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 ***Conflict on the Michigan Frontier: Yankee and Borderland Cultures, 1815-1840 (review)***

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

**Reviewed by:**

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In *Conflict on the Michigan Frontier: Yankee and Borderland Cultures, 1815-1840*, James M. Schwartz sets out to explore how settlers from the Northeast attempted to civilize the peoples who had been hammering out what Richard White has termed "the Middle Ground" for more than a century. He seeks to answer the age-old question: did a completely new society emerge on the frontier or did easterners successfully transplant their culture in the West? Schwartz's conclusion is: "The battle to contain the wilderness thus resulted . . . in the creation of new regional forms that differed somewhat from the Yankee norms on which they were based" (p. 11).

The first two chapters focus on the Yankee drive to establish "formal legal boundaries" in Michigan (p. 4). Newly arrived settlers had a decidedly love-hate relationship with the Northwest Ordinance. On one hand, they resented the territorial process that demanded that they submit to the whims of five appointed officials—a governor, a secretary, and three judges. They campaigned relentlessly for an elected assembly between 1817 and 1823. During the Michigan Constitutional Convention of 1835, Whigs and Democrats debated vigorously over whether or not aliens and African Americans would be allowed to vote. But when doing battle with Ohio over which state would control Toledo and its port, they tried to use the Ordinance to strengthen their case, arguing that the northwestern states should be of roughly equal size and strength.

The balance of the book focuses on a second kind of boundary—"informal cultural restraints" (p. 4). In terms of the economy, the Yankee drive to eradicate the fur trade and replace it with commerce and manufacturing culminated in a debate over banking in the aftermath of the Panic of 1837. Yankees sought to use religion and education to transform, or at least control, Native Americans and the descendants of the Indian-French borderland culture. The temperance movement in Michigan had a decidedly regional cast to it as Yankees did battle with

other residents over perceived drunkenness, as did their response to cholera epidemics in the 1830s when farmers blamed Detroit residents for the troubles.

*Conflict on the Michigan Frontier* is not without problems. Schwartz [End Page 126] starts by saying that the cultural restraints provided the foundation for political boundaries, but he begins his study with territorial and state politics. Yankee Democrats and Whigs take center stage, rather than conflict between Yankees and those who established the borderland culture. The chapters that follow are more interesting but not clearly connected to the first two. For sources, Schwartz utilizes a handful of manuscript collections, some published primary sources and newspaper accounts. As for secondary sources, the list of books is incomplete, and Susan Gray's *The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier* (1996) is especially notable by its absence. Nichole Etcheson's fine work on Yankees in Ohio would have made an excellent foil as well. At least three of the delegates discussed in the section on the constitutional convention do not appear in the index, and some readers might wonder why the papers of one of them—governor-to-be William Woodbridge—were not plumbed for this study since he had a long history in the Old Northwest, moving with his family from Connecticut to Marietta, Ohio, when he was young.

Still, the voices of Democrats and Whigs come through as Schwartz quotes both newspaper editorials from regional papers and political grandstanding in a variety of forums. He also examines nineteenth-century fiction and nonfiction books to shed light on the controversies of the day. Those interested in the settling of the Old Northwest will wish to add this book to their collection.

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**Kim M. Gruenwald**

Kim M. Gruenwald teaches history at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. She is the author of *River of Enterprise: The Commercial Origins of Regional Identity in the Ohio Valley, 1790-1850* (2002) and is currently researching other aspects of western identity.

In the concluding chapter, subtitled "The Triumph of the Diplomacy of Conquest," Sadosky describes how the final negotiations of the Revolutionary Era finally put an end to the borderlands diplomacy of the colonial era, even as it lay the groundwork for the more modern era of U.S. domestic and foreign policies.

But it is in the final pages where Sadosky makes a somewhat confusing choice. His six primary chapters are sandwiched by a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue illustrates the ad hoc nature of eighteenth-century borderlands diplomacy by showing how a British trader created a Cherokee emperor. The epilogue presents the 1831 Supreme Court decision in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, in which Indian nations are described as "domestic dependent nations." Curious in its absence is the 1832 case of *Worcester v. Georgia* that confirms to a much greater extent the primacy of federal authority in Indian affairs. It is unclear why this equally important decision is not discussed.

*Revolutionary Negotiations* is a solid addition to the historiography. For the reader already familiar with the basics of the history of the early American republic, Sadosky's analysis provides a slightly different perspective on the thoughts, actions, and impact of the Founding Fathers. But the discussions of diplomacy are far better when dealing with topics spanning the Atlantic Ocean than with those spanning the Appalachian Mountains.

JOHN P. BOWES teaches history at Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond, Kentucky. He is the author of *Evils and Pioneers: Eastern Indians in the Trans-Mississippi West* (2007) and is currently writing a book titled, *Northern Indian Removal: An Unfamiliar History*.

*Conflict on the Michigan Frontier: Yankee and Borderland Cultures, 1815-1840*. By James N. Schwartz. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009. Pp. viii, 184. \$30.00 cloth)



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