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**Author**

Clifton, James A.

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**License for Empire: Colonialism by Treaty in Early America.** By Dorothy V. Jones. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. x + 256 pp. \$23.00 Cloth.

**Indian Traders on the Middle Border: The House of Ewing, 1827-54.** By Robert A. Trennert, Jr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981. xiii + 271 pp. \$17.95 Cloth.

At their core these volumes deal with a common subject, the territorial expansion and political-economic development of the emergent United States and the consequences of these processes for Native American societies. Central to both is an examination of the nature of the treaty system. But beyond this shared concern the two studies represent polar opposites of intellectual style, diametrically opposed views on the proper fundamentals of researching and writing Native American history.

The differences in the studies begins with the authors' initial impetus for their work; they are reflected in the rationalizations for the importance of their contributions; and they are evidenced even in the very rhetoric of the titles fashioned for their books. During his graduate training, Robert Trennert, like many of us who were heavily involved with the history of the Indians of the Ohio Valley-Western Great Lakes during the 1950s and 1960s for Indian Claims Commission litigation, became aware of the economic and political activities of the trading firm organized by the Indiana merchants, George W. and William Ewing. Recognizing that no scholarly study of this firm had been attempted, he embarked on a decade-long search for materials on the Ewings' activities. Thus *Indian Traders* is justified as a "badly needed" study filling a gap left by other historians. Trennert judges the value of his own work by the alleged importance of the firm in making Indian policy, not the originality of the questions raised or the power of the methodology employed. Similarly, his title is connotatively flat—pure, straightforward denotation, telling the reader exactly what is to be found in the pages following, a narrowly monographic account of operations of a firm of Indian traders over a thirty year period on the "Middle Border," that shifting frontier region between the Indian West and the fully settled American East.

Jones's book, in contrast, starts on its cover page with rhetorical chicanery. One of the contemporary authors who favors eye-catching titles at the expense of fully demonstrated argument,

she bends the reader's mind to a construction unwarranted by the evidence by use of several persuasive devices expressive of her thesis. Dorothy Jones changes the denotative meaning of "colonialism" (and by implication "imperialism") to fit the needs of her thesis while retaining the standard latent meanings—especially the profoundly negative implications associated with these words. As a result she predisposes the reader to a construction at best only half right for the British era and substantially misleading for the era of American sovereignty. "Colonialism" she sees (p. 3) as involving culturally distinct groups wherein one dominates the other, a definition which reduces that complex political-economic-social phenomena to a single attribute, the self-interested exercise of power by the more powerful. The negative implication is reinforced with the connotations of "License" and is driven home by parallel repetition. Thus readers are predisposed to accept her major conclusion that the fledgling United States turned the British Indian treaty system to its own "colonial" ends between 1787 and 1796, a construction that is patently wrong. Unfortunately, this construction also misleads, for it deflects attention from the numerous manifest and latent functions of the treaty-making process on the individual, regional, national, private and public levels, some of which Trennert examines in often exhausting detail in his more narrowly-focused study.

But unlike Trennert's conception of his task, Jones's study is oriented by a clear sense of problem. She sets out deliberately to examine how traditional European diplomatic styles were modified to serve the ends of France and Britain in dealings with Native Peoples of the New World, and she finds that the treaty system emerged as the most favored tactic for land transfer, at least for Britain and the emergent United States. Her work is also thick with strong ideas drawn from a variety of fields and well integrated into a proper interdisciplinary framework. In consequence her chapters are rich in useful insights, a few original, others rephrasings of well-recognized existing conclusions, all tied together into a coherent and persuasive set of constructions. The breadth of her interpretations is also impressive, for this is comparative history done creatively to generate large generalizations applying to settings other than North America. These interpretations—right or wrong, productive or not, wholly or partially accurate—are intellectually provocative. They focus the mind on

a clearer, sharper appreciation of the nature and functioning of the Indian treaty system. As well as seeking answers for important questions, Jones is in the business of generating new ones.

*Indian Traders*, on the other hand, is historical narrative with neither large, theoretically embedded, well-defined queries nor powerful concepts of any sort. The author, obviously, is a historian with a pronounced aversion to the use of technical constructs drawn from other fields of study and complicated ideas of any variety. Consequently, his style of reporting is essentially pre-modern, history written as if the past century had not witnessed the development of the social sciences. His interpretive framework and conclusions are, therefore, based on common-sensical (i.e., ethnocentric) construction, and these regularly lead him awry. One particularly debilitating result is that he consistently confuses early nineteenth century folk conceptions with contemporary ones and often mistakenly treats these as if they were modern analytic constructs.

