

# H-Net Reviews

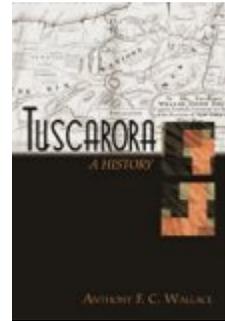
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Anthony F. C. Wallace. *Tuscarora: A History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012. xv + 278 pp. Illustrations. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4384-4429-1; \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4384-4430-7.

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## A Personal History: Anthony Wallace and Tuscarora

On the cover of Anthony F. C. Wallace's book, *Tuscarora: A History*, are featured a map of the Six Nations' territory from 1851 and two pieces of quiltwork. These images provide a good introduction to this new work by the eminent anthropologist, ethnohistorian, and Iroquoianist, who set out to write this book "about the importance of national sovereignty and of traditional ideal standards of responsible social behavior among the Tuscarora Indians" (p. xiii). It might not be a coincidence that one is hard pressed to see the name, Tuscarora, on the map, as the text asks the reader to quilt together the history of the Tuscarora people and nation, or perhaps of Tuscarora as a place, a reservation, a community, a concept. Readers who expect to find a history of Tuscarora in the conventional sense will be disappointed. This work struck me more as the personal history of Wallace's relationship with the concept, Tuscarora, with which or whom he has been intimately involved since 1948. It is not only the community who lives in a "Historia" (p. xiii), but also Wallace, and the text is the impressive and thoroughly interesting account of remembering, by both Wallace and the community. As Wallace explains, this book is the result of a collaboration, a reciprocal approach. Community members provided corrections, suggestions, and reviews for this text, which was aimed at presenting "the traditional values and the institutions of the Tuscarora in a positive light" (p. 112). This is not a distant, objective, academic history. It is a text written with a purpose, and it puts forth a proposition: that small, sovereign, indigenous nations can provide the

moral ideals needed to regenerate and survive, and that these ideals are their traditional values.

Having myself grown up in a "small but sovereign nation in a world of empires," which prides itself on its tolerance of diversity, a "preference for settling disputes by negotiation," and accepts inherent factionalism (p. 23), there are many things that appeal to me in this work. It is not a shortcoming, but the purpose of this work that a critical approach to nationalist presentation of cultural uniqueness and an academic perspective on historical "facts" are intentionally missing. (This can also be seen by the very rudimentary reliance on reference works.) The most academic chapters of the book are the ethnographic descriptions of family, kinship, and governance toward the end. Here, Wallace not only shows his mastery of Tuscarora social structure, but also explains the Tuscarora ideals that are the emphasis of the text through their practice. It is the next chapter, aptly called "Preserving the Cycle of Life," that provides the work's central point. It is also here that I found the answer to the text's structure. In discussing a book by Ted Williams, Wallace writes that Williams's stories "are stories about actual experiences of the author and of real people whom he knew, or knew by reputation, on the Reserve" (p. 228). It occurred to me as I read that passage that the same is true of Wallace's text.

Wallace makes very clear that being a conventional anthropologist—or bringing to bear a conventional aca-

ademic perspective—would not be appropriate here. Indeed, a book hides from him so as to not reveal “sacred knowledge to an inquiring anthropologist” (p. 227). In fact, Wallace confesses the shortcomings of his own previous research. He acknowledges that his career was possible “by the generosity of the Tuscarora community” and one family in particular, and seems to specifically design this project as a collaboration in response to a perceived lack of that acknowledgment before (p. 111). It was very moving for me to read his heartfelt apology to the community for his 1948 Rorschach studies (p. 18). He later on also describes how he returns a souvenir, a small False Fask mask he had bought in 1948, and his interpretation of Oren Lyon’s reaction (p. 225) shows that this text and the relationship it describes is deeply personal and in part atonement for perceived mistakes. Wallace deserves great credit for being so open about his reflections on his work, his relationships, and his regrets. What shines through, though, much brighter than any potential shortfalls, is his acceptance by the community, families, and individuals, and his deep engagement with the people over sixty years.

Readers who expect a straightforward history or an academic investigation of the Tuscarora will be frustrated with this book. The history is presented synchronically, according to subjects, so that readers have to piece it together. Details of historical facts are often absent on purpose, while at other times, seemingly inconsequential personal details are elaborated. The Fetterman fight is described without mentioning William Fetterman, and only to introduce his then commanding officer Henry B. Carrington as the field agent of a special report (p. 84). A book on Tuscarora history is of significance because it was published in 1881, “on the eve of the Dawes Act,” but the impact of the Dawes Act on the Tuscarora is never explained (p. 101). And there are some mistakes. *Sherrill v Oneida* is misinterpreted and the lawsuit as such never named (p. 129); the American Indian Movement made efforts “to ‘civilize’ the Indians,” presumably a confusion with the Society of American Indians (p. 127). Two hundred years of history are presented in fifteen pages, and Wallace asserts at one point that “[w]e must cut through the complex know of treaties and attempted treaties, border incidents, and the morass of names for Indian groups” to follow the main issues (p. 69). Later, he avoids another complex discussion: “But let us turn away from the thorny subjects of contrasts and similarities between Christian and Longhouse moral standards and go on to the principle of volunteerism” (p. 212). However, historical or anthropological details are not important because

Wallace is not writing a conventional academic history or ethnography. Instead of discussing complex historical and ethnographic issues in detail, Wallace asserts a cultural continuity, “the principles of a social world—a way of community life—that has not changed in many ways since the Tuscaroras lived in their original homeland” (p. 32). Traditional values survived, so that, for example, one mother “explained three hundred years later” the child-rearing practices described by John Lawson in 1709 (p. 213).

Wallace asserts that it is this cultural continuity, threatened for three hundred years, that is still surviving in Tuscarora. In an important passage, Wallace rightly critiques anthropologists for developing “tunnel vision” in regards to Native communities, only seeing reservation life and ignoring the fact that innumerable ties cross reservation boundaries (pp. 52-56). These ties, however, he asserts, are also what place the Tuscarora into a situation of “ethnostress” because they continue to experience a siege, “a life under constant threat from White governmental institutions and commercial interests that are striving to take their land, their livelihood, their religion, and even their language” (p. 125). The siege, a threat of cultural discontinuity (p. 123), is thus real: Tuscarora “have all been veterans of combat” (p. 109), and the “[New York] Power Authority is like a mythic beast, a hungry monster lying in wait just outside the already reduced boundaries of the Reserve, ready to devour more land” (p. 138). It is in resistance to this siege that traditional ideals are still surviving, and it is these ideals that are needed “to guide the revitalization of the global community” (p. 242). I agree in principle that the global community needs to act responsibly, reciprocally, and locally. Politically, the descriptions of cultural continuity and of the siege make sense and send a powerful message. However, and admittedly I might be absolutely wrong here, I cannot see the ethnographic evidence for the reality of the siege nor of such cultural survival in the community. My own experience in non-Iroquoian communities makes me doubt that one particular family speaks for the whole community.

In reflection on *Tuscarora. A History*, I find that “Tuscarora” really is a concept, the emplacement of local governance according to kinship responsibility in a specific community with which Anthony Wallace has had a long affiliation and to which he has returned to stay. This is a very important book, and it should figure on the reading list of anybody engaging with the anthropologies, histories, and ethnohistories of Native peoples. It raises fundamental questions about fieldwork, engagement, and the

writing of history. Might I suggest, though, to read both cally.  
terms in the title, “Tuscarora” and “history,” metaphori-

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