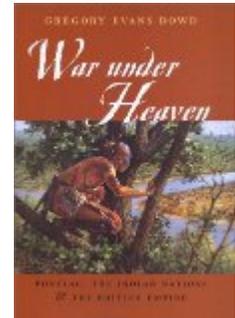




Gregory Evans Dowd. *War under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. xvi + 360 pp. \$32.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8018-7079-8.



Reviewed by Michelle LeMaster (Department of History, Eastern Illinois University)

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Restoring Pontiac

In *War under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations and the British Empire*, Gregory Evans Dowd undertakes to provide a much needed re-analysis of the so-called Pontiac's Rebellion, a significant pan-Indian war that threatened the stability of the First British Empire in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War. No full-length study of this topic has been attempted since Howard Peckham's 1947 monograph *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising*.^[1] Advances in ethnohistorical methodology and understanding of British-Indian relations since that time necessitate a fresh look at this crucial period, and Dowd provides an extensively researched narrative that fits the bill. For H-Albion readers, the book also provides insight into British colonial policy in the wake of the French and Indian War.

Dowd offers a new hypothesis as to the causes of the war, dismissing early arguments that it was the result of either Indian perfidy (Francis Parkman) or English pressure for Indian lands.^[2] Instead, he argues, "The status of the Native American peoples in this part of the realm claimed by the British Crown emerged as the single most im-

portant issue in Pontiac's War, far more important than, for example, trade, Indian hating, or even title to the lands themselves" (p. 2). Having recently gained significant amounts of territory from the French, British officers felt pressure to "assert imperial superiority" over both colonists and Indians in the region (p. 2). However, this need clashed with the need of Indian leaders to obtain respect and recognition in order to maintain the position of their own people in the radically altered political atmosphere of the post-war northwest.

In advancing this argument, Dowd insightfully recognizes the importance of status and symbolism in Indian-white interaction. Long-standing norms of diplomacy were repeatedly violated by metropolitan officials who lacked the experience with Indian affairs necessary for negotiating the labyrinth of forms and ceremonies required of successful mediation. In an interesting twist, Dowd places blame for the frontier conflagration, not on aggressively expansionist settlers, but rather on impolitic British officials. However, as with most totalizing arguments, Dowd overstates the case for

the importance of British disrespect of indigenous leaders and norms. He overemphasizes status while underemphasizing issues of trade, alliances, and most importantly, land. Dowd repeatedly makes the point that Pontiac's war began in the west, where British pressure on native hunting territories was not yet being felt. Just because the British were not yet encroaching on the lands of western tribes, like Pontiac's Ottawas, did not mean that the Ottawas and their allies could not see the handwriting on the wall. The discussion of land claims in the peace negotiations, which Dowd himself outlines, demonstrates the continuing fear Indians had of being overwhelmed by settlers now that their French allies were no longer there to check British expansion.

Dowd intersperses detailed descriptions of the campaigns and negotiations of the conflict with in-depth discussions of controversial historiographical issues. He begins by addressing the importance of Pontiac himself. Dowd restores Pontiac to a position of prominence in the planning and leadership of the "rebellion" that has come to take his name. Dowd's Pontiac is neither Parkman's great leader and doomed savage resisting the inevitable victory of civilization, nor Peckham's insignificant local chief. While clearly not a paramount chief, Pontiac, as a respected civil chief and religious leader, enjoyed significant influence among the tribes of the Old Northwest, and was a prime mover and shaker in the revolt against English assumptions of authority. Lacking clear documentation for Pontiac's life, Dowd draws on Ottawa political and spiritual traditions to piece together a picture of Pontiac's position and influence. The approach, especially Dowd's identification of Anishinabeg ideals of leadership with the trickster persona of Nanabush, a favorite character of regional oral tradition, offers some intriguing possibilities, although they are somewhat difficult to substantiate and regrettably based on accounts recorded by nineteenth-century ethnologists. His arguments for Pontiac's influence during

the uprising are better documented and convincing.

