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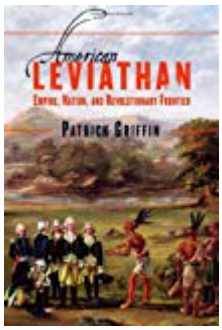

Patrick Griffin. *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier.* New York: Hill & Wang, 2007. x + 368 pp. $30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8090-9515-5.

Reviewed by Michael A. McDonnell

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Tom Quick was a nasty piece of work. After his father was killed by Delaware Indians near the end of the Seven Years' War in America, he went on a killing spree. According to legend, he vowed to murder at least one hundred Delaware Indians in revenge, though he reputedly declared that "'the blood of the whole Indian race is not sufficient to atone for the blood of my father'" (p. 3). He backed up words with action. He shot, tomahawked, stabbed, and bludgeoned Indians wherever he found them. He ambushed men, pushed women off cliffs, and dashed out the brains of infants against rocks. And, he did so in defiance of authorities. Despite being outlawed by eastern officials, his reign of terror lasted from the end of the Seven Years' War to his death in 1795, aided and abetted by neighbors, friends, and relatives who were as eager as Quick to rid the 'dark and bloody ground' the frontier had become of all traces of the 'savages' who plagued their world. In death, Quick's reputation grew. The violence he visited on the frontier for the sake of order became the stuff of American legend. By the end of the nineteenth century, his exploits had become the subject of popular books, plays, and a monument dedicated "to the memory of Tom Quick, the Indian slayer, the Avenger of the Delaware" (p. 6). For those who memorialized him, according to Patrick Griffin, the author of *American Leviathan*, he had come to epitomize the triumph of civilization and democratic values over savagery--a triumph that was contested on the frontier and that made Americans a distinctive people.

Of late, however, Quick's reputation has suffered some serious blows. Unknown assailants wielding sledgehammers destroyed his monument in 1997. Once celebrated, Griffin claims, men like Quick are now obscured--particularly by historians. They are an embarrassment to social historians seeking to understand marginalized peoples and often keen to glorify settlers as victims or resistors of elites, the market economy, or the conservative backlash against the more radical principles of the Revolution. They are also irrelevant to conservative historians seeking the Revolution's meaning, even its radical aspects, in the "measured sensibilities of the founders" (p. 9). And, while the idea of the "frontier" now seems only to be employed by historians of Native Amer-

icans to "face east" from it, the importance of the "West" has been downplayed by historians of the Revolution or used to show the failure or limits of the Revolution's enlightened promises. Thus, Quick no longer "fits" into any existing narratives, having become an embarrassment to historians of the West, or irrelevant to historians of the Revolution. The West of Quick, the "dark and bloody ground" of the Ohio Valley especially, no longer seems to have any purchase on the larger history of the formation of the American nation.

Griffin, however, persuasively argues that we cannot leave such men out of our narratives of nationhood. Indeed, when we comprehend the frontier settlers' world in all its complexity, Griffin claims, we, in fact, expose the limits of the prevailing master narratives that often "preclude common people from either playing meaningful roles or playing two distinct roles at once, one of the virtuous settler manipulated by sinister forces, the other of the race-addled Indian slayer" (p. 10). And, if existing narratives cannot contain such ambiguities, then we must change those narratives. Thus, the genius of Griffin's tale is to put such men as Quick--and the violence that prevailed on the frontier--front and center of the larger story of the American Revolution. Violence against Indians and resistance to authority, then, become central to a narrative of imperial collapse and nation- and state-building. It was in the West, Griffin contends, that the process and real meaning of the Revolution was made clear.

In a sweeping, well-written narrative covering the period of Quick's reign of terror, from the end of the Seven Years' War to the mid-1790s, Griffin lays out a compelling argument. The West--here mainly defined as the Ohio Valley, Kentucky, and western Pennsylvania--created problems of order and authority for both imperial rulers and the new nation-state. The British could not contain the violence between Indians and settlers unleashed by the Seven Years' War and the ensuing Anglo-Indian war (more commonly known as Pontiac's Rebellion). Desperate to put an end to what might have been an endless round of costly wars, they tried to establish a line between settlers and Indians--a line that would mark the cultural and territorial boundaries of the British Empire in America as a place awaiting civilization. Indians west of the line were not thought of as inherently inferior, but they were in a primitive stage of development in official eyes. A prevailing stadial theory of human development suggested to some that they might become subjects, but for now it was better to rely on deference on the part of would-be settlers and encouragement for subjects in the making to ensure peace and tranquility on the frontier. The policy was in ruins before it could be implemented. Speculators continued to jostle for lands west of the Proclamation Line, while thousands of squatters and settlers poured across western Pennsylvania and Virginia and down the Ohio Valley. In response, Native Americans defended their lands by setting the frontier alight. Predictably, violence escalated as settlers, then Indians, launched retaliatory and punitive raids against each other, and the line between friendly and unfriendly combatants became increasingly blurred. In the midst of the violence, laws became ineffective and the power of government was left impotent. The British, caught between enforcing the Proclamation Line in favor of the Indians and waging a war of conquest to appease settlers, would do neither because of the enormous costs either option would entail. In face of continued hostilities, they lost control of the debate over the West and effectively abandoned it by 1772. British officials "decided to cede the West to the chaos engulfing it" (p. 74). They did so, of course, just as they were beginning to lose control of their colonies on the eastern seaboard. In the ensuing vacuum of authority, the West came to resemble a Hobbesian nightmare where life was nasty, brutish, and short, and a place--in the words of one contemporary--"'not made to be inhabited by men'" (p. 97). In lieu of any real authority, chaos reigned in the region for two decades.