Hence, *Indian Traders* is a business history without economics. Predisposed to emphasize the extraordinarily self-aggrandizing life-style of the Ewing brothers in the first place, he mistakes the contemporaneous "profit" (meaning "mark-up" in the modern sense) with its current technical signification. Of more importance, he fails to ever strike a balance of net gain for all the Ewings' Indian business operations. It is political-administrative history without general ideas about public administration. Thus, for want of distinguishing between the processes of general policy formation and those of field administration or policy implementation, the author much exaggerates the power of the Ewings as regards the former. As he demonstrates with many particulars, clearly the influence of these Indian traders was mainly limited to bending general policy to their personal ends, even when they had a Whig patron in the White House. It is family biography which is psychologically naïve: its key actors are driven by "greed," or "civic responsibility," or "humanitarian motives." Of all the many complex phenomena described in these pages, readers will have to supply their own relevant analytic frames, whether about ethnicity, early learning and deprivation, symbolic systems, social change, internal development, patronage systems, or whatever. Trennert supplies us with a full array of the raw materials for such analysis without attempting it himself.

Indeed, *Indian Traders* does name, index and hesitantly use just

one allegedly technical idea: an oversimplified, antique version of the anthropological notion of "acculturation." But Trennert manages to misunderstand and misuse this solitary analytic construct in a fashion that makes literal nonsense of one of his major conclusions. When he writes of the contradiction between federal policy aims as making "acculturation impossible" (p. 209), he constructs a patently false generalization. Such policy contradictions, of course, substantially contributed to the types of social and cultural changes anthropologists used to phrase as acculturative. Had this author looked more closely at the other side of the middle border he might have recognized that the activities of the Ewing brothers, and similarly disposed contact agents, were a major force in causing numerous changes in Native American societies and cultures. These included internal conflict, or factionalism, and transformations of political systems. They involved, as well, the promotion of a vastly increased scale of economic wants which, because of an absence of commensurate means short of expending capital resources, brought great economic dislocations, eventual impoverishment, repeated frustrations and a predilection to a "windfall" psychology. And they also included the identification by some Indians of men like the Ewings as models for appropriate behavior in both the political and economic arenas.

From the perspective of the Native American side of the complex economic and political systems examined by Jones and Trennert, the authors differ sharply in how much consideration they give to assessing the role of Indians in the events depicted. Their views of the treaty system and its ramifications vary because of the different approaches they take. Trennert is a historian who embraces the cautious tactic of disclaiming any effort to portray Indians at all, but this is an obvious impossibility. A species of "Indian" does stalk his pages, but he is a stereotypic figure, hapless, put-upon, defeated, passive and victimized, with no appreciable role in affecting treaty-making or influencing policy implementation. In consequence, Trennert greatly exaggerates the power of men like the Ewings to bend Indians to their will. This bias appears in pronounced form, for instance, in portraying the influence of the Indian traders in the negotiation of removal treaties and arrangements for subsequent relocations, which the author treats as near absolute. For want of close, sympathetic analysis of readily available evidence, Trennert entirely misses

the fact that a great many Indians inhabiting the "middle border" had their own policy aims distinct from those pressed on them by Americans and that they often significantly deflected the implementation of American policy. Although the distribution of power and rewards was entirely asymmetrical, the exploitative relationship between Indians and traders (as well as other contact agents) was clearly reciprocal.

In contrast, Jones deliberately sets out to discover and portray the role of Indians not only in influencing the outcome of particular negotiations but in contributing to the form and style of the treaty system *per se*. As a result, aided by useful analytic devices, she is able to create a more balanced assessment of the nature of the system as it operated through the early years of the American national experience. However, her perspective is also marred by the dominant victimization theme and her understanding of the adaptive capacities of Native Americans weakened thereby. This bias is evident, for instance, when she writes that "few Indians had the knowledge or power to use effectively" those rights and privileges detailed in early treaty stipulations (p. xii). This sort of mistaken underestimation of Indian capacities for learning, political manipulation and diplomatic maneuvering derives from the one serious flaw in her study, and it does not at all square with the opinions of early French, British and American officials who had a healthy respect for the capabilities of Indians as regards demanding their rights and privileges before, during and following negotiations. The flaw in this study consists of inadequately detailed research into the specifics of Indian-European relationships, resulting in frequent misperceptions of historical realities. This research weakness is most evident in the constructions Jones places on the amount of New York Iroquois power in the Trans-Appalachian West between 1700 and 1787, which she greatly exaggerates. Evidently she is a subscriber to the Iroquoianist *Mystique*, or else she allows herself to be beguiled by the grandiose pronouncements of Seneca and Onondaga orators at Albany and Philadelphia, whose diplomatic claims far outreached their military prowess. She writes as if the 1701 Treaty of Montreal had never been negotiated, without understanding that the confederated western tribes and their French allies had repeatedly defeated the Five Nations and driven them out of the territory which they—under the prodding of Sir William Johnson—so grandly claimed. Such are

