



PROJECT MUSE®

---

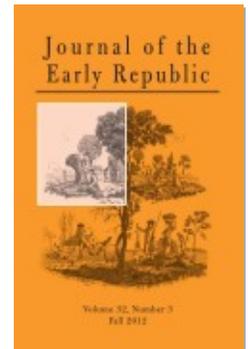
*The Black Hawk War of 1832* (review)

Andrew K. Frank

Journal of the Early Republic, Volume 32, Number 3, Fall 2012, pp. 547-549  
(Review)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2012.0048>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/483002>

space. Similarly, the title is a little misleading: The lower Great Lakes are Ontario and Erie, far to the east, and much of the book concerns the Wabash valley—not part of the Great Lakes waterway at all. Those caveats notwithstanding, Buss's fresh approach and deft use of rhetorical and postcolonial theory—as well as his useful and focused forays into the archive—make this an essential part of our continuing effort to reconsider midwestern, western, and “frontier” experiences in American history.

EDWARD WATTS is a professor of English at Michigan State University. His most recent book is *In This Remote Country: Colonial French Culture in the Anglo-American Imagination, 1780–1860* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).

***The Black Hawk War of 1832.*** By Patrick J. Jung. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. Pp. 275. Cloth \$29.95.)

*Reviewed by Andrew K. Frank*

In 1832, nearly 1,100 Indians in the trans-Appalachian West followed the elder Sauk warrior Black Hawk and defied a federal order to remain to the west of the Mississippi River and away from their recently vacated lands in Illinois. Black Hawk and the others did not necessarily intend a violent protest of this manifestation of the American policy of Indian removal, but anxieties within the United States made the war inevitable and divisions within the Native American communities made it disastrous. More than half of Black Hawk's followers died in the subsequent and short-lived war, and the resistance movement came to a crashing halt when the United States ruthlessly assaulted the remaining supporters near Bad Axe, Wisconsin. In this carefully researched volume, Patrick J. Jung contends that competing and overlapping dynamics—American expansion, rampant anti-Americanism, intratribal factions, and intertribal warfare—defined the path that led to the war and shaped its outcome.

Jung begins his analysis in the decades that preceded the war, demonstrating a “propensity of the Sauks and Foxes to resist political and cultural domination” and their long history of resistance and mistrust of the United States and other imperial powers (13). Assaults on their culture in the name of civilization, a controversial treaty in 1804 with the United States, and forced land cessions further created the fertile ground for the nativist

awakening that reshaped the region in the early nineteenth century. Drawing upon the work of Gregory Dowd and others, Jung explains how an ideology of millennialism and promises of a better future gave voice to the existing anti-Americanism for many Sauk and Foxes. Although the influence of Neolin, Tecumseh, and Tenskwatawa had long been diffused by 1832, “intensely anti-American sentiments” remained a powerful ideological force for Black Hawk and many others in the region (32).

After 1815, anti-Americanism and nativism suffered from forces that created equally important intertribal enmities that privileged national or tribal identities. In this context, two alliance systems—one centered around the Ojibwas and the other around the Sauk and Fox—divided the region into competitive and violent intertribal groups. As a result, a series of private wars and raids became endemic among the Native Americans. The United States intervened in these disputes to prevent conflagrations between the Indians that threatened neighboring American communities. The Native American situation became more complicated as calls for Indian removal became louder in the late 1820s. This too divided Native peoples, with anti-removal and pro-removal factions vying for control of their people. In these debates, Native factions disputed the legitimacy of the Treaty of 1804 amongst themselves, with Black Hawk leading those (a so-called British Band) who opposed it.

As the United States remained preoccupied with controlling intertribal disputes, Black Hawk declared that the Sauk and Fox retained the right to live east of the Mississippi River. After Black Hawk was compelled temporarily to move his people west, he led his followers back east on a path of diplomatic resistance. With frustratingly unclear motives, Black Hawk used the trip to as a public proclamation of their sovereign rights. Jung uses various ethnographic details to argue that Black Hawk did not come with the intention of starting a war. A war, though, quickly arrived when the United States military overreacted to the arrival of the Indians and blood was shed in the confrontation.

Although the war began as a manifestation of currents of nativism and anti-Americanism within the Native American community, the internal divisions between Indians shaped the path of the war itself. “Of far greater consequence were the Indian tribes who counted the Sauks and Foxes among their enemies and who attacked at the first opportunity, even if it was only a small renegade faction” (91). Sauk and Fox, Winnebago, Potawatomis, and others all used the war to settle old scores

between themselves and with neighboring white Americans. Jung's discussion of the war itself—both the decisions of the various military leaders and those who did the fighting—may be the most interesting section of the volume. Jung carefully connects war and society and allows all of the themes of the volume to emerge in complicated and interconnected ways. His discussion also reveals the tremendous barbarity—sexual assaults, attacks on unarmed women and children, and scalplings—that is often overlooked or mischaracterized in earlier overviews. Their inclusion, Jung explains, is essential because “at many times [the war] resembled a massacre rather than a war, particularly since women, children, and elders were needlessly and viciously killed” (7–8).

Jung draws many parallels between Black Hawk's War and the other Indian wars in the early republic, proclaiming that it is “an excellent example of how Indian wars came about and how they were conducted” (6). In the process, though, Jung relies on a few poorly defined terms. Few would contradict his statement that the Black Hawk War shared with others an ideology of nativism and anti-American sentiments. Yet, Jung's use of terms that conflate several ideas into one—“nativist anti-Americanism” (208)—provides too much latitude for effective comparisons to be made to the other Natives under the assault of American expansion in the early republic. Similarly, Jung's analysis unnecessarily equates “nativism,” “anti-Americanism” and a general opposition to American expansion. For example, Jung proclaims that “resistance to white expansion and pan-Indian nativism were the foundation for both the Black Hawk War and the Second Seminole War” (209). Seminoles certainly opposed white expansion, but their war was more defensive, largely fought in isolation of Indian allies, and hardly a proactive attempt to pursue a pan-Indian future.

Jung has written an accessible overview that builds upon the original documents in a way that is long overdue. The volume should attract the interests of specialists familiar with the Black Hawk War and those interested in the history of Native Americans or Indian removal.

ANDREW K. FRANK is associate professor of history at Florida State University. He is the author of *Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier* (Lincoln, NE, 2005) and is currently finishing a book-length manuscript on the history of the Florida Seminoles.