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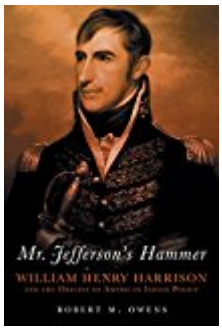
Robert M. Owens. *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer: William Henry Harrison and the Origins of American Indian Policy.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. xxx + 311 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8061-3842-8.



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The shelves of commercial bookstores are filled with hagiographies of dead white men. Most are written by popular authors, as academic historians since the 1960s and 1970s have moved away from the veneration of politicians and statesmen to complete the picture of America's past--a mosaic where the hands of white, African American, Native, and female actors color the American landscape. One may then wonder, why another biography of another dead president has been published? Robert M. Owens's *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer* is not just another presidential biography. But, then again, why would it be? William Henry Harrison's short presidency (partly a result of a grueling inaugural speech on a rainy and cold day) left little presidential material for scholars to write about. Owens, assistant professor of history at Wichita State University, has combed the primary sources related to Harrison and presents a detailed examination of Harrison's early years. He reminds us that Harrison lived a rich political and military life long before he became known as the president who "died in thirty days."

This new biography may not have been possible (or at least likely) a decade ago. In the 1990s, the Indiana Historical Society, under the guidance of general editor Douglas Clanin, collected close to 3,600 documents related to Harrison's early life in the Indiana Territory and published them as a collection that fills nearly ten microfilm reels. Owens used this massive collection to reexamine the life of Harrison, and most of *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer* explores Harrison's life between the years covered by the collection (1800-15). The first two chapters, though, attempt to place the man within the context of his Virginian upbringing and early western military career. How do we explain the apparent contradictions between Harrison's aristocratic youth and his later yeoman presidential run? Owens finds his answer in Virginia. He argues that "to appreciate William Henry Harrison's thinking in Indiana during the early nineteenth century, one must understand the Virginia gentry of the eighteenth" (p. xx).

The opening chapter, "A Son of Virginia," explains how Harrison's aristocratic Virginian upbringing embedded a deep sense of personal hon-

or in a young man who believed that one's reputation depended on the republican ideal of "manly independence"--an independence that was as much economic as political or ideological. Thus, on the one hand, Harrison used his position as the son of a gentleman (his father had signed the Declaration of Independence and served as governor for the state of Virginia) to gain military commissions and political appointments; on the other hand, he became obsessed with financial solvency as an avenue for preserving aristocratic status. Halfway through the first chapter, Owens fulfills part of his promise by making the book more than a political biography. Instead, he delves into the world of early American Indian affairs and national politics to explain that both Federalists and Republicans "remained committed to expansion, land acquisition, and the conviction that British influence in any form was corrupting and dangerous"--a premise that drives his interpretation of Harrison's motives throughout the rest of the book (p. 27). The chapter provides background into the actions that led to a stalemate between whites and Indians in the lower Great Lakes that followed the Treaty of Greenville (1795).

By the second chapter, Owens argues that Harrison "wanted, he *needed*, to be among the sociopolitical elite.... [A]nything less would have constituted failure" (p. 41). Owens chronicles Harrison's early rise as territorial governor of the Indiana Territory (consisting of modern-day Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota) and attempts to explain how a man overly concerned with financial solvency would mire himself in debt. He concludes that Harrison's acquisition of land and the two-year-long construction of the stately brick home, Grouseland, represented the ambitious attempts of a politician striving to reach a gentility learned from his Virginian plantation youth. Here, Owens demonstrates how a personal biography can act as a regional history. For Owens, Harrison represents a growing number of early American leaders who blurred the line between personal gain and the public good, especially in the American West. The central chapters of *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer* illustrate how Harrison's personal ambitions can serve as a window into the political divisions and critical issues that divided the region's inhabitants and included debates over Indian affairs, the admission of slavery into the territories, territorial division, and the role of political patronage. Indeed, Harrison sat at the center of dozens of debates that resonated beyond the territorial level. Owens is at his best when he contextualizes Harrison's personal position amid the backdrop of the local and national political landscape.

The remaining chapters detail the political divisions within the territory. Owens convincingly demonstrates how western issues divided settlers and officials in the region, often creating strange bedfellows as individuals who allied together on one issue, ended up disagreeing (sometimes vehemently) with one another over another. Using Harrison as a lens into period politics, Owens illustrates how political patronage did not always guarantee Harrison's good graces. For example, early in his career, Harrison called on former British soldier-turned-American ally William McIntosh to settle a personal land dispute. Harrison rewarded McIntosh by appointing him both treasurer of the territory and a militia officer. Yet, only a few years later, Harrison's ally Benjamin Parke, blasted McIntosh when the Scotsman opposed Harrison's proposal to move the territory to the second grade of government. As a reward for his loyalty, Harrison worked doggedly to have Parke become the congressional delegate of the Indiana Territory, ostracizing his former ally McIntosh.

