise Marienstras's "The Common Man's Indian" examines literary portrayals of Indians. She argues that narratives of Indian violence served to create a counter image of Americans and legitimated expansionist policies, including warfare.

Richard White's "Fictions of Patriarchy: Indians and Whites in the Early Republic" relates the dissolution of middle ground diplomacy to the changing imagery used in U.S.-Indian treaty negotiations. He finds that after military defeat, Native Americans lost control of the fictional metaphors that described their relations with the U.S. government. Americans now portrayed Indians as children who lacked the maturity to participate in negotiations that concerned their future. In "Onas, the Long Knife: Pennsylvanians and Indians, 1783-1794," Daniel Richter looks at how Senecas' attitudes toward and terms for Pennsylvanians changed as they lost hope that whites would recognize their territorial borders and hunting and fishing rights. In "Native Women in the Early Republic," Theda Perdu analyzes the role of Euro-Americans' accounts of Native American women, particularly their seemingly "uncivilized" or unfeminine gender roles and behavior, in molding early U.S. Indian policy.

Reginald Horsman's "Indian Policy of an 'Empire for Liberty' " reconstructs the intellectual underpinnings of U.S. Indian policy in the early republic. He finds that an amalgam of republican ideology, Enlightenment values, and land greed gave shape to policies that made the dispossession of Indians more orderly and efficient. Although treaties and annuity payments facilitated the advance of frontier settlements, they did not prevent sporadic warfare. Native Americans continued to "resist by war demands for their lands" (53).

This provocative and informative collection of essays represent a good beginning, if not the last word, in the forging of a synthesis of Native American history in the early national period. Future compilations would include more treatment of Indian-Black relations, community and family, and identity formation. The essays make significant headway in the attempt to link Native American history to broader themes in American history such as the Market Revolution, republican ideology, American popular culture and nationalism. However, this effort to fit Indian history into mainstream historical scholarship may be responsible for the book's primary weakness, its greater emphasis on whites' attitudes and policymaking, at the expense of greater elaboration of Native Americans' ideas and worlds.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-shear/

Citation: Wendy St. Jean. Review of Hoxie, Frederick E.; Hoffman, Ronald; Albert, Peter J., eds., *Native Americans and the Early Republic*. H-SHEAR, H-Net Reviews. September, 2000.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4544