

Mary Stockwell. *Interrupted Odyssey: Ulysses S. Grant and the American Indians.* World of Ulysses S. Grant Series. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018. ix + 256 pp. \$34.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8093-3670-8.

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While the American Civil War is often thought of as a conflict between the North and South, scholars over the past ten years have demonstrated that the war was also about the future of the West.[1] Who would have political control of the land west of the 100th meridian? Would its economy be based on the principles of free or slave labor? Could a benevolent, God-fearing American empire from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean come to life if the popular ideal of manifest destiny was interrupted by civil war? Could self-government, “the last best hope of the earth,” in the words of Abraham Lincoln, not only survive but also grow in the wake of horrific, mass bloodshed?

Union victory guaranteed that a free labor economy would accompany the mass expansion of settlers into the West after the fighting stopped. As Richard White argues in *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (2017), Lincoln’s vision of free labor, political equality, and the growth of middle-class towns like his hometown of Springfield, Illinois, could now expand nationwide. Embedded in these hopes and dreams, however, was the assumption that the West was ripe for the taking in a growing US empire. Any effort by native peoples to halt these ad-

vancements would only lead to misery and death among the various Indian nations already living in the West. White westward expansion after the Civil War was inevitable; manifest destiny and mass settler migration to the West were a matter not of why but of when, where, and how.

This state of affairs summarizes the situation President Ulysses S. Grant faced when he took his oath of office on March 4, 1869. While he deliberately avoided discussing any specific policy initiatives in his first inaugural address, Grant acknowledged the task before him when he stated that “the proper treatment of the original occupants of this land—the Indians [is] one deserving of careful study. I will favor any course toward them which tends to their civilization and ultimate citizenship.”[2] Balancing the competing interests and conflicting goals of the many groups who claimed land in the West—including settlers, politicians, religious and business leaders, and Native Americans—would be one of the greatest challenges of Grant’s presidency. In *Interrupted Odyssey: Ulysses S. Grant and the American Indians*, historian Mary Stockwell offers one of the finest studies of President Grant’s Indian policy and its consequences for the country to date.

In chapters 1 through 3 and a brief prelude, Stockwell establishes the context for Grant’s views

on Indian policy by providing a brief history of past presidential relationships with the country's Indian nations. She notes that George Washington believed that "the two peoples, red and white, would merge into one another" as more whites made their way west and military conquest opened new lands for US control (p. 8). How to "civilize" the country's native peoples for a new life under US rule was a central question of various presidents from Washington to John Quincy Adams. The process was guided by treaties between the US government and Indian nations and by legislation like the Civilization Fund Act (1819), which appropriated federal funds to build Christian mission schools, churches, and farm equipment. Resistance to this growing US encroachment on Indian lands and ways of life, however, led to several bloody conflicts between the Native Americans and the US government. By the time Andrew Jackson took office in 1829, the goals of assimilation and "civilization" were largely jettisoned as Jackson pushed for the mass removal of such Indian nations as the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw. Jackson also shifted control of Indian policy away from the executive to the War Department (later the Department of the Interior) under the management of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Stockwell argues that Grant's vision of peace with the Indian nations appropriated important aspects of Washington's policies by trying to restore power to the chief executive, reducing political corruption, and embracing the concept of "civilization" for the Indians.

Stockwell also uses these chapters to highlight the experiences of Grant and his close confidant, Ely Parker. She notes that Grant had few interactions with native peoples during his service with the antebellum US Army. In fact, the first time he interacted with native people was during the Mexican-American War, when he wrote to his wife that "the whole race [of Indians] would be harmless if they were not put upon by the whites" (p. 27). Grant was greatly impressed when he first met Parker, a New York-born Seneca Indian and

trained lawyer and engineer, in Galena, Illinois, in 1860. Grant and Parker became fast friends, and as Grant rose through the ranks of the US Army during the Civil War, he appointed Parker to serve on his staff. When Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House in April 1865, Grant tasked Parker with writing the surrender terms. Equally important, Grant continued to rely on Parker after the war to assist him with formulating fair policies for the Indian tribes in the West. Parker established a four-point plan, which Grant wholeheartedly endorsed, that called for the transfer of the BIA back to the War Department, a permanent guarantee of land to the various Indian tribes, the establishment of an inspection board to oversee all Indian agencies managed by the federal government, and a permanent commission composed of both Indians and white people to assist the chief executive with formulating fair policies for both groups.

Chapters 4 through 6 explore the early years of Grant's presidency. Grant appointed Parker head of the BIA—the first Indian to hold that position—and sought to replace the Department of the Interior with the War Department in managing the various reservations and Indian trading posts in the West. Since the days of Jackson's administration, unscrupulous officials who had no real expertise or interest in serving the needs of the Indians had been appointed to these positions, oftentimes providing poor food and clothing to the tribes while pocketing any extra cash from federal appropriations. By appointing military officials who served for life and were not motivated by profit or patronage, corruption at these places would ostensibly disappear. Grant and Parker also called for the full enforcement of all treaties to the exact letter, supported the creation of a Board of Indian Commissioners to work with Parker at the BIA, and encouraged the various tribes to begin assimilating to white ways by learning about Christianity and farming and eventually moving into newly established reservations where they would be protected by the US

government. Assimilation and the full rights of US citizenship would be the ultimate goals for the country's native peoples.

Grant soon realized that his plans faced strong opposition from a number of directions. "Not every Indian living in the West was happy with changes coming from Washington," argues Stockwell. "Many did not want to move onto reservations where they were expected to live like white men" (p. 69). Army officers found work at Indian posts to be demeaning. They did not want to serve as Indian agents nor did they believe that "protecting Indians and teaching them the finer points of civilization should be among [their] primary duties" (p. 70). Congress resented Grant's effort to strip their patronage power and soon passed legislation banning military officers from serving at Indian trading posts and reservations. They also abolished the treaty system (which Grant supported) but failed to implement a new system for negotiating peace with the various Indian tribes. Violent massacres of native peoples at Marias and Camp Grant exposed the shortcomings of Grant's policies. Equally noteworthy, the newly established Board of Indian Commissioners began a campaign to remove Parker from office. Led by the prominent philanthropist William Welch, the all-white board considered itself the ultimate authority in shaping Indian policy. They rejected Parker's belief that they were merely advisors to his authority in the BIA and resented the fact that a man of native blood was running the agency. Welch accused Parker of financial mismanagement and fraud, eventually forcing his resignation in 1871. Importantly, Grant failed to defend his friend from these charges, a stark contrast from his future efforts to defend other officials like Orville Babcock, William Belknap, and Columbus Delano from accusations of corruption. Grant's vision for the tribes had become, according to Stockwell, an "interrupted odyssey."

Chapter 6 also serves as an important transition point for Stockwell's narrative. Grant seems

to have ended his friendship with Parker once the latter resigned as head of the BIA. Meanwhile, the US Army discovered gold in the Black Hills of present-day South Dakota. This land had been protected from settlement through the terms of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, but the discovery of gold changed everything. As Stockwell argues, "the Great Plains, long dismissed as the Great American Desert, fit for only Indians and buffalo, suddenly became desirable country not just for raising cattle but also for farming" (p. 127). Although the US Army initially tried to keep all settlers away, they began illegally hunting for gold and building homes on this land. Parker's successor at the BIA, statistician Francis A. Walker, was blunt in his characterization of Grant's Indian policies. Grant's efforts to enforce the laws while promoting white westward expansion into new territories were contradictory. Walker, along with the Board of Indian Commissioners, strenuously argued that the need to "civilize" the original inhabitants living in the way of westward progress had become all the more urgent with the discovery of more gold. While Parker had called for a gradual assimilation of the Indian nations into the customs of mainstream American society (a process he said could take several generations to accomplish), the Black Hills discovery now meant that the "civilization" process had to begin immediately. For Walker, the Indians would "wear the white man's clothes. They would attend church, send their children to school, and even elect their own kind to public office." As Stockwell points out, Walker admitted that Grant's Indian policy would pave the way for "imperial greatness" for the US but might cause "incalculable loss" for the Indians, especially those who resisted federal power (p. 117).

Chapters 7 through 9 cover Grant's second term in office and the abandonment of his initial Indian policies. Stockwell argues that the Modoc War was a particularly devastating event for Grant. The Modoc tribe had maintained its historical home near Tule Lake in northern California.

During the Civil War, the US government and the tribe agreed to a treaty that relocated the Modoc to the Upper Klamath Lake in northwest Oregon. The Klamath tribe living in this area, however, were mortal enemies of the Modoc; for nine years the Modoc faced harassment and oppression from the Klamath with little support from the US government. Many fled back to Tule Lake in the ensuing years. In 1873, Grant appointed General Edward Canby to meet with the Modoc to negotiate for peace. During the peace negotiations, a Modoc leader named Captain Jack killed General Canby. Once again, Grant faced criticism on multiple fronts. According to Stockwell, "President Grant's Indian policy had failed, either because, as western papers claimed, he coddled the savages right up until the moment they went on the warpath or because, as eastern papers argued, he paid lip service to peace while planning for war all along" (p. 141). Grant maintained his support of a "peace policy" with Indians who were willing to remove themselves to reservations and adopt the ways of white Americans, but his threats against hostile tribes became more serious. When another attack against buffalo hunters at Adobe Walls in the Texas Panhandle occurred in 1874, Grant went on the warpath. Grant had been merciful toward Captain Jack, Stockwell argues, but he "had no intention of forgiving the Comanche, Kiowa, and Cheyenne warriors for their attack on Adobe Walls. Instead, the Army would move swiftly against them" (p. 146).

