

*Seneca Possessed: Indians, Witchcraft, and Power in the Early American Republic.* By MATTHEW DENNIS. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. 320 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$45.)

Matthew Dennis aims to break out of what he sees as a binary narrative trap in the writing of Native American history in his compelling study of early republic-era Seneca life. Rejecting the all-too-familiar trope of declension as well as opposing tales of “uncomplicated Indian triumph” (6), Dennis weaves seemingly disparate threads of Seneca social, cultural, political, and economic history into a unique and convincing interpretation of a crucial era of transition in Seneca peoples’ collective past. Based on deep research in archival sources housed primarily in Pennsylvania and New York, Dennis’s monograph represents an important contribution not only to the historiography of Iroquois people but also to that of the early American republic.

The greatest strength of the book resides in Dennis’s refusal to detach his analysis of the Senecas’ profound cultural metamorphosis circa 1799–1826 from the larger story of American national growth and transformation. Dennis draws frequent analogies between the experience of the Senecas and that of “other poor and middling Americans” (148) at that time, making certain connections evident that contemporary, literate historical actors misunderstood, ignored, or obscured. In so doing, Dennis provides a crucial “how-to” lesson in integrating the often-segmented histories of native peoples into broader contexts more familiar to a wider audience.

Concerned with the theme of possession, Dennis guides his readers through a variety of explanations of how the Seneca people and their homelands in what is now western New York were possessed—culturally, spiritually, materially, and legally—during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Framed by assessments of the 1821 murder trial of Seneca leader Tommy Jemmy (who was charged by state authorities for executing an alleged Seneca witch), Dennis provides a nonlinear, yet richly detailed, tour of a little-studied period of Seneca history and culture. Among the highlights along this interpretive journey is a fresh analysis of the emergence of the Handsome Lake religion among the Senecas. Here Dennis ascribes relatively greater influence to the presence of Quaker missionaries among the Senecas than other historians have allowed and also suggests that the negative impact of the *Gaiwi’io*, or teachings of Handsome Lake, on Seneca women may not have been as severe as recent feminist readings have charged. Dennis argues for an ultimately sympathetic understanding of the Quaker mission among the Senecas, emphasizing the Friends’ tolerance of Seneca religious practice, the critical nature of their technical advice to Seneca economic innovation, and their acceptance of Seneca choices (on frequent occasions) to ignore or dispute Quaker prescriptions.

Could the Senecas have accomplished their far-reaching cultural overhaul in lieu of the Quaker presence? Dennis thinks not, yet he stresses the agency of Seneca actors in the “purposeful transformation and revitalization” (224) of their lifeways amidst intensifying pressures from the surrounding settler population. By the end of Dennis’s account, the reader is rewarded with a nuanced understanding of how the Senecas, notwithstanding frequent contemporary assertions of their status as a “backward” population (187), represented such a frustrating obstacle for their would-be oppressors precisely because of their innovative success in engaging the new economic realities of the early American republic: market exchange, natural resource management, and land leasing as a means of economic development.

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*The Union War.* By GARY W. GALLAGHER. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. 215 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$27.95.)

In *The Union War*, Gary Gallagher seeks to reclaim what the concept of Union meant to Northerners who fought in the Civil War. The author views his thesis as a needed corrective to the common misconception, advanced by historians of the “freedom school” of Civil War history, that the second important goal of the North—emancipation—somehow eclipsed the equally worthy goal of preserving the Union. Gallagher chastens these students of the Union war effort, pointing out that they have collectively failed to appreciate the context in which the citizens of the loyal states understood the significance of the word “Union” as a sacred tradition born of antebellum political philosophy.

Gallagher asserts that the hallowed meaning of “Union” has disappeared from the American vernacular. “Recapturing how the concept of Union resonated and reverberated throughout the loyal states in the Civil War,” he contends, “is critical to grasping northern motivation. No single word in our contemporary political vocabulary shoulders so much historical, political, and ideological meaning; none can stir deep emotional currents so easily” (46). Northerners’ attention to the sanctity of Union emerged from years of poignant reflection through which they collectively connected themselves with a primordial sense of nationalism.

Although Gallagher’s book helps recover this lost vocabulary, his analysis becomes a list of reprimands against historians who have intentionally or unintentionally obscured the importance of Union. Few schools of thought escape his scathing indictment, yet several interpretations stand out as primary culprits. First and foremost, Gallagher rebukes the post-1960s generation who in their effort to recover the centrality of emancipation argued that only the liberation of slaves offered the Union a true purpose (40). Of course, Gallagher does not