

The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of US History. By Ned Blackhawk. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023. 616 pages. \$35.00 cloth.

The Rediscovery of America represents a vast and vital undertaking. In nearly 450 pages of text Ned Blackhawk puts forth and endeavors to support a revision of the American national historical narrative that has long been crafted around Indigenous erasure. The book therefore has a clear purpose, namely to provide the reader with a new interpretive tool to analyze the history of the United States. This goal requires a focus on the nature of encounter rather than discovery, and an emphasis on the fact that Indigenous societies have never been unchanging institutions encased in amber. “To build a new theory of American history,” Blackhawk asserts, “will require recognizing that Native peoples simultaneously determined colonial economies, settlements, and politics and were shaped by them”(5).

Following the introduction, the book encompasses twelve chapters organized into two sections. Section one, titled “Indians and Empires,” traces a chronological arc from Spanish colonization to the ratification of the US Constitution. Focusing on the familiar construction of the colonial American narrative, Blackhawk addresses the Spanish reliance on Indigenous labor in New Mexico even as he emphasizes that by the late eighteenth century the Pueblo world was defined by autonomy more than submission. Shifting his gaze to the Native northeast in chapter two, Blackhawk illustrates how everything from disease, negotiation, and trade networks showcase how Indigenous societies were shaped by and shaped colonial enterprises. Yet it is the chapter on Iroquoia where Blackhawk supports this argument most effectively. As he puts it, the histories of Iroquois-French relations “undo long-standing assumptions about Indian peoples remaining removed from European influence, and show the centrality of Indian peoples to the continent’s historical evolution and the growth of European colonies”(97).

Blackhawk explains that during the first centuries of encounter with European empires, Indigenous societies were remapping the continent as much as Europeans were. The new political and social geography from the Atlantic coast to the western Great Lakes and Mississippi Valley was a mutual creation sparked by colonization but shaped by Indigenous response. The final two chapters of this first section address the rise of the American republic, first by showing how antimonarchical beliefs had their origins in the process of settling the interior and fighting Native peoples. Indeed, the control, acquisition, and distribution of trans-Appalachian lands became the defining axis of the early American republic. Indians and their territory were at the pressure point of debates over state versus federal authority, and the emphasis on treaty negotiations set the stage for both nineteenth-century diplomacy and twentieth-century assertions of tribal sovereignty.

The second section of the book, titled "Struggles for Sovereignty," begins with the expansionist early nineteenth century and concludes with the end of the twentieth century. Four of the six chapters in this section discuss the developments of the 1800s, and each chapter positions specific developments in relation to the actions of Indigenous peoples. In the early republic, Native dispossession fueled the growth of a nation built on and by racialized slavery. The decades encompassing the Civil War and its aftermath demonstrated the federal government's transformative growth in power and authority over the people and lands within its borders. It was a transformation built on extralegal violence in California and targeted military campaigns to subjugate Native nations from the northern Plains to the canyons of the Southwest. The fighting force that maintained the Union simultaneously and subsequently established more forceful control over western Native nations. By the late 1800s, that military might transitioned into the implementation of an unbridled congressional authority that, by altering constitutional interpretations, had an impact beyond just federal Indian policy.

The final two chapters take the reader on a relatively rapid tour of defining events and policies in the twentieth century. Blackhawk uses the Red Progressives of the early 1900s to illustrate the survivance of Indigenous peoples even as the devastating allotment policy continued to play out and Native children continued to endure government boarding schools. His narrative addresses John Collier and the Indian Reorganization Act, the Indian Termination Act, the Indian Child Welfare Act, and the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975, among other prominent policy developments. At the core of his analysis, though, is the assertion that, "far from being outside the currents of the era, Native peoples were at the center of them" (410). The American Century was shaped by its citizens, and that included Native people. In contrast to assertions of Native disappearance that had shaped American perceptions since the early republic, Indigenous nations and people continued to shape the world in which they lived.

Throughout this book Blackhawk discusses events that most who teach Indigenous history recognize and cover in their classrooms. That familiarity makes *The Rediscovery of America* no less necessary. In fact, it makes it more critical that the argument is made effectively. Those familiar with the content will still benefit by an argument that disrupts common knowledge, and any newcomers to this material are forced to reconsider what they thought they knew about American history.

Yet tackling a revision of the national narrative is not without its obstacles. This book is largely a synthesis built on a comprehensive assessment of scholarship in a field that has become increasingly developed and rich over the past three decades. In short, there is a copious amount of material Blackhawk had to filter through his analytical lens. As a result, some chapters end up reviewing historical events and fail to connect directly to the stated effort to unmake the historical narrative. A strong and distinct concluding chapter would have helped address those missed connections, for the two paragraphs at the end of the final chapter are asked to do more work than they should. The goals stated in the introduction needed more substantial review and closure at the book's end.

Every book has its flaws, and none I mention above undermine the strong message presented by *The Rediscovery of America*. Indeed, this book provides a signpost for

other scholars to follow and is a call to action for all who write American history, not just Indigenous history. Unmaking US history is a tall order, but the process is a necessary one that enriches us all.

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