

BOOK REVIEWS

Alex Taylor. *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution*. (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 2005. Pp. 560, maps, tables, illustrations, bibliography, index. Hardcover \$35.00 Paperback \$15.25).

President Bush and his ever-diminishing number of bellicose supporters like to remind the American public that we are at war. For many Americans since 9/11, the enemy singled out by Bush's administration has eluded rational logic, as "the war on terror" is unspecific. To deflect his "war on terror" in a different direction both rhetorically and militarily, Bush and his commanders chose to invade Iraq in the name of democracy. Since then, Bush's military has tried to impose restrictions, boundaries, and ways of governance on tribal peoples whose values and beliefs radically differ from the west. As throughout history, recent events often-times closely resemble those of the past. After the American Revolution, United States policymakers tried to subdue and confine native peoples. Operating much like Bush's administration

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without a definitive imperialistic vision, Federalists as well as state governments lacked consistent policies concerning tribal peoples, the lands they occupied, and their individual and rightful claims to self-rule. Reflecting on the present situation in post-invasion Iraq in comparison to post-Revolutionary America makes the subject matter of Taylor's book all the more alarming and intriguing. *The Divided Ground* is a painful reminder that our present overseas imperialistic venture into a world of tribal peoples, with all its attendant encumbrances, has a deep history, beginning on American soil among Native Americans like the New York Iroquois.

Because Americans still feel the repercussions of 9/11, this reader might guess that publisher Alfred A. Knopf finessed the release of a book about the region that straddles New York's border with Canada. After all, with the "war on terror" the Canadian-American border has entered the political arena as never before, as homeland security presses the urgency for increased border patrols to stop unwanted people from crossing into the United States. In light of such attention, Alan Taylor's new book will fare quite well on bookstores' shelves. But even for those readers with only a passing interest in border protection, *The Divided Ground* is an excellent history that will find a wide readership. Taylor has crossed disciplinary borders again, as he brings together Iroquois studies, which in recent years has been a less active field of Native American history, and borderlands history, now a prosperous field of inquiry. For scholars, *The Divided Ground* will be attractive because Taylor's broad sweep provides an unusual history. He examines the politics of land between Indians and Euro-Americans in New York before the borderland was forged out of the maelstrom of the American Revolution and the multifaceted legal, cultural, and diplomatic encounters after the war as the borderland splintered into a bordered territory. Here he emphasizes how the Iroquois tried to secure portions of their homelands and sovereignty to continue to live as they always had—within a fluid region where western geographic borders had no application.

Eighteenth century New York-Canadian border history is worthy of Taylor's investigation, and he approaches this topic with unparalleled creativity. Until the War of 1812 and even after, the region remained a contentious place. Creation of the borderland reoriented the lives of the Iroquois and Euro-Americans in fundamental ways. Taylor traces these changes with immense detail in a chronological narrative which integrates an overwhelming amount of primary evidence culled from both sides of the border. Part of Taylor's brilliance has always rested in a sophisticated ability to capture the frontier human condition. In *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier*

of the *Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), for instance, he wove a narrative of backcountry power and politics around the story of William Cooper and his family. In *The Divided Ground*, Taylor again provides a narrative that carries the story of two people who came of age on the fringes of Anglo-American settlement, but who might be unfamiliar to non-specialists, the missionary Samuel Kirkland and the Mohawk Joseph Brant. Kirkland and Brant, both educated before the American Revolution at the New-Light minister Eleazer Wheelock's Connecticut-based Moor's Charity School, knew one another well. And primary sources about both men, and how their lives intersected, are uncommonly rich. Taylor, cleverly using the history of these two men as his backdrop, focuses on the ways in which imperialism forced whites and Indians down different paths as a world once shared turned into a world divided. Gracefully written—even if at points the vast subheadings might pull readers away from the narrative thread—*The Divided Ground* is a fine addition to various sub-disciplines. It will grab attention from scholars of the early republic, the history of the politics of land, and Native American history; the book is also a nice contribution to borderlands studies.

The book is divided into three parts. Part one explores the politics of land in New York before the Revolution, as Taylor evaluates tensions between colonial understandings of patronage, power, and landholding, and Iroquois notions of diplomacy, homeland protection, alliance making, and chiefly leadership. Colonial powers perpetually tried to impose borders on the Iroquois, especially the Oneidas and Brant's Mohawks who lived close to Anglo settlements. Under immense pressure, Iroquois chiefs, whose powers rested in persuasion, conducted land negotiations but only held symbolic dominion over lesser tribes and portions of their own homelands, and never to completely sold all of Iroquoia. At the same time, the Iroquois Confederacy managed to broker on multiple fronts, with the French, and with the British superintendent of Indian affairs, Sir William Johnson. Although Johnson purchased massive amounts of acreage from the Mohawks, his intentions were never to dispossess them or put them into destitution.

