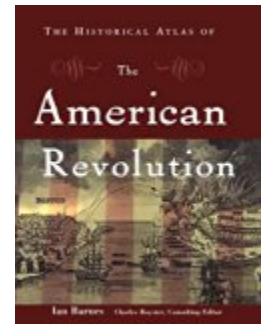


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ian Barnes. *The Historical Atlas of the American Revolution*. Charles Royster, Consultant Editor. New York: Routledge, 2000. 223 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-92243-2.

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## Misdirected Atlas

### Misdirected Atlas

Most atlas collections are too costly for the average teacher or scholar to purchase for personal use. Many are costly enough to give smaller libraries pause. Hence there is definitely a market for a compact, affordable, up-to-date atlas of the Revolutionary era in American history. That is clearly the niche that Ian Barnes and Routledge Press hoped to fill. Unfortunately, this atlas is so riddled with errors and out-of-date interpretation that it is not worth its price.

The central core of the atlas is military and naval history, not only of the American Revolution, but of the War of 1812. The atlas interprets the revolutionary era broadly, with maps and sections stretching back in time to King William's War and forward to the Oregon Treaty of 1846. Social and political events are treated in Chapters One, Eight, and Nine. Its military focus becomes startlingly clear in the short biographical section at the end of the book. Eight out of the eleven lines in the entry on Alexander Hamilton, for example, recount his military service. His cabinet service is not mentioned.

Ian Barnes has contextualized the Revolutionary War by mapping the ways the conflict became a world war. Each chapter begins with an overview essay and then moves to specific topics with more detailed essays and maps. The color maps suppress geographic detail (such as mountain ranges) in order to focus attention on the specific purpose of the map.

The decision to stretch the revolutionary era to in-

clude most of the antebellum period may be justified as showing the working out of independence. I, however, would have wished for a greater exploration of the period up to 1800, with maps that provide post-revolutionary comparisons to early maps on immigration in the colonies, religion, and the economy, and maps that better illustrate the spread of population into the trans-Appalachian region before 1812. Surprisingly, there are no maps showing the development of the old Northwest Territory or the Old Southwest. The Confederation period is represented only by a discussion on ratification of the constitution.

The major problems, however, rest not in the conceptualization of the atlas, but in its execution. There is not evidence of mastery of the literature of the period, nor citations to specific works to support the information conveyed in either text or maps. The bibliography contains only 46 entries. Of these two are U.S. Survey textbooks; two were standard supplementary reader texts from the Heath *Major Problems in Series*; another is the *Penguin History of Canada*; two are state histories; six are other atlases, and two are encyclopedias.[1] The atlas bibliography includes no biographies of major figures on either side, nor individual studies of major battles. Even Robert Middlekauff's 800-plus page study *In Glorious Cause* (1982) and the studies of such military experts as Don Higginbotham and John Shy are absent. Works that do appear seem selected whimsically—for example, June Namias's study of women's captivity narratives, which is more a study of the development of myths and legends surrounding these women than the original

events and has less than four pages of historical data from the revolution.[2] The result is a narrative that often relies on interpretations that were being challenged when I was in graduate school three decades ago. It also shows a New England bias, for example, by leaving Virginia out of the story of the origins of colonial legislatures. At times it presents a Whig interpretation and at others it resorts to early iterations of a social conflict interpretation.

The treatment of religion in the atlas illustrates many of these problems. The atlas includes two maps, one documenting the growth in building of church buildings in the eighteenth century and another supposedly showing church adherence about 1775. Because there are no citations for sources, it is impossible to discern how the author concluded that fewer than 20 per cent of Americans in 1775 were linked to any church. This is lower than any recent scholar's estimate (even the generally pessimistic ones by Jon Butler in *Awash in a Sea of Faith*).[3] Religion does not emerge at all in the post-war discussion except in a brief mention of the second Great Awakening. That mention suggests that New England women's inability to find husbands because of a skewed sex ratio is responsible for the Awakening! (171). Thus opportunities to map revivals (including major ones in the South), the shift in denominational strength, and disestablishment are all not covered.