Dowd also investigates the ties between Pontiac, the uprising, and the spiritual ideas of the Delaware prophet Neolin. The dislocations produced by contact with Europeans forced the two peoples into closer proximity with one another. Both groups spoke languages belonging to the Algonquian family and possessed some religious similarities, factors that facilitated both understanding between the two groups and the dissemination of Neolin's ideas. The Delaware communicated their experience with the English (including loss of land) as well as the new religious ideas spreading among their towns to the Ottawa, who took the lessons to heart. Pontiac himself may have lived in Fort Duquesne or a nearby Delaware town during the French and Indian War and had personal contact with Delawares and Neolin's teachings. The relationships created in these years, Dowd argues, would form the basis of the new alliances that followed the collapse of the alliance between the Great Lakes tribes and the French, and these new alliances in turn formed the basis of a new pan-Indian identity in the Northwest region.

Also of considerable historiographical importance is Dowd's analysis of the influence of the French on Pontiac's War. Beginning with English officials themselves and made most famous by Parkman (and in the twentieth century perpetuated by Peckham, among others), the dominant view has attributed the post-war Indian resistance movement to French instigation. Dowd, however, convincingly demonstrates that the remaining French settlers and even Catholic Indians provided very little support for the war. Dowd also dismisses the idea that the Iroquois began the uprising. While Seneca emissaries did visit the region in 1761 and propose action against the English, they came at the invitation of Anishinabeg near Detroit. The central Onondaga council does not appear to have been aware of the message the two messengers carried; it later disavowed the propos-

als the emissaries had made. The war, Dowd demonstrates, originated with the Ottawa, not the French or the Six Nations. "Deeply held religious traditions inspired in Pontiac and his followers the conviction that they could defeat the British by stratagem, manipulate France (as they had in the past), and transform their world through sacred and profane means" (p. 113). In this way, Dowd restores Anishinabeg agency and leadership to the movement that came to bear Pontiac's name.

Dowd's conclusions regarding questions of the place of Indians within the British Empire will most interest members of this list. The war, he maintains, "confronted colonials and their imperial officials with the issue of the status of Indians in the emerging Empire" (p. 175). Anti-Indian, land-hungry settlers wanted Indians eliminated, but imperial administrators demonstrated a greater willingness to incorporate native groups into the empire, albeit in a subordinate position. This led to the well-known tension between imperial administrators and western colonists, who "saw hypocrisy and greed" in imperial Indian policy, and often disregarded the hated Proclamation of 1763 (p. 190).

Yet Dowd argues convincingly that British officers were no more egalitarian than settlers were when it came to their views of Indians. They shared settlers' beliefs in the superiority of Anglo-American culture over that of the Indians. The Proclamation of 1763, he maintains, was not aimed at maintaining good Indian relations or consistent boundaries between settlers and Indians but rather aimed at dividing lands over which the British crown ultimately exerted sovereignty. Administrators fully expected that the boundaries would change, giving way to greater English dominance over the region's native peoples. Certainly any claims that the Indians were now under the king's protection did not convince the British to accept Indian terms for the relationship, and it did not serve to make imperial authorities into buffers between Indians and colonists. Ultimately, the Proclamation revealed "the inability of Indians,

British officials, and colonial settlers to forge meaningful and enduring relationships" (p. 233).

There were limits to the degree of inclusion British officials envisioned for Indians, however. Unlike seventeenth-century officials, British commanders in the wake of Pontiac's War no longer wished to include Indians in the category of "subjects" of the British monarchy. In the wake of the seventeenth-century revolutions in Britain itself, "the word subject had become invested with new meanings, having less to do with 'subjection' to a monarch than with the Protestant monarch's responsibilities to subjects whom history had invested with liberties" (p. 175). The result was a sometimes inconsistent policy in which Indians in the English colonies would be considered neither subjects nor members of sovereign nations. This development would inform the later evolution of American law and Indian policy, leading to John Marshall's eventual categorization of Indians as "domestic dependant nations" (p. 188), as well as the status of other colonized peoples within the second British Empire.

Exhaustively researched and dealing extensively with the historiography of the Pontiac's War and the establishment of the Proclamation of 1763, Dowd's work has much to offer scholars of Anglo-American Indian relations and mid-eighteenth century British imperial policy. However, a non-specialist might find him- or herself bogged down in the details. Those interested in the French and Indian War and the pre-Revolutionary frontier will find this book a must read, but instructors will find it too involved for use in the undergraduate classroom.

Notes

[1]. Howard Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (New York: Russell and Russell Publishing, 1970). Readers might also see the more recent, but more narrowly focused work by William R. Nester, *"Haughty Conquerors": Amherst and the Great Indian Uprising of 1763* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2000).

[2]. Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian War after the Conquest of Canada*, 6th ed., 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

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