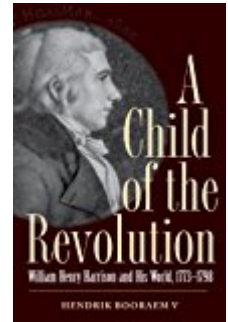


Hendrik Booraem. *A Child of the Revolution: William Henry Harrison and His World, 1773-1798.* Kent: Kent State University Press, 2012. 192 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-60635-115-4.



Reviewed by Garrett W. Wright

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

In *A Child of the Revolution* (2012), Henrik Booraem V masterfully combines biography, military history, and social history in a study of William Henry Harrison's life from 1773 to 1798. As in his other presidential biographies, Booraem here focuses on Harrison's pre-political life, allowing him to explore the many political and cultural transformations wrought by the American Revolution.[1] He uses Harrison's early years as a springboard for the analysis of themes such as early American occupations, military service, and generational conflict. Through Harrison and his contemporaries, Booraem illuminates the effects of a changing world on a rising generation of young Americans.

Booraem's decision to focus on Harrison's "journey to maturity in a changing world" allows him to analyze political, social, and cultural transformations while anchoring them in the life of an individual (p. vii). Indeed, the author admits that he is more concerned with that changing world's influence on Harrison than the influence of Harrison himself. While the study of the subject's world

is expected in any biography, in this case it was made necessary by the lack of sources on Harrison's life before his entrance into the political arena. Booraem adeptly makes up for Harrison's near absence from the historical record through detailed research and careful source analysis. He often provides examples of Harrison's contemporaries in order to speculate on Harrison's own life and experiences. Similarly, he employs travelers' accounts and secondary sources to describe in detail the various historical cities visited by Harrison in order to insert readers into the narrative while analyzing the changing physical landscape of Revolutionary America. Finally, Booraem carefully consults and compares Harrison's fanciful autobiography and personal speeches given later in his life in order to glean tidbits of truth about his education and military service. Because of this lack of evidence, Booraem wisely abandons the traditional chronological approach to biography. Instead, he organizes most chapters around central themes--such as education, philosophy, military reorganization--which allows him to jump

into Harrison's life when the record permits while keeping the narrative relevant and coherent.

Though Booraem traces many themes throughout *A Child of the Revolution*, he is most concerned with movement. He follows Harrison over the course of twenty-five years, as he moved from Virginia to Philadelphia to the Ohio Valley. While this movement adds to the difficulty of tracing Harrison's life, it is precisely what makes him a figure worth tracing, and Booraem does so with great skill. Harrison's early education exposes the experience of young elite southerners at boarding schools and the early indoctrination of the Virginian planter class. Booraem analyzes Harrison's life in Richmond in order to study the rising influence of abolitionism and revivalism in the Upper South among a new generation of aristocrats. Finally, though an examination of Harrison's military career, he introduces readers to the lives of soldiers during the postwar reorganization of the American army. In doing so, Booraem masterfully balances the study of soldiers on the ground and officials at the administrative level and illuminates the effects of bureaucratic decisions on the lives of individuals such as Harrison.

Contrasting the ideals and lifestyles of Harrison and his contemporaries against the ideals and lifestyles of their fathers' generation, Booraem frames the transformation of America as one of generational differences. He often describes Harrison's alienation from his father as a driving force in his changing ideas of authority, liberty, and religion. In an especially salient chapter examining a group of Harrison's contemporaries--Charles Willing Byrd, Billy Daingerfield, and Richard, Theo, and Jack Randolph--he links the personal and political by connecting these young men's estrangement from their fathers through death or otherwise to their adoption of relatively radical ideas. Rejecting their forebears' notions of authority based on duty, these Revolutionary Americans drew upon humanitarianism and early Romanticism and envisioned an America

where one's relationship to family and government would be based on love, gratitude, and volition. Though the simultaneous rejection of patriarchy and monarchy and the espousal of self-rule in political and social realms is nothing new to historians, Booraem is especially effective in personifying these changes in the American intellectual and political landscape through a study of those who sought such change.

When discussing Harrison's military career, Booraem shifts the narrative into a traditional chronological biography. He traces Harrison's experiences from Pittsburgh to the Ohio River Valley, touching upon many historical tidbits along the way: levee construction, river navigation, bootlegging, dueling, Indian treaties, sickness and suicide, courtship, and interactions between soldiers and civilians are all discussed in this section of the book. In the hands of less skilled historians such details would surely detract from the main narrative, but Booraem employs them as supplements to fill out Harrison's soldiering life, rather than as distractions.

A Child of the Revolution is evidence that Booraem has mastered the presidential biography. Although he explicitly welcomes further research on Harrison's early life, it is hard to imagine a more carefully researched and vividly written biography than this (pp. viii-ix).

Note

[1]. See Hendrik Booraem V, *The Road to Respectability: James A. Garfield and His World, 1844-1852* (Cleveland, OH: Western Reserve Historical Society, 1988), *The Provincial: Calvin Coolidge and His World, 1885-1895* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1995), and *Young Hickory: The Making of Andrew Jackson* (Boulder, CO: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2001).

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