

At the Edge of Empire
The Backcountry in British North America
 By Eric Hinderaker and Peter C. Mancall

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. Pp. xii, 210. Illustrations, maps, notes, essay on sources, index. Clothbound, \$49.95; paperbound, \$17.95.)

At the Edge of Empire offers students of British North America an ambitious and well-written synthesis of “the territory that lay beyond the core settlements of mainland English settlements” (p. 4). Eric Hinderaker and Peter Mancall begin their analysis in Ireland, where Sir Humphrey Gilbert and other Englishmen like him created the first English backcountry. Ruthless violence and dreamy visions of a better world dovetailed nicely for the English in Ireland, establishing a pattern that would be replicated from John Smith’s Jamestown to Daniel Boone’s Kentucky frontier. *At the Edge of Empire* makes sense of these varied locales, reminding us to recognize particulars of time and place while not losing sight of the broader patterns that characterized British colonization.

Hinderaker and Mancall bring together their understanding of the multiple regions of colonial America to identify many shared traits of the various British North American backcountries. First, they show that success was elusive for backcountry immigrants because of incessant struggles with both Native Americans and eastern elites, both of whom made it difficult for settlers to secure title to the land. Consequently, backcountry settlers generally believed that justice was elusive, a sentiment

that led to the vigilantism evidenced by Bacon’s Rebellion, the Paxton Boys, and the Regulator movement. Such periodic spasms of violence in the backcountry fostered stereotypes of lawlessness and irreligious behavior in the region that cut across nearly three centuries of British colonization. But most importantly, the British emphasis on settlement made a lasting impression on American identity. Access to and ownership of western lands became a guiding principle of American nationalism.

At the Edge of Empire is organized around the competing and sometimes shared interests of Native Americans, backcountry settlers, and the eastern elites and British officials who tried to manage their affairs. The authors explore the distinctive cultures, economies, and governments of the thirteen colonies, both as they affected each colony’s relations to regional tribes and as they fit into the wider legal and diplomatic structure of the British Empire.

Readers will also appreciate Hinderaker and Mancall’s rich analysis of Native Americans in the British backcountry. Struggles over land, rather than disputes about trade or access to labor, typically determined when and under what circumstances violence occurred. Indian-English alliances, built around trade and mutual pro-

tection, eventually succumbed to violence as settlers advanced inexorably on Native Americans debilitated by disease and economic dependency. The authors address the root causes of these violent confrontations in competing philosophies regarding the land.

Throughout *At the Edge of Empire*, the authors make an implicit argument about British North American history: that the British did not plan on destroying tribes with Old World diseases anymore than George Washington set out to become an American through his actions at Fort Necessity, at the dawn of the French and Indian War. Too many historians, in their view, read conspiracies into events that resulted from the haphazard mingling of people over time. While deep-seated cultural and economic goals informed both alliances and conflicts between British colonists and Native Americans, these

outcomes were not part of a coordinated three-hundred-year plan scripted by British colonizers.

This narrative synthesis of the advancing British Empire is interrupted by brief but involved explorations of specific wars, communities, and regions. The structure of *At the Edge of Empire* advances Hinderaker and Mancall's goal of illustrating both the unity and the diversity of British North America. Students and general readers will appreciate this highly readable synthesis of the backcountry—a moving region that was, in many ways, at the center of the British Empire.

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The Indian Frontier, 1763-1846

By R. Douglas Hurt

(Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002. Pp. xvii, 300. Maps, illustrations, chronology, notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$45.00; paperbound, \$21.95.)

Any scholar who studies Native American history, the American West, or Indian-White relations prior to 1850 will find few surprises in this book. Nonetheless, they should take note of it. R. Douglas Hurt, a prolific author and chair of the history department at Purdue University, has taken it upon himself to produce a concise one-volume overview of nine distinct but

overlapping frontier regions over eight extremely complicated decades. Major players in his broad survey include civil, religious, and military figures of Spanish, French, English, and American origins. Central also are leaders and members of the Iroquois, Shawnee, Sauk, Cherokee, Comanche, Chickasaw, Mesquakie, Seminole, Dakota, Ute and numerous other Indi-