

Book Review of

Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

Dowd's work chronicles and adds depth to the common understanding of the Indian's struggle against Anglo-American expansion into the western borderlands of the thirteen original colonies. This struggle was complicated by the overlapping dependency of Indians on Great Britain and the newly formed United States. Dowd's thesis hinges on the premise "...there was no single Indian outlook (amongst the Delawares, Shawnees, Cherokees, and Creeks) but at least two major contending viewpoints in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries." (p. xxiii) The Indians displayed some unity of thought and purpose stemming from their shared spiritual practices when dealing with the growth of their colonial neighbors until the War of 1812. Briefly stated, "...Indian politics was also a matter of religion." (p. 167)

Dowd simply and uniquely divides all the Indians into two groups: nativist or accomodationist. He, however, does not assign an entire tribe into either group. More accurately, Dowd speaks of nativist and accomodationist elements within each tribe. Given the title of the book, he tends to discuss the nativists the most. They viewed their loss of land as a loss of sacred power. Prophets such as Neolin, Pontiac, Tecumseh, Tenskwatawa, and Osceola, all from a variety of tribes, experienced visions which resulted in these new rituals. These prophets would travel outside of their own tribes spreading word of their visions, teaching new sacred rituals and attracting followers. A Pan-Indian unity grew out of their travels to other tribes. Employing the new rituals, such as the Green Corn Ceremony, gave nativists the hope of restoring their sacred power and creating an Indian unity that could withstand the onslaught of foreigners taking their land. Accomodationists allied themselves with their individual tribes and tribal leaders. This group would regularly cooperate and trade with both the British and Anglo-Americans and, according to nativists, contaminate their sacred source of power in those interactions.

American politicians and diplomats wanted to civilize the Indians for two main reasons: to drive them off their land and transform native culture. Accommodationists generally went along with the plan due primarily to the trade benefits. Nativists felt that putting "Hoes in their hands to plant corn," (p. 105) would strip Indian men of their source of power which was derived from hunting animals and the associated rituals. Likewise women would be stripped of their traditional power if they were forced to sew and spin cloth instead of growing crops. Transforming native culture had mixed results due to outright rejection by nativists and some Indian men and women occupying both roles simultaneously. Men would both hunt and grow crops while women would focus on agriculture and sewing. Introducing Christianity was another attempt to transform native culture. Accommodationists adapted their religion to incorporate Christianity. However, a prophet warned "... every Indian who embraces (Christianity) is obliged to take the road to the white man's heaven; and yet no red man is permitted to enter there, but will have to wander about forever without a resting place." (p. 201)

Despite their passion, nativism and the Pan-Indian movement ultimately failed to hold back the tide of westward expansion in North America. The Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, where 3,000 soldiers defeated 400 - 1,300 nativists in the north, and Horseshoe Bend in 1814, where another 3,000 soldiers brutally defeated 1,000 southern nativists, typified many extremely violent and vicious campaigns that were waged in what would become territory of the newly founded United States of America. Dowd argues, "In the nativists' view, their failure was not one of their prophets' misunderstandings, but of the Indians' seduction by the Anglo-Americans." (p. 200) Other mentioned factors for the defeat of the nativists include the declining Indian population, the shrinking trade of pelts, and violent internal divisions.

Dowd's book is significant not because of new information he discovered but due to how he reframed the discussion about North American Indians from 1745 - 1815. Historians before him had

grouped Indians by their tribe, their actions, and, if possible, their own unique prophet. Each tribe was said to have then acted independently of each other in their resistance to westward expansion. Dowd was the first to view the tribes' political actions as unified and cohesive due to shared religious components in their cultures.

My only critique centers around what I see as a generalization of Anglo-American thought and policies. Were all Anglo-American policies towards natives the same during this time period? I believe Dowd's reply would be the answer lies outside the scope of this book. Just as there is a lack of detailed analysis of accommodationists as compared to the treatment of the nativists.

I highly recommend this book. Prophetic visions and battles are all discussed by Dowd in such vivid and rich detail that make this book well worth a trip to your local library. Historians, teachers, and the casual reader with a general knowledge of the time period can all add another spirited element to their understanding of the North American Indian after they read this book.

~ CRAIG W. COWLES