Numerous people tried and failed to reconstitute authority. The first was the royal governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore (John Murray). He conspired with wealthy speculators to whip up support among squatters and poorer settlers by demonizing Indians and promising to vanquish them once and for all. Together, they exploited the fear and hatred festering on the frontier to engineer a war for control over the land. The oncoming Revolution put paid to Dunmore's schemes, but the fiasco also began to erode settlers' faith that they could count on any single group to reassert authority in the region and bring an end to their troubles. George Rogers Clark's failed expedition in 1778-79 further eroded that faith as settlers and squatters began to realize that the price of authority might be the loss of their land to speculators.

Continued bloodshed and increasing racist violence came to characterize the region but also came to provide a basis for inhabitants to refashion a sense of themselves and the world in which they lived for themselves. As Griffin notes, that developing self-sovereign sense was built on the back of a struggle against speculators as much as it was built on a racist struggle against Indians: "The struggle to ensure that their betters would not exploit them in a context increasingly defined by Indian-white violence made Indian hatred as an animating ideology possible" (p. 178). The two emerged as a result of the Revolution and grew in tandem: "Empowerment grew as a response to the failure of patrons to restore order amid uncertainty. Race hatred stemmed in part from the isolation and independence of settlers in a world of failed sovereignty" (p. 178). Both were predicated on continuing violence and "Anarchey" [sic] (p. 178).

Out of this maelstrom, westerners dared to dream of a new, ordered state of nature, but one that could only be imagined through the defining bloodshed and chaos of the Revolution. On the basis of violence and the new race hatred arose a vision of a western commonwealth that bridged lines of class and region and that had arisen from popular notions of self-sovereignty. Elites in the West came to realize through stubborn experience with poorer settlers that without protection there would be no civil society in the West, and that civil society would have to be predicated on racially exclusive terms. At the same time, the so-called Whiskey Rebellion in western Pennsylvania demonstrated that proponents of this western vision of commonwealth were not above asserting independent sovereignty if government was not accountable to the people. In the West, accountability meant above all protection. Common settlers claimed ultimate sovereignty, but recognized that only the state could assert that sovereignty in any effective way. As Thomas Hobbes had argued one century before: "'Covenants without the sword are but words and no strength to secure a man at all'" (p. 243).

At this critical juncture in the history of both the West and the Revolution, as whiskey men threatened to create an independent western commonwealth, the fledgling government headed by George Washington did what the British were unwilling to do, and what any others were unable to do--they dispatched an army with enough force to push Indians once and for all out of the Ohio Valley, establishing a new line to keep Indians, rather than settlers, at bay. Anthony Wayne's expedition of 1794 proved that the new government was willing to put settlers' interests first and willing to kill Indians to retain the West. Leviathan was thus born. It was, Griffin concludes, "an act of co-creation" (p. 242). As Griffin points out in compelling and powerful prose, from out of this Hobbesian dog-eat-dog world of the frontier where victims of eastern elites could also be victimizers of Native Americans, emerged a new more powerful American state that also effectively brought an end to the Revolutionary process. Indeed, in one final twist, Griffin notes that this new American Leviathan would destroy Indians, protect settlers, and guard the rights of common white men to access to the political process. But, it

would also "consign settlers to marginal lives on the edges of society as it ensured elite access to land" (p. 15).