Stockwell also uses these last chapters to detail what was perhaps the greatest failure of Grant's Indian policy, the forced acquisition of the Black Hills in violation of the Fort Laramie Treaty. After the initial discovery of gold in the Black Hills, the Grant administration attempted to purchase this land from the various Sioux nations living there, including the Lakota, Dakota, and Yankton tribes. The Sioux consistently refused to sell. Meanwhile, an increasing number of settlers poured into the Black Hills eager for gold. Stockwell notes that on November 3, 1875, President

Grant "called a meeting at the White House to lay out a strategy for taking the Black Hills away from the Sioux and subduing any resistance" (p. 171). While there had been orders to evict miners from the Black Hills, the army was ordered to cease enforcing this provision. All bands of Sioux not attached to a reservation were ordered to do so or face a winter campaign against the army in early 1876. Claiming that he could no longer protect the Sioux from encroaching settlers, Grant waited to see what would happen next. In reality, the conditions for what would become the Battle of Little Bighorn in June 1876 were already set. In October 1876, 228 chiefs and headmen were forced to sign a new agreement ceding the Black Hills to the US government. Grant himself fell silent on Indian policy following his departure from the presidency. As Stockwell argues, "after trying for years to treat the Indians with greater respect than any president had all the way back to Washington, he had nothing more to say" (p. 179). He could not fathom why any Indian tribe would reject his generous offer of US citizenship. "Never once in all his planning did President Grant wonder whether the Indians agreed with him," Stockwell contends. "Nor did he ever consider how unhappy they might be contemplating the future he had laid out to them" (p. 134).

Grant's approach to peaceful relations with the various Indian tribes was simultaneously thoughtful, paternalistic, and contradictory. In Stockwell's view, he genuinely cared for the fate of the nation's "original inhabitants" and believed they had been oppressed by white greed and violence for many years. He attempted to undo the mistakes of past administrations and chart a better future for the tribes amid the migration of white settlers to the West during Reconstruction. His close friendship with Parker highlights his respect for native peoples and his desire to learn from them. He rejected the views of close confidants, such as General Philip Sheridan, who famously argued that "a good Indian is a dead Indian." Grant also believed that while Native Ameri-

cans were not yet fit for citizenship, they would be if they adopted Christianity, learned to farm, embraced the concept of private property, and espoused the values of mainstream Protestant culture. As with Lincoln's free labor vision, however, Grant's views were embedded with the assumption that the West remained open for white settlement and growth. When the desire for peace clashed with the country's dreams of manifest destiny, the latter won out. Although Stockwell does not use the term, some historians argue that Grant's peace policy was a form of "cultural genocide"—an effort to "save the man and kill the Indian," where anything related to Native American culture was considered barbaric and "savage." The Indians of the American West had to be saved, and they could only be treated as equals when they left their past lives behind.

In the case of the forced acquisition of the Black Hills, President Grant abandoned a central argument of his first inaugural. During the address, Grant stated that "Laws are to govern all alike—those opposed as well as those who favor them. I know no method to secure the repeal of bad or obnoxious laws so effective as their stringent execution." [3] By abandoning the terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty and orders preventing settlers from inhabiting the Black Hills, however, Grant failed to live up to his own standards of law enforcement. As the Black Hills Land Claim continues to be a point of disagreement between the US government and the Sioux people today, all can point to President Grant's inaction as a crucial moment in a prolonged history of mistreatment and abuse of Native Americans. Perhaps more important, the paradox of peace and manifest destiny that Grant faced as president reflects the realities of a nation—both then and now—still struggling to determine the best method for establishing "the proper treatment of the original occupants of this land" in a fair and equitable way. Stockwell's scholarship highlights an important historical era in which Native Americans experienced struggle and genocide, common themes in

their own interrupted odyssey that has lasted since 1492.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Elliott West, *The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, *Crooked Paths to Allotment: The Fight over Federal Indian Policy after the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Virginia Scharff, ed., *Empire and Liberty: The Civil War and the West* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Adam Arenson and Andrew R. Graybill, eds., *Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); and Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, *The World the Civil War Made* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[2]. Ulysses S. Grant, "First Inaugural Address" (1869), in *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States from George Washington 1789 to George Bush 1989*, vol. 2, ed. Superintendent of Documents, US GPO (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1989), 15.

[3]. *Ibid.*, 12.

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