



2010.01.02

Patrick J. Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2008. Pp. 275. ISBN: 978-0-8061-3811-4.

Review by Kathleen P. Chamberlain, Eastern Michigan University (kchamberl@emich.edu.edu).

The events surrounding the Black Hawk War of 1832 are well traveled. The tragedy had barely ended before contemporary accounts such as Benjamin Drake's 1838 popular but flawed *Life and Adventures of Black Hawk* began to appear in print. These works generally contained equal portions of myth and fact, but served as the basis for the scholarly accounts that followed. With the advent of American Indian studies in the 1970s came renewed interest in Black Hawk, the Sauk warrior who challenged American forces in Illinois, and his rival Keokuk, the civil chief frequently depicted as a lackey of the U.S. government. Patrick Jung's study takes a broader approach to the Black Hawk War, placing it in the larger context of the intertribal conflict that flourished in the Great Lakes region after 1800—especially following the War of 1812—and intensified during the early years of Andrew Jackson's presidency and the period of Indian removal.

Jung sees a need to reexamine not the facts of the war itself, since these are relatively well known, but its context in terms of pan-tribal religious revitalizations that swept the Ohio country and Mississippi Valley after the American Revolution and spawned pro-removal factions and resistance movements that put many of the Indian wars in motion. While the Shawnee prophet Tenskwatawa and his brother Tecumseh urged tribes to put aside their differences and unite against a common enemy in the years before the War of 1812, Tecumseh's death in 1813, Jung claims, unleashed vicious warfare between rivals who fought each other as frequently as they battled whites. Thus, resistance to American expansion and intertribal warfare "came together in an awkward embrace in the years immediately preceding the Black Hawk War" (5). Only by understanding these conflicting forces, Jung maintains, can historians explain Black Hawk's and other such wars.

Although Jung, an assistant professor of history at the Milwaukee School of Engineering, lists a primary research interest in American military history, *The Black Hawk War* does not fall strictly into this category. The first three chapters, for example, explore the cultural and historical factors that weakened the Sauk and their Fox allies and laid the groundwork for this tragedy. Though the teachings of Delaware prophet Neolin in the 1760s gave rise to a nativistic spirit in the region and the Shawnee pan-tribal revitalization prompted Indian unity and opposition to so-called "government chiefs" who "consistently acceded to the United States' demand for land," Sauks and Foxes were more influenced by the Potawatomi sorcerer Main Poc, who encouraged not pan-tribalism but continuing hostilities with traditional rivals (25). Main Poc inflamed Sauk leaders against their common enemies, the Menominees, Santee Sioux or Dakota, Osages, and Omahas even as he preached resistance to white encroachment. The U.S. Department of War, territorial officials, traders, and Indian agents—and before 1813 British commanders as well—played upon these rivalries and splintered tribal groups like the Sauks into pro- and anti-American and British factions. Jung's clear, concise, and organized writing style renders this very complex and often confusing situation extremely logical and understandable.

Jung suggests that the weak political organization of the Sauk coupled with decades of chaos and massive land losses had by 1832 made them vulnerable and ultimately unable to launch a united front against U.S. attempts to remove them to Indian Territory. Tribal factions complicated the situation, although Jung contends that to label these factions as pro- or anti-removal or even pro- or anti-American is overly simplistic. Keokuk, for instance, is nearly always dubbed pro-removal, but in reality he was not nearly as friendly to the U.S. government as earlier accounts portray him. Jung claims that Keokuk acceded to the removal of the Sauk from Illinois to west of the Mississippi River into Iowa only because, by 1832, he had concluded that resistance to overwhelmingly superior American forces was futile. Black Hawk, on the other hand, still believed resistance was the key to Indian survival despite the rapid changes occurring all around him.

Chapters 4–7 focus on the return of Black Hawk’s band to Illinois and then the war itself; thereafter, the book becomes more of a traditional military history. These chapters juxtapose the movements of Black Hawk and his so-called British Band against the activity of General Henry Atkinson. Atkinson’s primary mission was at first to arrest the Sauks, but he then “by accident” became responsible for all operations of the war including dealing with citizen volunteers who inserted themselves into the conflict. Readers will find familiar material in this portion of the book, including battles such as Bad Axe and Wisconsin Heights. It is also well known that the volunteer militia acted “more like a loosely structured mob than an army” and that a lack of provisions, the outbreak of cholera, and a challenging environment plagued those trailing Black Hawk’s warriors (127). Jung contends that, examined from both sides, the war was more a panic than a true military conflict. His interpretation of the war itself agrees with Roger L. Nichols’ *Black Hawk and the Warrior’s Path*.¹ Nichols, however, casts Black Hawk as the naïve traditional, whereas Jung credits the Sauk leader with understanding the American expansionist mentality. But, if Black Hawk indeed possessed such an understanding, why did he still believe in his people’s ability to resist?

The last chapter examines the aftermath of the Black Hawk War from the perspective of continuing Sauk divisions. Despite Black Hawk’s death in 1838, anti-Keokuk and anti-assimilation factions endured and maintained traditional practices well into the twentieth century. Jung also places the war in the larger framework of American expansion and the Indian removal period. He claims that, to a degree, the Seminole Wars of 1835–42 fanned hope among some Indians of another pan-tribal resistance. Thus, although Black Hawk did not win the war, his actions inspired others well after 1832.

The Black Hawk War augments some of the recent studies of Jacksonian Indian policies² and expands the literature focusing on Great Lakes Indians during an extremely tumultuous time in their history that still cries out for more scholarly treatment. This well researched and written blend of ethnohistory and military history will stand as a central work on Black Hawk and his war for many years to come.

1. NY: Viking, 2001.

2. E.g., Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (Arlington Heights, IL: H. Davidson, 1992).