

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-

an nations. With such an immense cast of characters, multiple and ever-shifting frontier regions, continual changes over time, and no central narrative to hold all of his disparate parts together, Hurt's project seems destined to fail. Yet, somehow, it doesn't.

Like most authors writing in the wake of Richard White's *The Middle Ground* (1991), Hurt presents readers with a frontier that is a far cry from Frederick Jackson Turner's stark dividing line between "civilization" and "savagery." Instead, Hurt writes of "zones of encounter"—regions shaped by intercultural interaction and negotiation. These negotiations, he points out, changed every group involved in them, "sometimes quickly, usually slowly, but nonetheless decisively" (p. xv). No less than their European counterparts, Native people developed strategies for dealing with changing circumstances and were never passive victims. As Hurt tells it, the history of the regions that eventually became parts of the United States is not always about conquest, rarely possessed a pre-ordained outcome, and was not even always driven by European or American interests.

None of this is original—or, by now, even surprising. Dozens of monographs have been written on this subject for each of the regions and periods that Hurt describes; his impressive bibliography lists a sizable portion of them and will serve as a valuable reading list for those readers who wish to pursue the subject (or a particular aspect of it) in greater detail.

Originality is not always the best indicator of a book's value. In completing this work of historical synthesis, Hurt has provided a service to a variety of audiences. For those who teach classes in U.S. history that cover the period prior to the mid-nineteenth century, he has presented smoothly written chapters that provide a great deal of information and are easily comprehensible to undergraduates. For graduate students preparing for qualifying exams in related fields or taking a course outside their area of specialization, Hurt has provided an excellent overview, as well as thorough documentation and an extensive reading list. Most importantly, though, he has provided a history of Indian-White relations for general readers that emphasizes conflict but is not really about warfare. Nor does it dwell on a particular region or narrow time period at the expense of all others. In effect, Hurt has adopted a comparative approach to frontier studies, summed up a decade of scholarship, and packaged the result for popular consumption.

Too often, academics write only for other academics. With *The Indian Frontier*, Hurt has demonstrated that complex ideas and situations can be conveyed to non-specialists without sacrificing their complexity or their richness. Moreover, Hurt makes it look deceptively easy. One can only hope that readers of all stripes will appreciate his efforts.

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The Mythic Meanings of the Second Amendment
Taming Political Violence in a Constitutional Republic
 By David C. Williams

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. Pp. x, 397. Notes, index. \$45.00.)

Almost thirty years ago, in *The Gun in America* (1975), Lee Kennett and James Anderson concluded that "time works against the gun" (p. 255). Yet, since this prediction, debates over the Second Amendment have only continued, heating with time. Now enters David Williams, John S. Hastings Professor of Law at Indiana University School of Law, Bloomington, who proposes to reduce the heat by constructing a new myth for these new times. An early participant in the most recent wave of polemical battles, Williams uses this book to solidify his arguments, while answering friends and critics—particularly Gary Wills, Saul Cornell, Robert Cover, and Sanford Levinson—and dismissing by silence those who composed the friendly brief in *U.S. v Emerson* (2001).

The book is divided into three parts: the first is a foray into the period of the founding; the second, a survey of the complex present understandings of myths and political violence; the third, a proposed remedy for the current confusions over the meaning and significance of

the Second Amendment and, by implication, a prescription for judicial action. Here Williams concludes that as "disciplining violence is the first task of constitutional order, it is also the first duty of citizenship" (p. 313).

Williams's historical vision is inextricably intertwined with his idealism. His reading of the Second Amendment leads him to assert that "the right to bear arms belongs to the Body of the People, which is a *sui generis* element of eighteenth-century theory: the citizenry as a collectivity organized into a universal militia and unified by a common culture" (p. 70). Of course, such a vision of society did not survive the rapid growth and change of the nineteenth century, although the author includes little discussion of its erosion over time.

Williams states his thesis most clearly in the final section of the book. Here, he makes a plea for "restructuring" the Second Amendment by creating a new American unity built upon "the revival of a common life," and prescribes the construction of a new "myth" of "civic trust" (pp. 320,