
Robert M. Owens. *Red Dreams, White Nightmares: Pan-Indian Alliances in the Anglo-American Mind, 1763-1815*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 243 pp.

Red Dreams, White Nightmares by Robert M. Owens covers the years 1763-1815, starting at the end of Pontiac's War and ending with the conclusion of the War of 1812, a significant period in Euramerican imperial expansion and colonization. In terms of expansion, once the colonists broke political ties with Britain they became another entity among European powers vying for territorial control and growth. While the belief in Manifest Destiny would not take hold until the mid-nineteenth century, there were conflicts over control and momentum toward expansion. In terms of colonization, breaking political ties with Britain ushered in a new phase of colonization. Breaking away from the metropole signified the fact that the colonizer intended to stay, which can generally be characterized as settler colonialism. While the belief in Providence, greed, and just good ole' "Indian-hating," have all been fingered for the impetus behind expansion, Owens contends that a factor that often gets overlooked is the colonist's fear of Indian "savages," specifically the fear of Pan-Indian alliances and a "general Indian war." In the introductory chapter, he lists a brief historiography of Indigenous wars and coalitions but claims that "none of these works fully addresses the link between Anglo-Americans' fears of Indians, especially the dread of broad alliances, and its influences on European and American Indian policy" (7). While Owens is not offering new research, he offers a new perspective, one he feels has not been adequately covered, if at all, in previous scholarship. He specifies this point by claiming that, with the exception of Gregory Evans Dowd's 1992 *A Spirited Resistance*, such studies focus on either side of the Ohio River and fail to see possible pan-Indian alliances across the river.

Pan-Indianism is a broad term. Owens says that while its coinage is relatively recent, it often refers to Indigenous alliances from the late nineteenth to the twentieth century. Perhaps most notably, it often connotes intertribal unity during the Red Power Movement. Owens clarifies his usage as being aligned with Dowd's: "in the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, [pan-Indianism] refers to efforts by Native Americans... to establish broad, multitribal military coalitions" (4). Such pan-Indian alliances seek to bring Indigenous nations, often traditional enemies, together. For the purpose of *Red Dreams*, Owens' discussion on pan-Indianism focuses particularly on coalitions formed among Indigenous nations across the Ohio River. He argues that, although Europeans and Euramericans feared an "Indian war," their biggest fear was a "General Indian war": "a broad war against a great many different Indian peoples" (5). Thus, this fear plays an essential part in Euramerican expansion and colonization.

Red Dreams is broken into three parts, each examining different but related time periods. The first part begins with the end of Pontiac's war, which only exacerbated settler fears given that it exposed how vulnerable British forces were to a pan-Indian militarized coalition. From 1763, the year King George III signed the Royal Proclamation that banned further settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains, to the Revolutionary War, "British policy became one of quietly encouraging intertribal rancor, to save money and to save Anglo-American lives" (17). This divide-and-conquer strategy was used to stave off pan-Indian alliances when it became apparent how difficult it would be to enforce the Proclamation and stop further settlement.

Part II focuses on how this fear influenced the Revolutionary War era through the mid-1790s. The war fostered a shift in British Indian policy. Before the war they were content with keeping

Indigenous nations fighting amongst themselves. When war was inevitable, their policy shifted to promoting such alliances in order to fight Patriot rebels. Owens also asserts that this period, particularly the 1790s, was the greatest opportunity for Indian resistance given how Britain and Spain were willing to support such alliances. For early Americans, the war introduced additional elements: “If Southern Indians and runaway slaves with Spanish guns acted in concert with Northern Indians bearing British ones, the cost of putting down such a war might well break the Treasury” (71). But avoiding such a coalition not only had practical purposes, it also helped forge an American identity, as “Americans increasingly self-fashioned their identity as the civilized opponents of Indian savagery” (176). This patronizing attitude would continue to guide Indian policy. Furthermore, since the colonists had just broken political ties with Britain to form their own nation, they needed to cultivate their own identity. Ironically, they had to eliminate Indigenous people while appropriating their own sense of indigeneity.

Part III covers the end of the 19th century to the end of the War of 1812, a period Owens claims was the last great effort for a pan-Indian alliance. This period also saw the efforts of probably the most famous of Indigenous agents who attempted a coalition, Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa. The brothers’ connection to Britain was infamous and Euramericans recycled the fear of a British and pan-Indian coalition that was recreated during the Revolutionary War. As the slave population rose in the South during this period, so did the fear of a revolt in conjunction with a pan-Indian alliance, which was nothing new as the “threat posed by Indians and slaves joining forces had weighed on white minds, especially in the South, nearly since the beginning of colonization” (199). In actuality, the plausibility of such an alliance declined, particularly after Tecumseh’s coalition fell apart. Owens asserts that for Euramericans, pan-Indianism’s failure would be celebrated as yet another sign of American exceptionalism.