the understandable perils of problem-focused, broadly comparative study, particularly one accomplished under the severe constraints of completing a dissertation.

In sum, what we find in these two volumes are two substantially different perspectives on the nature of the treaty system, differences which stem from opposite views of the nature of the thinking and writing of history. Trennert's Indian history is writ with a finely sharpened idiographic quill, thick with particulars, unguided by queries of general interest or by powerful technical ideas. It is history the craft as practiced by a master, one relying on the well-honed technique of finding many documented details and tying these together into a coherent, plausible narrative account. But it is history biased by modern ethnocentric preoccupations, prone to exaggeration by omission as well as confusion by faulty interpretation. It informs the reader, if it does not enlighten. No one after reading this book should have the least doubt that in the early nineteenth century some Americans took great pride in extracting large profits from dealings with Indians. Beyond that, its lasting value will be for reference purposes, and it will serve as the well documented raw material for others with different interests.

*License for Empire*, on the other hand, is painted with the broad sweeps of a nomothetic brush. It is history in the scientific mode, generalized and comparative, an inquiry directed by strong interdisciplinary conceptualizations, where the particulars of the past are obscured by a dominant concern with larger developments. It strives to broaden the mind, to illuminate dim corners of understanding. It is prone to exaggeration by commission and by ignorance of details that may likely have forced qualification, if not rejection, of a theme, thesis, or conclusion, were they considered. Indeed, one finishes this study with a sense that some considerable license was exercised, that the thesis was predetermined and demonstrated at nearly all costs. Jones's argument has something of the quality of a barrister's brief to it—only the right kinds of facts are lined up alongside the theory of the case.

Overall, neither the style of *Indian Traders* nor that of *License for Empire* is a fully satisfactory, entirely effective intellectual format for the writing of Indian history. Partially complementing and partly supplementing one another, the mistaken conclusions of the former can become too easily the confused evidence of the latter. Neither style, by itself, involves an adequately powerful

melding of method and material. While the one informs with data insufficiently worked into a significant fact, the other binds thought with constructs founded on insufficient information. And both are too much bent by that ever popular image of the Indian as victim. Yet both do advance our knowledge by suggesting fresh ways of viewing the Indian treaty as a significant human and cultural event, as a system relating different kinds of humans together for their several ends.

James A. Clifton  
University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

**The Seven Visions of Bull Lodge.** Edited by George Horse Capture. Ann Arbor, MI.: Bear Claw Press, 1980. 125 pp. \$6.95, paper.

There is a growing need nowadays, among many Indian tribes, to consult with their elderly and record as much as possible of the ancient spiritual knowledge before it is lost forever. *The Seven Visions of Bull Lodge* represents an important step toward fulfilling that need for Gros Ventre people. This book, edited by George Horse Capture, provides us with the opportunity to see the world from the perspective of a traditional Gros Ventre medicine man. It is a valuable and unique work because it is about Gros Ventres, recorded and edited by Gros Ventres, and most importantly, intended for Gros Ventres.

Bull Lodge functioned as warrior, medicinal healer and medicine man for his people during the late 1800s. Bull Lodge's daughter, Garter Snake Woman, was chosen by her tribe at age six to be the "Pipe Child," thereby realizing a very special and personal relationship to the Feathered Pipe, a cornerstone of Gros Ventres spirituality. Garter Snake Woman revealed her father's story to Fred P. Gone, the reservation worker hired by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Depression. Gone's purpose, as mandated by the WPA, was to collect and record Gros Ventre cultural information.

As Garter Snake Woman tells the story, prior to his first vision experience, Bull Lodge cut his little finger off at the last joint and offered it as a sacrifice to the "Supreme Being," who is the Father of the Pipe (p. 125). The purpose of the sacrifice is to demonstrate