The American Revolution, therefore, was America's frontier, and the shift from empire to nation (and to empire, again) and "the transition to modern conceptions of sovereignty, land, and race were not only imposed from above, at the center, but also achieved from below, on the margins" (p. 16). Indeed, if a compelling narrative, ***American Leviathan*** is also a powerful argument about the real nature of the Revolution. For it was in the West that the Revolution was reduced to its fundamentals. And, as uncomfortable as it might be, Griffin concludes, the Revolution created "a liberating and troubling legacy" (p. 10). The experience of frontier settlers shows that ambiguity defined the Revolution. On the frontier, common people helped construct new notions of sovereignty, gained unprecedented political rights, contended with speculators and greedy easterners, ***and***, in the process, became racist Indian killers. It was here, on one of the first American frontiers, that the real meaning of the Revolution became clear.

Ultimately, of course, the genius of Griffin's book lies in tying back together two powerful symbols of Americanness, and even American exceptionalism--the western frontier of Frederick Jackson Turner and the American Revolution. For, in ***American Leviathan***, Griffin reworks the image of the dark and bloody ground to return us to something akin to a nineteenth-century version of the West, culminating in Turner, in which Indian-fighters, like Quick, transformed the way society functioned in the West, and in the larger nation as well. As Turner wrote of such regions as the Ohio Valley, "'No one can read their petitions denouncing the control exercised by the wealthy landholders of the coast, appealing to the record of their conquest of the wilderness, and demanding the possession of the lands for which they have fought the Indians, and which they had reduced by their ax to civilization, without recognizing in these frontier communities the cradle of a belligerent democracy'" (p. 7). The crucible for this process was the American Revolution. Only now, in hindsight, we must recognize that this is hardly something to celebrate. In recognizing that, Griffin notes, we cannot avoid facing the hard and ugly reality that a "Janus-faced people created a contradictory settlement" that lay at the heart of the meaning of the American Revolution and made Americans a distinct people (p. 16).

It is hard to argue with Griffin. It is harder still if you have attempted to teach courses on the American Revolution based on the last thirty or so years of scholarship. If nothing else, scholars have made a virtue out of the contradictory settlement(s) that lay at the heart of the Revolution. Slavery, of course, was one of those contradictions. The establishment of an 'empire of liberty' in the West based on the subjugation of Native Americans was another. Indeed, a generation of scholarship has convincingly demonstrated that, viewed in all its complexity, the Revolution indeed was all about the kinds of people frontier settlers were--"grasping [***pace*** Gordon Wood], egalitarian [***pace*** Gary Nash], vice-ridden [***pace*** Thomas Slaughter et al.]"--and the kinds of contradictory impulses that such a diverse group of people could create in the maelstrom of Revolution (p. 9). That these impulses could be found simultaneously among the same people and that they were key to the Revolutionary settlement has also been established. Anyone familiar with Richard White's ***The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*** (1991), Slaughter's ***The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution*** (1988), Woody Holton's ***Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, and Slaves and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*** (1999), and a host of other commentators' studies, but particularly Eric Hinderaker's ***Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800*** (1999), could

not fail to grasp the kind of contradictions and their legacy captured in Griffin's work.

Yet, it is also difficult not to agree with Griffin that at least popular ideas and narratives of the Revolution find it hard to contain these contradictions. Indeed, on the one hand, some of the same historians who have complicated academic notions of the meaning of the Revolution have also been responsible for pushing a vision of the Revolution, in countless popular biographies of the "founding fathers," that is one-dimensional and is dominated by tales of the "measured sensibilities of the founders, men who paved the way for democracy and who developed the liberating principles that would one day extend freedom to those excluded" (p. 9). On the other hand, though they have never shied away from trying to understand what made people like Quick tick, it is true that historians on the left have been understandably reluctant to put such men front and center of more popular tales, preferring instead to emphasize a more inclusive, complicated, tale of the West that accounts for Native Americans' experiences. But this approach hardly makes for reassuring history, nor does it sell books. The story of Quick, then, as Griffin suggests, has been given short shrift in the master narratives of the Revolution that currently animate the popular imagination.

For bringing to a broader public one of the contradictions that make teaching the American Revolution as frustrating as it is rewarding, then, Griffin should be commended. But, in doing so, Griffin is in danger of reinvigorating some older popular stereotypes and creating new ones. Indeed, despite his claims that we need to view the "complexity" of the settlers' worlds, and the "totality of experience of men and women who, much like Quick, inhabited the edges of American society" to understand the meaning of the Revolution, the common people Griffin writes about are remarkably one-dimensional (p. 10). They allegedly all kill Indians. Allegedly, because though the book purports to be about common people, the depictions of western settlers, squatters, surveyors, and speculators are drawn mostly from above, from elites' depictions of them--elites, of course, who often had a great stake in depicting settlers and squatters as lawless, or as Indian killers, or in painting a woeful picture of lawlessness and violence on the frontier.

Do not get me wrong. I have no doubt that Griffin is right about the seemingly endless cycle of violence on the frontier. The recent work of Gregory T. Knouff (***Soldiers' Revolution: Pennsylvanians in Arms and the Forging of Early American Identity*** [2004]) and Matthew C. Ward (***Breaking the Backcountry: The Seven Years War in Virginia and Pennsylvania, 1754-1765*** [2004]) in particular has made that much very clear. But, in a book that seeks to understand the world of the common people on the frontier, Griffin never stops to look closely at any of those common people in particular. In trying to complicate our more simplistic narratives of Revolution and nationhood, Griffin's view of frontier interactions is too simple. Frontier settlers are, for the most part, faceless. Apart from a general vengeful motive, we do not know why they act violently, they just do. In effect, the legend of Quick stands in for the story of Quick (indeed, Griffin does not pause long enough to investigate whether there was any historical basis for the Quick story). The stereotype of the lawless Indian-hating racist killer stands in for the common people of the West. And, it is those stereotypes that elites drew on in their reports and that Griffin uses in his story of the creation of the American Leviathan. In some sense, of course, this is a result of the limited available sources--and the later chapters of the book, when petitions become more commonplace, are more convincing. But it does lead to some curious assertions, such as the claim that common people agreed to elites' hold on their property; that Dunmore temporarily brought order to the West, mainly because settlers "gave leave" to the governor to do so; and that Ohio suddenly became a

peaceful haven when elites finally got control of the territory in 1788 (p. 124).

Griffin's approach also obscures our vision of the Native Americans of the region. In countless tales of raids, ambushes, and massacres, they become, once again, the nameless, faceless savages of Turner's era. They have no agency, except to fight and to massacre. And, the violence of both Native Americans and settlers is never fully explained, just described. So it becomes senseless, thoughtless. Though clearly sympathetic to the general predicament of Native Americans in this period and region, Griffin's methodology leads him to overlook their motives and their roles in determining decisions made by colonial and early Republic officials. The British, for example, in drawing up the Proclamation Line of 1763 apparently made a decision not to conquer the Western Nations. We get no sense that perhaps Native Americans convinced through negotiations, threats, and violence, that the British had little choice. Nor do we get a sense of the complicated dynamic at play between Native Americans and the new federal government outlined long ago by James Merrell.

Overlooked, too, are the more complicated, sometimes violent, but also peaceful ways in which settlers and Indians interacted--interactions that have been elucidated by such scholars as Jane T. Merritt in ***At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763*** (2003), White in ***Middle Ground***, and further north, by Susan Sleeper-Smith in ***Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes*** (2001), and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy in ***A Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Metis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832*** (2004), among others. Such an omission is made more curious in light of Griffin's own evidence which, read carefully, gives us tantalizing glimpses of the existence of more peaceful relations. The ubiquitous killing of "friendly" Indians, for example, only occurs again and again because it was made possible by more peaceful relations. Not all Indians sought redress through violence just as not all frontier settlers were in league with Quick. More peaceful relations would also eventually provide the basis for alternative narratives of nationhood than those of violence and lawlessness--narratives quite brilliantly unearthed by Edward Watts in a recent volume documenting the role of French colonial culture in the Anglo-American imagination in the early Republic, ***In this Remote Country: French Colonial Culture in the Anglo-American Imagination, 1780-1860*** (2006).

All of this is not to question Griffin's conclusion, but rather the basis of such claims. Indeed, he provides compelling evidence that endemic violence on the frontier helped create a new, more powerful, and centralized state. But the evidence he presents points more toward the way in which elites shaped a discourse about the frontier that suited their own interests. A vision of the West that emphasized lawlessness would no doubt help ensure that speculators' claims would eventually be made good. A vision of the West that proposed the extermination of the Indians as the only real way to bring order would no doubt propel the proponents of a stronger, centralized government to act as soon as they could. A vision of Quick the vengeful Indian-killer would no doubt serve the proponents of an expansive, aggressive, imperial nation in the nineteenth century.

Griffin should be applauded, then, for reminding us that there is some truth behind the claims of Turner. The West was, of course, vital in creating a nation and a new empire. And, it is no bad thing that Griffin points out to a wider audience some of the compelling contradictions that lay behind the founding of a nation and the imperial orientation of the fledgling Republic. But the Revolution was about more than just the legend of Quick and the narratives that elites spun around him for political purposes. And, the West was about more than just racist Indian-killers,

even if they also tried to resist elites at the same time. Historians of late have indeed been guilty of decentering the likes of Quick. But, in doing so, they have also continued to uncover a host of rich contradictions that plague our narratives of the Revolution and that defy easy characterization. Fortunately, we have a much richer, more complicated history for it.