

The Indian World of George Washington: The First President, the First Americans, and the Birth of the Nation. By Colin G. Calloway (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) Pp. 621. Hardcover, \$22.20.

Few topics boast as deep a historiography as the seventeenth-century American frontier. Beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, scholars have battled over the nature of the frontier and borderlands in American history. Recently, scholars have placed the frontier inside of the larger picture of early United States and colonial diplomacy. Colin Calloway's *The Indian World of George Washington: The First President, the First Americans, and the Birth of the Nation* represents a welcome addition to the field.

Calloway brings over two decades of related work to this massive volume. His books include *The Scratch of a Pen: First Peoples* and *The Victory with No Name*.¹ Calloway's work focuses on diplomatic relationships, treaties, ethnicity, and culture clashes between 1600 and 1850. *The Indian World of George Washington* focuses on a specific individual whose life speaks to larger themes of dispossession, diplomacy, and American identity in the late eighteenth century. He uses ledgers, diaries, court records, and personal correspondence to give voice not only to Washington's world, but to the indigenous world he actively sought to change. Spanning twenty chapters and three sections, *The Indian World* examines the life of the first president and its intersections with the lives of Native Americans in the mid to late 1700s. Calloway's purpose is not to demonize or criticize Washington; rather, the book shows "how Washington's life...was inextricably linked to Native America" something we often forget when we examine Washington with modern eyes (13). Calloway moves chronologically, tracing Washington's—and the emerging nation's—movements across the Ohio frontier. Early Virginia, and much of the Appalachian frontier, was a key space where white settlers developed the idea of inferior races to refer to Native and African Americans. Calloway is most interested in the contest for the Pennsylvanian frontier and the wars that built Washington into his well-known personage. With the Braddock campaign in the 1750s, Indians retaliated against frontier houses more than previous engagements, which "opened deep rifts within society" (120). The frequency of violence in this space gave substantial weight to claims of white supremacy, posing Native and African Americans as 'others.'

In response to British colonial infringement, Native Americans kept their options open between colonial powers, suspecting deeper intentions than displayed face-to-face. Washington, with all his show of diligence toward the Cherokees and other groups, only cared for "Indian territory, not Indian assistance" (234). Washington and his troops descended on to Iroquois land at various times from 1760-1780, during which time Washington was granted the nickname Town Destroyer. Taking lands on the eastern frontier, Calloway argues, was critical to "American success at the peace talks" in Iroquoia (259). In September of 1778, Andrew and Thomas Lewis signed one of the first treaties between the U.S. and the Delaware Indians, promising representation in the eventual Congress (which never happened). Negotiators and

¹ Full titles for the selected works are *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 1999, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016); *The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Washington himself viewed Native America as a sovereign nation or, at least, a set of sovereign nations, but ones which were conquered and therefore malleable. “Their sovereignty was limited by the sovereignty of the United States,” leaving Native America under the heel of the American Republic (345).

The final section deals with Washington’s Indian policies in the emerging United States from his presidency until the end of his life. Indian policy for Washington revolved around the acquisition of land by making peace “as well as threatening and waging war” (397). While waging war against the Northern Iroquois Confederacy, frontier settlers undermined the Treaty of Hopewell (1791), the Treaty of Holston (1791), and the formal Appalachian line by consistently settling over established boundaries. International problems arose, too, as Spain sided with the Choctaw and Chickasaw. Spain also tried to exploit the violence taking place between the Cherokees, the settlers, and those trying to create peace talks. Despite early aggression, Spain eventually established treaties with the Americans—as well as Indian, British, and North African Barbary nations. Eventually, lands in the west were completely opened to settlement, driving Native America into warfare, homelessness, and dispossession, which Calloway poses as “genocide.” According to Calloway, Washington’s land-hungry policies created a civilization program of dispossession “between assimilation and extinction” especially with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 (485). Though Washington died land-rich and cash-strapped, his policies, which were geared towards expanding the republic, relied on Native Americans giving up their lands and African Americans relinquishing their labor (491). Calloway ends with a challenge to our present situations involving First Nations people. The chain of friendship once believed in by some never came to pass, and “assaults on the rights and resources of Native peoples continue” to the present day (492).

Calloway’s work is spectacular. With excellent sources and a powerful narrative voice, he explains how Washington’s dealings with Native Americans in the 1750s transformed him into the most powerful man in North America. We see Washington change as much as we see the Native political landscape shift from the 1750s to the 1790s. Calloway highlights events like the Gnadenhutzen Massacre of 1782, in which a rogue militia brutally murdered 96 Moravian Delaware converts. Calloway records that Washington’s only concern about the massacre was to warn soldiers in the western theatre “not to let themselves to be taken alive” (276). The race to exterminate the Indians of Ohio was set in motion by the rogue militia and Washington’s not-so-quiet support. Calloway adds to a growing section of literature that ties Washington directly to this previous overlooked event. The Gnadenhutzen Massacre is a grim part of the race to acquire indigenous lands with full governmental complicity, and Washington was at the center of it.²

Despite his compelling narrative, Calloway has a troubling insistence on reminding the reader of future events. He writes with one foot in the past and the other in the present. For example, at the end of chapter six, after discussing how costly Indian alliances were to maintain, Calloway writes, “It was an issue Washington would face again as commander of the

² See also Rob Harper’s *Unsettling the West: Violence and State Building in the Ohio Valley*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). Harper details the event, and the governmental complicity, in his chapter titled “Horrors, 1780-82.”

Continental Army and president of the United States" (147). Stylistic preferences such as this weaken Calloway's narrative, for it makes the coming Indian policies and disasters seem inevitable when, in actuality, those relationships were hopelessly volatile. Also, Calloway's interpretation of frontiersmen as "land hungry and Indian-hating" seems shallow and oversimplified, especially after the work of Peter Silver, Patrick Griffin, and David Preston who emphasized the intimacy of frontier peoples to local Native groups.³ In fact, the frontier people appear merely as straw men in his work, painted against the backdrop of Washington's life circumstances.

The Indian World of George Washington remains a welcome addition to the scholarship of colonial America, frontier studies, and the American empire. Calloway's writing is poignant and clear with footnotes and sources from a wide variety of material. The book is especially welcome at present with problems between the U.S. government and First Nations arising in the form of growing white nationalism. It is especially poignant considering the Thunder Bay murders in Canada. A growing number of books focus on Washington as the heroic, idealistic first president. Calloway's work evens out that narrative and asks us to think more critically about America's democratic, revolutionary past. Is it built off of great men, forging a nation out of a frontier? Or, was it forged in a mangled set of land grabs, broken treaties, and displaced indigenous peoples?

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³ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: WW Norton Company, 2008); Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); David Preston, *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667-1783*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).