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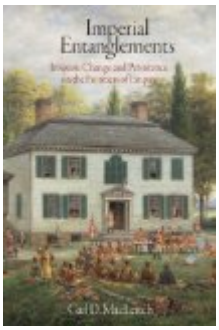

Gail D. MacLeitch. *Imperial Entanglements: Iroquois Change and Persistence on the Frontiers of Empire.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. 352 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4281-2.

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Published on H-War (September, 2014)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

The Haudenosaunee, also known as the Iroquois or Six Nations, of present-day New York have long been the focus of historians of Native America. Many of these studies have concentrated on the legendary military and diplomatic achievements of the Six Nations. Gail MacLeitch sets out to provide more nuances to that depiction in *Imperial Entanglements: Iroquois Change and Persistence on the Frontiers of Empire*. Arguing that this previous focus "obscures other arguably more important dimensions and veils significant shifts in their [Iroquoians'] historical experiences," MacLeitch focuses instead on the "economic and cultural" dimensions of the Iroquois experience during the years surrounding the Seven Years' War (p. 3). By doing so, MacLeitch tries to bring the era of the Seven Years' War "into sharper focus" while placing the Iroquois "as dynamic participants in a story of empire building in mid-eighteenth-century North America" (pp. 9, 11). However, frequent departure from chronology within chapters, coupled with the absence of any overview or timeline of major events will leave nonspecialists disoriented.

Imperial Encounters is organized, for the most part, chronologically, beginning with a chapter of Iroquois history before the Seven Years' War. A second chapter describes the expansion of British influence within Iroquoia during the 1740s and 1750s. The following three chapters take a thematic approach to various facets of the Iroquois experience during the Seven Years' War, dealing with economics, gender, and ethnicity. The final two chapters address changes in Iroquoia following British victory in the war. Readers familiar with the historiography on Native American involvement in the market economy and the racialization of the early American frontier will find little new in those chapters.

The book is at its best when exploring the cultural and economic history of the Native residents of the Mohawk River Valley during the mid-eighteenth century. MacLeitch traces how the Seven Years' War accelerated Indian involvement in a

market economy, pushed the British (and some Natives) towards a more racialized view of their neighbors, and strained established Iroquoian gender roles. The book's strongest chapter, "Gendered Encounters," reveals how overlapping yet distinct concepts of gender shaped wartime exchanges between the British and the Iroquois. Although Sir William Johnson and other British officials were uncomfortable with the level of influence Iroquois women had on political decisions, the reality of Native power forced the British to negotiate with indigenous men *and* women.

When looking beyond the bounds of the Mohawk Valley, ***Imperial Entanglements*** all too often resorts to oversimplifications. While paying lip service to the diversity of the Iroquois experience, MacLeitch often uses the Mohawks and Oneidas as stand-ins for the entire Confederacy. West of the Mohawks and Oneidas, the Onondagas historically looked to the Confederacy's southern frontier with Pennsylvania. The Cayugas and especially the Senecas faced—and increasingly moved—west. But for MacLeitch, the only frontier that mattered was the westward march of British towns onto the Mohawk and Oneida lands. The Mingos, breakaway Iroquoians (mostly Senecas) who moved to the Ohio Valley, and several multiethnic communities to the south receive scant attention. All of these people remained in communication with the Iroquois in eastern New York, influencing their economic and cultural experiences. Part of this bias is no doubt due to the sources. Sir William Johnson, British agent to the Iroquois, lived among the Mohawks, even marrying one. But this relative cornucopia of information about the Mohawks does not excuse lumping the Iroquois experiences together. The western (Genesee, or Chenussio) Senecas in particular were far less "entangled" in the British Empire than Mohawk Valley residents, even fighting alongside the French during the Seven Years' War. Guyasuta, a Seneca leader living in the Ohio Country, who led fighters against the British during the Seven Years' War and again in 1763, represents an opposite geographic and political pole from Joseph and Molly Brant, bound to Britain by virtue of Molly's marriage to Johnson. However, Guyasuta—who accompanied a young George Washington in 1754 before switching sides and aiding the defeat of a British force under General Edward Braddock in 1755—is not even mentioned.

MacLeich's coverage of a 1763 conflict often mislabeled "Pontiac's War" (she calls it the "Anglo-Indian War") brings the book's major interpretive weaknesses into sharpest relief. Both the western Senecas and Native religion played an important role in the war, and MacLeitch shows little interest in either. Forced to explain why some Senecas participated in this multinational military effort by Great Lakes Indians to remove British influence in the region, MacLeitch argues that "economic concerns and grievances fueled Seneca actions" (p. 180), while also stating that their participation took place within the "British occupation of Indian lands" (p. 179). Although British officials feared other Iroquois would join the Senecas, they did not. But in 1763, colonists had interfered far more with the Mohawk and Oneida subsistence base, as MacLeich admits (pp. 181-186). If colonial land hunger and economic dislocation were the major sources of Native militancy in 1763, the Mohawks, rather than the Senecas, could be expected to be on the front lines. They, along with most of the Six Nations, chose not to participate, but MacLeitch makes no attempt to analyze their decision, which is an odd choice in a work purporting to show them as "dynamic participants in a story of empire building in mid-eighteenth-century North America" (p. 11). Instead, eastern Iroquoian inaction is taken for granted.

Other scholars have suggested that the nativist movements sweeping the Great Lakes region beginning in the 1740s influenced Indian actions in 1763.[1] Readers will remain unaware of this unless they care to check the endnotes, where they will learn, "Recent interpretations of this

["Pontiac's] war deemphasize economic grievances" in favor of other explanations (p. 299, n. 11). Within the text, information supporting competing explanations is either ignored or presented in a scrambled fashion, often as an afterthought at the conclusion of a chapter. Readers first learn about the Delaware Prophet Neolin—an influential figure in the nativist movement—less than ten pages before the end of the book, even though Neolin and prophets like him were associated with pan-Indian militancy and ideas of separatism from Europeans (p. 239). Notably, MacLeitch avoids discussing him in relation to the "tried and tested new racial models of understanding," present among many Senecas, Cayugas, and Onondagas by the 1770s (p. 235). MacLeitch notes that Iroquois orators began to speak of "separate origins from Europeans" in the 1740s, but implies the Six Nations conceived of this independently (pp. 158-159). She notes fifteen pages later, at the very end of the chapter on racial identity, that Ohio Valley Shawnees and Delawares used racialized appeals to persuade the Six Nations to support the French during the Seven Years War (p. 174), and mentions the prevalence of nativism in the Ohio Valley from the 1740s onwards near the end of the book (p. 239).

MacLeitch has written a detailed economic and social picture of life in the Mohawk Valley during the mid eighteenth century, tightly focused in the everyday experiences of ordinary Indians on a frontier of an expanding British Empire. Readers seeking a book with more expansive ambitions will be disappointed. MacLeitch does not engage with any of the literature on the subject of the Iroquois' own quasi-imperial pretensions to the Ohio Valley or discuss how the experience of the Six Nations compared with any other Natives in eastern North America at the time. Nor does she provide a strong narrative structure of the Iroquois "home front" experience during the Seven Years' War. Perhaps most limiting of all, the book's tendency to dwell on events occurring near Sir William Johnson's front yard mean that readers hoping for a more wide-ranging examination of the Iroquois experience at midcentury may find themselves lost.

Note

[1]. See especially Gregory Evans Dowd, ***A Spirited Resistance: The North American Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*** (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), and ***War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations and the British Empire*** (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

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Citation: Ian Saxine. Review of MacLeitch, Gail D. *Imperial Entanglements: Iroquois Change and Persistence on the Frontiers of Empire.* H-War, H-Net Reviews. September, 2014.

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