

**Dawn Peterson.** *Indians in the Family: Adoption and the Politics of Antebellum Expansion.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017. 421 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-73755-6.

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*Indians in the Family: Adoption and the Politics of Antebellum Expansion* offers readers a new framework through which to interpret the antebellum United States: the politics of indigenous child and youth adoption by white settler families. During these decades, Southeastern Indians “became particularly interested in sending their children—especially their sons—to live in slaveholding households in the U.S. South” (p. 1). In this context, their educations ranged from academic subjects to assimilative messages about masculinity, race, land use, politics, and settler cultural practices. Many of these adoptees returned to their natal homes where they advocated for both their families and nations in a rapidly shifting context. Dawn Peterson convincingly argues that this adoptive familial paradigm allowed government officials and others to render “U.S. imperialism into a family story” rather than one of brutal dispossession (p. 2). The monograph successfully reimagines familiar aspects of Southeastern indigenous history through the lens of family history and a critique of colonialism.

Peterson acknowledges in a note that the number of adoptees was small: the book takes into account under thirty such persons and really examines a fraction of that number in detail. Yet as students and scholars of Native American history know, the challenges of quantifying such

things are great; indigenous populations were frequently small; and hundreds—Peterson states over eight hundred by 1824—of Native children were educated (and in many instances “adopted”) by missionaries during the same era (p. 5). Thus the book addresses a far-reaching phenomenon.

Through an innovative argument, Peterson maintains that adoption served as a metaphor for who could incorporate into the “free white national family” and who could not (p. 8). White settler families who adopted Native children saw them as close enough to whiteness to integrate and boys as educable to the end of creating “patriarchal farmers” (p. 77). From the perspective of indigenous parents and leaders, such bonds fit into precolonial practices of adoption, notions of kinship, and pragmatic plans for the future. As the book demonstrates, the indigenous goal of educated political leaders—adept in both the dominant culture and indigenous ones—often triumphed over the settler aim of Native acquiescence to a particular place in a racialized hierarchy in the ever-expanding United States.

The first chapter can stand alone as an examination of the federal Indian policy of “civilization” with a focus on gender and sexuality. It investigates the ways in which settler logics of masculinity and femininity were ascribed to indigenous bodies—though not black ones—whom whites

read as capable of imbibing such ascriptions. (Here Peterson advances an interesting argument about Thomas Jefferson's and others' imaginings about Native men's virility.) Similar in its ability to serve as distinct topic, the second chapter brings readers to Pennsylvania for a discussion of the Quaker education of a handful Seneca, Creek, and Cherokee boys and six Stockbridge and Tuscarora girls.

The remaining seven chapters cohere more immediately and tell a Southeastern indigenous story. Chapter 3 provides a detailed examination of the ambitions and actions of US Indian agent Silas Dinsmore and his work among the Choctaws. Chapter 4 considers Molly McDonald, the mother of one of the adoptees that the book tracks most carefully, James McDonald. This section skillfully traces the life of this slave-owning Choctaw woman despite, as Peterson writes, the "archival silences" that can challenge historians (p. 126). Chapter 5 describes Andrew Jackson's adoption of the Creek boy, Lyncoya, and argues that the adoption translated "a unilateral act of war" against the Creeks "into an act of benevolence" (p. 142) wherein Lyncoya represented the "last" member of his community" (p. 147). The next three chapters address James McDonald; the last gasps of the "civilization" policy; the efforts of McDonald and David Folsom to protect Choctaw sovereignty and land base in the lower Mississippi Valley; and the Choctaw Academy in Blue Springs, Kentucky—an educational opportunity distinct from missionary efforts. The book concludes with the fight against Southeastern Indian removal and maintains that the place of indigenous people in the "national family" was uncertain and decidedly no longer east of the Mississippi River (p. 271).

*Indians in the Family* offers readers familiar with Southeastern indigenous history fresh arguments and a thoroughly researched account of the decades after the Revolutionary War. For those lacking such a background, the book provides suf-

ficient context so as to have broad appeal. The monograph will thus likely serve as a welcome resource to anyone interested in Native American history, early American history, and the history of adoption in the United States.

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