

BOOK REVIEWS

The Nation's Nature: How Continental Presumptions Gave Rise to the United States of America. By JAMES D. DRAKE. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011. 401 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$45.)

United States history continues to be written as if it begins and ends at the shores of the North American continent. It is a landlocked narrative, one that distorts the past and obscures the future. James Drake's marvelous exploration of our "continental presumption" opens up an entirely different, wholly original perspective. The New World had been imagined by explorers initially as an island or an archipelago. The British were island and coastal people, more oriented to sea than land, for whom a continental land mass blocking access to Asia was more a frustration than a blessing. Their French rivals coveted America as a waterland, exploring it by way of rivers and lakes. Confined to the coasts and waterways, few knew anything about the continent as such.

The geographical notion of continent did not emerge until the seventeenth century and, as Drake shows, was not considered an indisputable fact of nature until the late eighteenth century. This idea was as much the product of politics as natural science, used by Thomas Paine to justify separation from the mother country when he famously argued that it was absurd for "a continent to be perpetually governed by an island." The rebellious colonists were rhetorically continental long before they were able to explore or occupy even a small part of the continent itself. As Drake demonstrates, ignorance and imagination went hand in hand, creating by 1775 a national metageography which remains largely unchallenged to this day.

Much of Drake's book is concerned with the political details of the struggle for independence and the events of the early national decades. He tells this story well, but the true genius of this book lies in its ability to expose the metageography that underpins our national myth-history. Drake is as conversant with Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community as with the work of cultural geographers such as Karen Wigen and Martin Lewis. For too long, history and geography have been separate disciplines, especially in the United States. Used to thinking of this continent as a natural phenomenon, we assume that geography is destiny when, in fact, it is a contested product of history itself.

In the twenty-first century, boundaries once fixed have again become fluid. In many ways, the United States has become less continental as population has gravitated to the coasts. The center has been hollowed out, and edges have come

to define who we are as a people. Geographers have begun to ask whether continents are any longer a viable category of analysis, while the new field of global history has challenged the idea that the story of this nation can be contained between the seas. In this moment of geographical turbulence, we are suddenly liberated from the tyranny of continental presumptions and encouraged to reimagine ourselves in a less landlocked manner. Drake's book comes as a gift at this critical time.

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The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America.

Edited by CHRIS BENEKE and CHRISTOPHER S. GREND. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. 416 pp. Notes, index. \$45.)

The religious diversity of early America has been fully documented in historical scholarship. How religious tolerance was conceived, codified, and practiced has garnered less attention. This anthology by Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda initiates a productive conversation about the contours of religious difference in early America. Tolerance and intolerance are addressed from the colonial to the early national periods through an investigation of religion "as a source of legal repression, political conflict, group attachment, cultural transcendence, and individual freedom" (2). The work of twelve scholars is included in this collection, which is divided into four sections entitled "ideologies," "practices," "boundaries," and "persistence." The essays explain how early Americans experienced degrees of religious liberty, indifference, and discrimination that varied by time, place, and group. Some articles focus on a particular religion (Judaism) or issue (religious infidelity), while others trace a specific concept over time (the use of Amalek in English and American rhetoric). These varied approaches provide trenchant analysis of the complex history of religious tolerance and intolerance in early America.

Religious liberty and prejudice were equally enmeshed in the larger imperial project of British North America. Ned Landsman's contribution demonstrates the role of empire in the debate over instituting an Anglican bishopric in the American colonies. While the "imperial union" of 1707 led to this controversy, "imperial disunion" resolved it when the colonies severed relations with England (96). Likewise, Owen Stanwood uses the context of empire to understand the multiple uses of antipopery sentiment in colonial America, as "fear of Catholics remained a constant backdrop in the American Protestant consciousness" (220).

Attempts by colonial governments to enforce religious orthodoxy faced local resistance. Joyce Goodfriend examines the New Netherlands as a "laboratory of