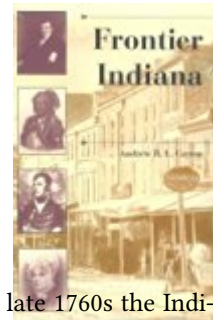


H-Net Reviews

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Andrew R. L. Cayton. *Frontier Indiana*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. xii + 340 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-33048-2.

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Frontier Indiana is a highly readable and spirited account, during the period 1700-1850, of the territory that became the modern state of Indiana. Rather than the traditional narrative, each chapter focuses on the individual central to a given era. Most notable among the personalities discussed are: Jean-Baptiste Bissot, George Rogers Clark, Little Turtle, Tenskwatawa (the Prophet), and Jonathan Jennings. Andrew Cayton's objective, as stated in his preface, is to provide an account of the people who inhabited the Northwest and to incorporate as many perspectives as possible. This work is an amalgam of social, cultural, economic, political, and military history. Its central theme is the clash of cultures, races, and nationalities (Indian, French, Blacks, British and Americans), and it examines how, finally, the Americans emerged victorious. The author makes use of a wide variety of primary and secondary sources and brings the most recent scholarship to bear.

By the early 1730s it became evident that the French attempt to dominate the Indian tribes of the Northwest through the establishment of close commercial and personal relations, particularly through the efforts of Jean-Baptiste Bissot, Sieur de Vincennes, and his son, were no longer effective, and the French resorted to arms to maintain their influence. As Clayton asserts, French control over the Indians was merely an illusion from the start.

British efforts to control the Northwest and the Indians, following the Peace of Paris of 1763, took on a much more ominous tone from the Indian perspective. The British, as personified through George Croghan, were less interested in maintaining the traditional French commercial and personal relationships than in political domination and exploitation of the land. It was this later point that particularly disturbed the Indians and when British

western land policy collapsed in the late 1760s the Indians were left to the mercy of American expansionists.

However a new and far more serious threat to the Indians, than the brief British tenure, resulted from the military campaign conducted by LTC George Rogers Clark during the American Revolution. Clark's campaign quickly destroyed the illusion of British power, left the Indians at the complete mercy of the Americans and lay the basis of American dominion.

After the Peace of Paris of 1783 the American objective in the Northwest was not only to establish its own authority but to transform the region from its traditional commercial economy to an agricultural one. Furthermore, the Americans were not interested in maintaining any personal relationship with the Indians as did the French, or to negotiate with them, but rather to control them. For the first time, the Indians encountered a culture whose policy meant the destruction of their culture as they had known it for centuries.

The 1780s witnessed the gradual implementation of American policy through the Land Ordinance, the Northwest Ordinance, the building of forts and the presence of a Regular United States Army that could be used to assert authority over both the Indians and the influx of white settlers. While the Americans thought that the Indians had conceded their lands along with the British in 1783, Little Turtle, a Miami war chief, thought otherwise. The following decade ushered in an era of warfare in the Northwest designed to alienate Indian land claims and assert American authority. After two major military disasters, the American victory at Fallen Timbers and the subsequent Treaty of Greenville forced Little Turtle to advise his people to accept the idea of an agricultural economy and to adapt to and accommodate the American presence

and culture.

The American military victory in the Northwest meant disaster for the Indians. The influx of white settlers resulted in epidemics and the widespread use of whiskey among the Indians, the decimation of the animal populations and the clearing of the forests. But its immediate most significant result was to provoke a reaction among the Indians to resist American encroachment and to return to their traditional customs. The Indian who best personified this perspective was the Shawnee Chief Tenskwatawa (the Prophet) who, unlike Little Turtle, was no accommodationist. However, the Prophet's efforts toward a restoration of the traditional Indian culture met a new threat from the American governor of the Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison. Harrison's purpose was to promote the settlement of the Northwest and the Jeffersonian ideal of an agricultural economy. This meant the transfer of Indian lands by whatever means necessary. It was all the above factors, plus a series of land acquisitions negotiated by Harrison, particularly by the Treaty of Ft. Wayne, that incited an Indian reaction led by the Prophet. However, the resulting Battle of Prophetstown in 1811 destroyed the Prophet's reputation among his own people and any hope of resisting American expansion in the Northwest.

Just as Governor Harrison was undermining the Prophet's power and influence, his own was being threatened by a Indiana newcomer by the name of Jonathan Jennings. Jennings's political opposition to Harrison was based on his accusation that Harrison and his cohorts represented aristocratic politics at its worst (they were undemocratic) and supported slavery. So successful was Jennings that he became the first elected governor of Indiana when it became a state in 1816. Clayton asserts that the importance of this contest between Harrison and Jennings was to transfer power from government by patronage to government by election and from the governor to the legislature (p. 259). Jennings played a major role in swelling the political base in Indiana.

White influence, in what is presently the state of Indiana, became dominant between 1816 and 1850 as the frontier came to a close. The Indian choice of either accepting white culture or moving west was resolved when, by the 1830s, the United States acquired most of the land in the state. In the meantime the population of Indiana grew from 150,000 in 1820 to nearly 1,000,000 by 1850, and out of the wilderness grew a largely rural, agricultural economy based on commercial capitalism. During those four decades, the contentious issues among the people of Indiana revolved around banks, internal improvements, public education and race. The resolution of these issues indicated a strong preference for local rather than national control over cultural questions. Clayton concludes that "the history of Indiana has been the history of a struggle for the power to control the development of the region. By 1850, the victors were clear; they were white male southerners" (p. 300).

Several criticisms could be levied against Clayton's work but none are so serious as to impinge upon the overall quality of what is otherwise a masterful work set in a broad context. First, the term "frontier" is never really defined except by implication or suggestion, although he does approach a limited definition on page 99. It seems to this reviewer that his perception of the George Rogers Clark expedition, and Clark in particular, is very narrow and limited. Was the Clark expedition as motivated by personal greed and ambition as Clayton suggests? And since the War of 1812 had such a profound impact on the Northwest, it surely must be worth more than a passing glance. Finally, while the chapter titles are centered on individuals, they are in two or three cases rather misleading. For example the chapter on Ann Tuthill Symmes Harrison is really about Governor Harrison. Although not the author's choice, the absence of footnotes is regrettable.

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