

Nicholas A. Brown, Sarah E. Kanouse. *Re-collecting Black Hawk: Landscape, Memory, and Power in the American Midwest.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015. 294 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8229-4437-9.



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The trend of American historiography is one of ever-growing inclusivity. While acknowledging traditional narratives, newer patterns of study provide greater opportunities to embrace other stories, broadening our worldview. Nowhere is this process more clearly delineated than within the field of Native American history, an area that necessarily combines the historical experience of indigenous peoples and the modern-day challenges they face. Contributing editors Nicholas A. Brown and Sarah E. Kanouse have drawn on their academic training in art and history to produce a work that is at once both artistic commentary and historical scholarship. *Re-Collecting Black Hawk: Landscape, Memory, and Power in the American Midwest* contributes to the historiography through its choice of subject matter and the way that information is conveyed.

Brown and Kanouse recognize the inherent challenges to objectively researching and portraying the story of native populations. Principal among these is the almost overwhelming influence of the predominant colonial narrative. In the

effort to create a memory worthy of respect and commemoration, Americans have long distanced themselves from the troubling realities of the country's origins. Acknowledging these implications, and wrestling with the deep moral issues they raise, is the goal of this compilation. It explores the story of Black Hawk, a Native American leader of Fox and Sac Indians. The eponymous war occurred in 1832 when he led a small group across the border from Iowa to Illinois in order to reclaim ancestral lands.

The volume is, however, decidedly removed from narrative history. It discusses "the various and conflicting ways the history of that war and the memory of that person function in the present" (p. 5). To achieve that objective, the editors have chosen a bold approach that is atypical in the realm of historical scholarship. Neither a conventional monograph nor a collection of essays, the book consists of black-and-white images juxtaposed with various writings that create what Brown and Kanouse term an "extended image-text essay" (p. 4). The images are not paired in the

conventional manner (to enhance the text) but rather are frequently related to that material in abstract ways.

This innovative methodology succeeds in challenging commonplace assumptions. In one notable example, the book places the generally illustrious reputation of Abraham Lincoln in question. It stresses the ramifications wrought by his signing of the Homestead Act, namely westward migration at the expense of indigenous peoples. In another instance, the historic preservation officer for the Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma proposes the term “conflict” in lieu of “war” to denote the events surrounding Black Hawk. This distinction in language reflects the editors’ efforts to encourage a reconsideration of widely held beliefs—even the words employed by scholars and the public to discuss both past and present. At times saddening, at times inspiring, the tome never fails to challenge the reader. In this sense, it constitutes a meaningful addition to Native American historiography that will induce many to reevaluate their perspectives.

The source material for a work of this scope is expansive, as demonstrated by the ten-page bibliography. Endnotes are fewer than in a traditional monograph, understandable given the heavy reliance on interviews, newspaper and magazine excerpts, portions from other volumes, and verse compositions. The strength of this approach is its ability to offer a far-ranging look at popular and academic thought on historical memory.

Nevertheless, the bold design and ambitious goals of the work could be considered a detriment. Brown and Kanouse chose a format that would reach a broad audience. Rather than “a limited-edition set of silver gelatin prints ... [they opted for] a widely distributed print book produced by a nonprofit university press” (p. 230). Still, depending on the reader’s background, the unusual nature of the extended image-essay may either intrigue or frustrate.

The editors’ commendable effort to include a variety of texts demonstrates the historian’s dilemma: how to offer content suitable for a range of readers that satisfies each group sufficiently. The interviews and news excerpts are approachable for a general audience. In contrast, some scholarly essays employ intricate terminology only encountered within the confines of academia; these sections will be unfamiliar and challenging for the public at large. Such aspects of the publication limit its potential appeal. The readership may only have an introductory appreciation for the complexities of art and symbolism, narratives of struggle and colonialism, or the methodologies of listening championed by indigenous rights activists.

An interdisciplinary volume encompassing principles from art and history, Brown and Kanouse have utilized their unique combination of skills to challenge the assumptions held by Americans of non-indigenous descent. The example set by the editors should be embraced by other historians, popular and academic, in their pursuit to convey relevance and foster a spirit of revisionism. *Re-Collecting Black Hawk: Landscape, Memory, and Power in the American Midwest* is a demonstration of the potential for innovation in the field of history.

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