The discussion of the constitutional convention on in general is among the weakest parts of the atlas. The text mixes the debates among delegates at the convention with those of the ratifying convention, thus leaving the impression that Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, and Richard Henry Lee were part of the gathering in the Philadelphia (p. 164). The accompanying map suggests that the popular vote decided the issue of ratification, rather than simply the delegates to the conventions. Another chart in this section attempts to illustrate the concepts of checks and balances, federalism, and separation of powers. Readers will be surprised to find out that the U.S. Constitution created a government based on "Universal suffrage" (p. 167), at least according to that chart. In 1789 even universal male suffrage would have been an overstatement given racial exclusions, property requirements, and the survival of some religious tests in state laws.

Even more troubling are the editorial and continuity lapses. Time and again terms or names are used in the general overview that are not explained until later. Picture captions and text disagree. See for example the different versions of who fired the first shot at Lexington (p.

70). Technical knowledge such as the difference between a dragoon (mounted infantry) and cavalry is assumed. Virginia has become a part of the Middle Colonies (p. 22). The forces of Colonel Peter Gansevoort (Battle of Fort Stanwix and Oriskany, 1777) are converted from American troops to British on one map (p. 92). Items appear on maps that are not part of the text and vice versa. Modern cities and sites anachronistically appear on maps. Cleveland is one of a number of modern cities noted on a map showing church membership in the colonial period (p. 29). The map of the Battle of Harlem Heights includes Grant's tomb! (p. 83).

Problems in the American Indian discussions are especially noticeable. This is unfortunate because it is clear that the editor made a special effort to include African-Americans and American Indians in the atlas. The map "Native American Resistance 1782-1842" (p. 161) illustrates several of these problems. The text does not discuss the Seminole War at all, but the map includes the forts and battles of that campaign. General Harmar's name is misspelled ("Harman") twice on the same map. This map also illustrates another unfortunate decision. The cartographer has consistently used a stereotypical tepee as the symbol for American Indian villages. Eastern Indians, of course, did not use tepees. In the discussion of Indian Removal, the Potawatomi are referred to as "New York Indians" and the map showing removal identifies the destination sites of many tribes without their original homelands being marked. This leaves the impression that there were no removals from Indiana or Ohio, for example, and that most of the Old Northwest was already cleared of Indians.

This list of problems could go on, but there is no point. No section of this book escapes the plague of errors and discontinuities. If all of these were fixed, the reader still has to contend with outdated and muddy descriptions of social and political history. The smart reader will chart a course to another atlas.

#### Notes

[1]. Mary Beth Norton, et al., *A People and a Nation*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994; Richard D. Brown, ed., *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution, 1760-1791*, Boston: D.C. Heath and Co. , 1992; H. Brogan, *Longman History of the United States of America*, London: Longman, 1985; Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Major Problems in American Colonial History*, Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1993; K. McNaught, *The Penguin History of Canada*, New York, 1988; W.S. Powell, *North Carolina through the Centuries*, Chapel Hill: University of North

Carolina Press, 1989; Willis F. Dunbar and George S. May, *Michigan, A History of the Wolverine State*, rev. ed., Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1980. Indicative of the problems with this whole book, of the seven books noted in this footnote, the atlas bibliographic entry had errors in four of them. These ranged from omitting the publication date entirely from the Dunbar and May work, to adding a publisher (Houghton Mifflin) to the Kupperman and Brown books. The publication date is wrong on *A People and a Nation*.

[2]. June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993, pp. 117-118, 183-184.

[3]. The map on p. 29 for example includes a pie graph showing less than 20 per cent of Massachusetts whites as church members in 1775, after the first Great Awakening. Church membership in Massachusetts, however, was exclusive. Many people attended church regularly while waiting for the signs of grace that would let them claim membership. For a conservative estimate on church membership see Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, pp. 190-193. Patricia Bonomi more optimistically puts the percentage as closer to 60 per cent church members in her *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 220.

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