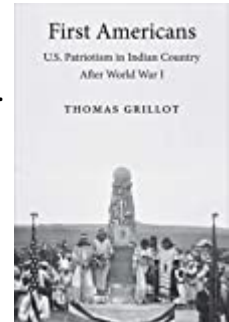


Thomas Grillot. *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018. ix + 298 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-22433-7.



Reviewed by Matthew Villeneuve (University of Michigan)

Published on H-War (June, 2020)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Thomas Grillot's *First Americans* is a study of Indigenous patriotism in the aftermath of World War I. While the historiography on American Indian participation in the First World War often focuses on the battlefield experience of Indigenous people, Grillot's study examines the ways Indigenous veterans, along with their Euro-American comrades, made meaning out of Indigenous participation in the War to End All Wars after the armistice. This is welcome analysis that acknowledges the presence of Indigenous people on the battlefield while favoring a closer study of the memory, discourse, and politics wrought in the commemorations, memorials, and holidays that came in the wake of the conflict. In so doing, Grillot sheds light on the process by which the symbolic repertoire for the expression of Indigenous pride came to include such icons as the American flag, citizenship, and the figure of the GI.

Grillot defines Indian patriotism as "the mix of gestures, ceremonies, and utterances demonstrating love of the country and military loyalty," which constituted Indigenous responses to an American

"political ideology linking rights and military participation and a series of teachings, symbols, and ceremonies [which] centered on collective belonging" (p. 11). While military service generated political capital for Indigenous people and their communities, Grillot spends the first portion of the book examining the early twentieth-century period when patriotism was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, military service of American Indian men demonstrated the autonomy and capability that offered a means to resist the paternalism of the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA). On the other hand, celebrating that service and casting citizenship as a "reward" for battlefield sacrifice was just as often yet another front in a larger campaign by whites to impose citizenship on Indigenous people as a vehicle for their assimilation. Grillot's history tracks how Indigenous veterans and the reservation communities of which they were a part consequently navigated "the intersection of universalistic soldier-citizenship and the particularistic condition of being Indians in the United States" (p. 162). In so doing, these veterans inaugurated a seeming-

ly irrevocable shift from earlier Indigenous participation in armed conflicts alongside the United States as allies, to becoming American soldiers themselves.

Grillot's book contains many examples of Indigenous displays of patriotism that helped to cement this transition. For example, in 1925 the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma purchased one of E. M. Visquency's now-iconic sculptures depicting an American soldier running with rifle in hand titled "the Spirit of the American Doughboy." Though the statue was identical to hundreds of others purchased by towns across the country, when it was installed in Muskogee, the tribes listed not only the names of their warriors who fell in battle in France but also a longer list of their nation's esteemed leaders and former war chiefs, some of whom had fought against the United States. Grillot argues that for the tribes, their longer martial tradition was not incompatible with their nation's service in the United States' military during World War I.

However, so too did Indigenous patriotism offer Euro-Americans fuel for their own vision of the future of American Indian people. These efforts are exemplified by the Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, "Ah-Dah-Wa-Ham" chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, which raised its own statue on July 4, 1923, to commemorate Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) veterans. By commemorating their Indigenous neighbors as citizen-soldiers, such non-Indian people found convenient ways to advance a narrative of settler colonial reconciliation and harmony through military service to the United States that concluded with Indian assimilation.

Still, Indian veterans proved dexterous with the political capital they gained from their military service. They used their patriotism to simultaneously fortify traditional practices and lay claims to new forms of belonging in the United States. This is demonstrated through Grillot's close study of patriotism on the Standing Rock reservation, where, Grillot notes, there were no less than six American

Legion posts on the reservation by 1924. These posts hosted Indian and non-Indian veterans and their families alike for holidays, military funerals, and other commemorations where non-Indian veterans told stories of interracial harmony through common service to the American nation. At the same time, Indigenous veterans used the same symbolic vocabularies to peruse their own agendas—namely, celebrating local tribal communities. Through these memorializations, Grillot concludes, "Rather than a foil, the symbolic grammar of U.S. nationalism proved a resource to define and express local identities" (p. 81).

If there are weaknesses in the book, they emerge from the difficulty in toggling between the local and national registers within Indian country. Moreover, as a broad study of postwar memory, there seems to be a larger role to play for the Indigenous women who were Gold Star mothers, children of pensioners, and participants in local events, such as legion meetings, holidays, and parades. Nevertheless, this is an important and overdue book. *First Americans* plugs a gap in the Progressive-era Indian historiography regarding Indigenous postwar experience; it helps to establish the overlooked centrality of veterans' resistance to the Indian New Deal in the 1930s and their role in the origins of 1950s termination policy. At the same time, Grillot's history of Indian country's patriotism expands broader understandings of the legacy of World War I in the United States and complicates an American faith in the democratic potential of the synthesis between citizenship and service.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Matthew Villeneuve. Review of Grillot, Thomas. *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. June, 2020.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=55097>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.