The concluding chapters mostly recount Harrison's struggle with local Native leaders, particularly Tecumseh and Tenskawatawa (popularly known as the Shawnee Prophet). Here, Owens returns to the topic of the book's subtitle, *William Henry Harrison and the Origins of American Indian Policy* (although a good portion of chapter 7

discusses the end of the slavery debate). After failing to secure political authority over the territory's populace, unsuccessfully challenging territorial division, and losing the proslavery debate, Harrison turned to the one continuously successful aspect of his civil and political career--Indian affairs. The penultimate chapter recounts Harrison's actions from the Battle of Tippecanoe to the end of the War of 1812 (in 1815). Owens tries to find balance in his interpretation of Harrison's actions, refusing to craft him as a ruthless Indian killer and refraining from excusing his actions completely. Throughout the bulk of *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer*, Owens goes to great lengths and great pains to present the viewpoint of Harrison's enemies and allies. But, one wonders why he does not provide Tecumseh or the Shawnee Prophet with the same treatment? Historian Gregory Evans Dowd presents an insightful interpretation of this indigenous movement in *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (1992). Owens clearly is aware of Dowd's work (Dowd's book is included in the bibliography), but he does not cite him in the notes to the chapter on the Shawnee brothers.

Despite its title and the focus of this review so far, do not be misled into thinking that *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer* is all about Harrison, or for that matter, all about Indian affairs. It is not. Although much of the information in the book probably will not surprise those who have read other histories of Indiana or Indian affairs, Owens breaks new ground by linking together the oft-separate issues of land acquisition, Indian policy, slavery, and territorial division. This is by far the greatest strength of Owens's book, but it can also be, at times, its greatest weakness. The ever-growing cast of historical actors can overwhelm. Owens bounces from issue to issue and year to year to emphasize the complex world of frontier politics. This tactic works well in the chapter titled, "1805: The Pivotal Year," as Owens grounds the chapter in a single year. In this powerful chapter, he demonstrates how Harrison "consolidated his hold on Indian negotiations and local politics, particularly slavery" (p. 127). This fresh interpretation, bringing debates over slavery in the West and Indian affairs together, adds significantly to the current historiography on both subjects. The chapter even facilitates Owens's habit of taking the reader on sidetracks, because they work to complement the story he is telling rather than distract from it. Yet, Owens's propensity to tell the story from all angles does not always work well.

In an otherwise well-ordered monograph, the sixth chapter, "A Frontier Society: Indiana, 1800-1812," appears out of place. In fact, it is the only chapter to include subheadings. Perhaps it was the author's attempt to provide too many outside connections. Or, perhaps it was an editor's decision to require more inclusive background information. Nonetheless, the chapter chronologically overlaps the preceding three chapters and the two that follow. In it, Owens attempts to discuss "everyday life in early Indiana" (the mysteriously appearing subtitled first section of the chapter) by weaving together the stories of the territory's only early newspaper, the daily lives of local settlers, instances of divorce and family life, and the role of women in early frontier society. At times, the connections to Harrison seem stretched and add little to the rest of Owens's argument. In one instance, Owens shares jokes printed in the local newspaper, but the inclusion of such jokes adds nothing to his argument. Instead, it distracts the reader from the main purpose of the book. Moreover, the chapter ends with an oddly placed section on dueling that includes the story of a duel between Harrison supporters and opponents--a story perhaps best suited as a part of the chapter that precedes it.

Still, Owens works tirelessly throughout the book to incorporate Harrison's narrative into a larger frontier saga about the fate of Native peoples and the debate about slavery and territorial division. Ultimately, Owens's biography of the ambitious young man, not the much older president,

should be welcomed by scholars and the public alike. Still, readers may be surprised that the book is about far more than its title leads one to believe. Owens promises that *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer* is a "cultural biography"--one that places Harrison "within the context of his era" (p. xx). In actuality, Owens's work is really a story about early territorial Indiana with Harrison at the center of the story. "Warts and all," Owens explains, "William Henry Harrison was quintessentially American" (p. xvi). He is right. Harrison represented both the ambitious plans of many early national leaders and their anxieties about failing their fellow citizens and themselves. Readers interested in knowing more about early Indiana and its connections to larger early national issues will the find the book helpful and enjoyable. Owens has demonstrated successfully how cultural biographies can provide a reason for reviving the histories of dead white men.