Owens finishes the book with an epilogue that relates the last ditch effort for a pan-Indian alliance by the Sauk leader Black Hawk, “one of Tecumseh’s former disciples,” forming a pan-Indian/African American alliance with foreign aid, but in 1832, he “would badly overestimate the odds of forming and maintaining such an alliance” (14). Owens goes on to say that although the chances of such an alliance forming was “slim at best by the 1830s, several factors combined to make that chance seem terrible” (240). Among these factors was fear of these alliances, which should speak again to the power of fear. Throughout the book, for example, Owens mentions the use of the image of the “tomahawk and scalping knife” that was employed prodigiously in newspapers to represent that “savage” threat Indigenous people posed. By defeating such alliances, real or imagined, it “set a default narrative whereby they could only look more virtuous, regardless of how they fought their enemies,” thus justifying their imperial moves (243).

Owens proclaims *Red Dreams* is a story about fear and cites the 2004 anthology, *Psychology of Fear*, edited by Paul L. Gower. While Gower says fear can be individual or collective, Owens further explains that collective fear can be expressed on a national level and is often disproportionate to any actual danger being posed. Owens, however, limits his discussion of the psychology of fear to one paragraph in his introductory chapter, which is an unexpected choice considering the book’s thesis is examining how fear of pan-Indian alliances influences European and Euramerican Indian policy. Further explication of this idea along with further scholarship on fear may have been prudent. And while the book carries the theme of colonists’ fears of pan-

Indian alliances throughout, the ideas particular to the psychology of fear are rarely mentioned, let alone applied, to historical events. In this sense, *Red Dreams* lacks deep analysis and theoretical application vis-à-vis such psychological formations. Since Owens is claiming to be breaking new scholarly ground in examining how this fear influenced policy, it is forgivable that a more explicit application of this theory is not readily present.

Red Dreams' stated purpose is to examine how fear affected European and Euramerican Indian policy. While Owens does clarify how he defines and uses certain terms, e.g. pan-Indianism, coalition, alliance, and confederacy (4-5), he does not do so with "policy." How tightly or loosely Owens defines "policy" has an effect on the content of each chapter and the rhetoric. On the one hand, if its meaning is restricted to official policy by either European nations or the US, then "policy" gets almost completely lost in the reading. Each chapter chronicles and sharply focuses on various battles and important figures, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, although mostly non-Indigenous, and "policy" is rarely mentioned. If on the other hand, his definition includes smaller actions made by individuals, (e.g. military strategic decisions, Indigenous leaders encouraging alliances) the book is very successful. The point is not about semantics but rather the effect his definition of "policy," and what it includes, on the prose and how the content is presented. Since it appears Owens assumes a loose understanding, the book tends to be more generalized with the notion of "policy" getting lost. Just as *Red Dreams* lacks deep analysis and theoretical application, the focus on "policy" gets lost in the reading.

When assessing how fear influences our actions, it is judicious to question whether or not those fears are founded. This often helps us determine if such fears and resulting actions are justified. Determining Indigenous motivations and actions is difficult for this time period, given the lack of written records, although Owens does an admirable job. He does admit: "It is impossible to determine exactly how many efforts were made to form pan-Indian alliances" (11). There are moments when Owens relays Native leaders' voices and intentions, but there are moments when he, and thus the reader, are in the dark. He relies heavily on archival and primary sources throughout the book and relates the Native voice when he can, and the research is impressive. However, *Red Dreams* might have benefitted from seeking the Native voice more often. Indigenous Studies challenges the accepted methods used to maintain objectivity, and some Early American historians rely on interviews or consult Indigenous national historians, but others fear compromising objectivity and ignore this challenge altogether. While more debate on that challenge is much needed, *Red Dreams* presents a thorough depiction of how European and Euramerican politicians, military leaders, Indian agents, and settlers reacted to the fear of an Indigenous alliance.

Red Dreams covers an era that, as previously mentioned, is critical as it covers the shift to settler colonialism once the colonist broke political ties to the metropole and proceeded to fashion a differentiated identity, one with Old World sensibilities but steeped in indigeneity. This era, then, depicts the nativity of American settler colonialism, if we rely on a strict definition of *settler colonialism*. While previous scholars have studied numerous facets of what helped shape the US, geo-politically, culturally, socially, and politically, Owens offers a new perspective not yet explored. While those familiar to Early American history and Indigenous studies are familiar with how Indigenous people are depicted by Euramericans and the fear it evokes, justified or not, Owens offers a detailed and thorough perspective on how the fear of a pan-Indian alliance

affected European and Euramerican people. This book is crucial for anyone interested in early American colonialism.

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Works Cited

Dowd, Gregory Evans. *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1875*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992.

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