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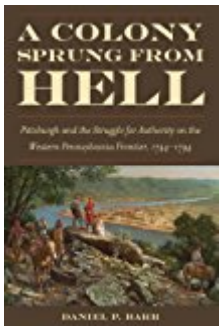

Daniel P. Barr. *A Colony Sprung from Hell: Pittsburgh and the Struggle for Authority on the Western Pennsylvania Frontier, 1744-1794.* Kent: Kent State University Press, 2014. 344 pp. $65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-60635-190-1.

Reviewed by Jessica L. Wallace

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

In *A Colony Sprung from Hell: Pittsburgh and the Struggle for Authority on the Western Pennsylvania Frontier, 1744-1794*, Daniel P. Barr situates the Pittsburgh area in the center of debates on expansion, political control, and military power in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. Barr organizes his book chronologically, from the decade prior to the Seven Years' War to the Whiskey Rebellion. Throughout these five decades, he traces the various attempts of Virginia, Pennsylvania, British imperial officials, and the new American government to establish authority in western Pennsylvania, highlighting the inability of outsiders to effectively exert control over the region, which began as a borderland between colonial settlements and Indian country and in the nineteenth century became an important industrial center.

In the first section, Barr analyzes the land speculation and expansionist policies that both Virginia and Pennsylvania advanced, along with the resulting clashes over the lands at the forks of the Ohio River. That competition destabilized the region, as the French increasingly moved into the region and Native American groups sought to either remove colonists or exploit their presence for their own political ends. From the 1750s forward, charter claims to land were trumped by actual military presence and economic power in the region.

Part 2 deals with British attempts to limit and control western expansion through the Proclamation Line of 1763 and the creation of Fort Pitt, which Indians, Virginians, and Pennsylvanians alike objected to, believing it was a sign of more British authority and control to come. Part 3 covers the American Revolution through the Whiskey Rebellion, tracing how the Revolution affected the western struggle for authority. Barr analyzes the shift to local government as colonial and imperial powers were consumed with the war, creating a pattern of local governance that was very difficult to change after independence. Thus, Barr argues convincingly, the Whiskey Rebellion was the logical outcome of the decades-long political culture of local authority, distrust of oversight, and strug-

gle for control of the western Pennsylvania frontier.

Throughout his book, Barr emphasizes that the history of Pittsburgh and the surrounding region was one consumed by local interests and battles between competing parties to validate claims to political authority in the region. This intense regionalism meant that local concerns outweighed colonial, national, or imperial ones. In the American Revolution, for instance, the rhetoric of liberty and equality was not as influential in garnering support among colonists in the region as were the immediate local concerns of security and stability.

Another major theme is the competition between Virginia and Pennsylvania for control of the region. Before the Seven Years' War, both colonies' charters gave them access to the lands at the forks of the Ohio River, though Virginia—primarily through its Ohio Company—was more aggressive in asserting its land claims, arguing that if Pennsylvania's Quaker-dominated assembly could not effectively defend the region against the French, their land claims should be invalidated. Once the border was decided in favor of Pennsylvania, thousands of former Virginians refused to accept the change, moving instead to the newly opened lands in Kentucky. In 1783, a petition with twenty thousand signatures even reached Congress, proposing the creation of a new state of Westsylvania; Pennsylvania objected on the grounds that advocating the creation of a new state in its present borders was treasonous. In explaining the intense competition between the two colonies, Barr highlights the roles that prominent figures of the eighteenth century played in the fight for power, including Pennsylvanians Conrad Weiser and George Croghan; Virginians Robert Dinwiddie, Christopher Gist, George Washington, and George Rogers Clark; and Delaware Indian leaders Shingas and Teedyuscung.

Barr takes care to include Native American considerations in his account of the struggle for authority, though the competing interests of Pennsylvania and Virginia take center stage. He acknowledges how the Delaware in particular used the Seven Years' War to leverage British colonists into recognizing their own case for autonomy, primarily through targeted attacks on the backcountry. Indian policy was another source of division among colonists, who could not decide how to respond to attacks—or who should finance them. Acts of violence against Native Americans—from the Paxton Boys to the massacre of Christian Delaware Indians at Gnadenhutten in 1782—demonstrated the deep-seated belief among the region's white inhabitants that violence was the proper response to their problems, long ignored by eastern leaders.

Barr uses western Pennsylvania as a case study for issues of western expansion, Indian conflict, and the tensions between local and larger concerns. From its beginning, he asserts, Fort Pitt was a "virtual cross-section of colonial society" (p. 2), a situation that changed little through the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution. He argues that colonists were initially drawn to the region because of its opportunities for personal and economic growth, but what kept people in the region was "an attachment to local autonomy and personal liberty" (pp. 271-272). Ultimately, Barr makes a strong argument for the importance of authority and control in shaping western Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century, demonstrating that colonists, Native Americans, and imperial officials alike were highly motivated to increase their own share of political power in the region.

While Barr clearly elucidates the problems residents of the Pittsburgh frontier faced, he is weaker on acknowledging that many of these problems were not Pennsylvania-specific: the internal fighting between eastern and western constituents, local interests versus colonial, imperial, or state policies, and competitions between multiple colonies for land all happened on the southern frontier during the eighteenth century as well. Indeed, while Virginia was competing with Pennsyl-

vania for the Ohio River lands, it was also jockeying with South Carolina for greater trade access and military alliance with the Cherokee in what is now eastern Tennessee. Barr could have usefully gone to greater lengths to explain that the Pennsylvania example serves as one model of frontier problems. Finally, in his last paragraph of the book, he argues that what happened near Pittsburgh is an embodiment of the American frontier. This is a large, important argument—one that certainly deserves more discussion than a single paragraph. An epilogue or a longer conclusion to the final chapter would have enabled him to more clearly and thoroughly address these issues of the western Pennsylvania frontier being an example of both typical and unique features of the frontier and American expansion.

In all, Barr's book presents a clear and compelling argument for the importance of the Pennsylvania frontier, and his connections between events of the Seven Years' War, the American Revolution, and the early Republic will make this book of use to scholars of military, social, political, and Native American history.