Taylor's close attention to land and boundaries continues in part two, where he explores the creation of the New York borderland after the American Revolution, as well as the uneasy position this new space created for the Iroquois. Taylor draws out Iroquois abilities to play British officials in Canada against the disorganized and disunited United States policymakers, and demonstrates how well Iroquoian leaders understood their new elevated positions as negotiators between imperial powers and the state of New York;

Iroquois leaders made concessions, but without abandoning tribal sovereignty outright. His focus on profit-driven land speculation and leasing, and attempts by people such as the Oneidas to work through New York patrons to lease their own lands to their own benefit, provides a new and exciting contribution to the history of the politics of land in the early American republic. Land in the new republic was highly prized, and thus people maneuvered and competed for consolidated acreage. Native peoples within state borders, who had come to grips with Anglo-American land ways, tried to turn a system of New York leasing around to their own advantage. The story Taylor tells is tragic, nonetheless, as New York won out and profited greatly from the public revenue of Indian land sales and leases, to the point of becoming dependent on income derived from native lands. Iroquois people and Anglo-Americans, by the 1780s, had begun to head down paths that diverged as never before. According to Taylor, land was still at stake but also key were the new social and cultural boundaries between people as New York and the United States sought to further impose new geographical borders upon the Iroquois.

Part three thus focuses on the legal, political, spatial, and cultural division of the borderland that destroyed a once porous space and ultimately partitioned the once powerful Iroquois Confederacy's remnants onto reserved tracts—most ended up in New York, others resided in British-occupied Canada. The division of the Iroquois Confederacy has been explored before, but Taylor, giving close attention to Indian agency, approaches the topic from multiple angles. Seneca chiefs such as Cornplanter and Red Jacket come off as savvy decision-makers, brokering on multiple fronts. Brant, on the Canadian side, tried to work both sides of the geographical divide, but found himself "frustrated by the tangle of the borderland," (p. 256) and ridiculed by militants for not taking aggressive actions against the Americans. In Taylor's interpretation, Brant wanted to find peace with the Americans, although he was a man fraught with internal contradictions as a diplomat, "Anglicized" educated man, and proud Iroquois warrior. For Taylor, Brant and Kirkland were important figures because they represented how the division of the borderland affected people on a very deep and personal level. And as Taylor's investigation of law cases involving Iroquois witch murders and exaction of clan revenge shows, New York lawmakers found themselves in a conundrum; should they fully impose New York laws upon native peoples who claimed justice not in courts but with religious and ceremonial foundations? Taylor concludes that no matter how much Brant,

Kirkland, and the New York Iroquois sought to defend the cultural, legal, and spatial, boundaries of Iroquois sovereignty, New York power continued to impose new restrictive geographical borders, particularly by selling native soil. Throughout, readers gain a strong sense of the ramifications of the destruction of the borderland—the loss of Iroquois land, the restriction of native sovereignty, and the end of many intimate relationships between whites and natives.

The Divided Ground is a great book by a great scholar. It brings the politics of land to the center of intercultural negotiations on one early republic frontier, a space that shifted from a non-bordered region to one with defined borders. But Taylor's excellent history uses the story of land to do much more. He reveals much about the early American republic, an era of massive change, and about shifting notions of culture, law, politics, and sovereignty in that era. As Taylor weaves all these issues into a rich account of the dispossession of the Iroquois, he also brings many different people to the fore, including native chiefs, Anglo missionaries, and important politicians and land speculators from both Canada and the United States. Taylor has provided an immense contribution; in this spirit, *The Divided Ground* had this particular reader intensely pondering both the geopolitical consequences and the unyielding justification of today's imperialism among tribal peoples.

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Daniel P. Barr, ed. *The Boundaries between Us: Natives and Newcomers Along the Frontiers of the Old Northwest Territory, 1750–1850*. (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2006. xix + 261pp., notes, bibliography, index. Cloth \$52.00).

Of the eleven essays included in *The Boundaries between Us*, only the final two fail to reference Richard White's *The Middle Ground* in their endnotes. This does not come as a surprise, because this collection revolves around the Old Northwest Territory and because White's interpretive framework has loomed so large over American Indian historiography in the fifteen years since its publication. Yet the strength and popularity of the middle ground as a concept might be viewed as both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand,