

Florida Atlantic University

A Comparative Study of American Indian Responses to Imperialism,  
From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

A Comparative Book Review Submitted To

Dr. Kersey

Department of History

by

David Glauber

Readings in American Indian Leadership

Boca Raton, FL

14 February 2007

A Comparative Study of American Indian Responses to Imperialism,  
From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, American Indians resisted and fought European colonists in the “New World” and, later, United States frontiersmen who wanted to take over their vast territory. These battles, which ended disastrously for the Indians, influenced and shaped the history of North America and of the United States. The descent of American Indian civilization began with their dependence on “Old World” technology, such as European glass, imported beads, iron celts, and lead balls. Additionally, they were “exploited by the English trade in skins and slaves,” which forced them to amass heavy debts to colonists and American frontiersmen.<sup>1</sup> In order to repay their financial obligations, their colonial and American creditors forced the Indians to cede most of their land to them. This loss of territory and independence resulted in several Indian religious revivals, which tried to spur its followers to revert back to their aboriginal customs and traditions. Despite the blatant challenge to the Indians’ way of life, Native Americans did not unite in a pan-Indian movement against their common enemy, but some Indian leaders and groups did confront this threat. Courageous leaders, including Wampanoag’s King Philip, Shawnee Chief Tecumseh, and Tecumseh’s blundering brother, the Shawnee Prophet Tenskwatawa all stood poised to challenge colonial and American imperialism. With strong passions against their changed circumstances, the Muskogee “Red Sticks,” who sported red-painted clubs, also revolted. Their revolt was not against Americans; it was against their own Nation of Creek, or Muskogee Indians, who they believed were too dependent, and too passive or accepting of American customs.

These themes are discussed in Joel Martin's *Sacred Revolt*, R. David Edmunds' *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, and Russell Bourne's *The Red King's Rebellion*. In Bourne's political, social, religious, and highly biased history towards the Wampanoag Indians of New England, he argues that "the English pursued a racial policy whose deliberate purpose was not enslavement but annihilation" during King Philip's War in the 1670s.<sup>2</sup> The intent of his study is to determine how the established peace between the Pilgrims, Puritans, and the Wampanoag Federation that existed in the 1620s broke down into this violent war in the latter part of the century that resulted in severe loss for both the English colonists and the Indians. Whereas Bourne focuses on northeastern Indians, Edmunds tells the story of the southeast's Shawnee Indians. His social, political, and religious history chronicles the story of Tecumseh's misfit brother, Lalawerthika, and his transformation into the Prophet Tenskwatawa.<sup>3</sup> Tecumseh takes his brother's local and distant followers and leads them into a determined and courageous opposition force that fatefully ends with Chief Tecumseh's death in 1813. Also set in the southeast is Joel Martin's religious and political history, *Sacred Revolt*. This work depicts the hardships suffered by the Muskogee (Creek) Nation as their massive debts also resulted in a threat to their land. Unable to watch idly, the "Red Sticks," who carried red-painted sticks, underwent a religious revitalization that aimed to save their territory, revolted against their native tribe in a debacle that the United States ultimately put down.<sup>4</sup>

Indian troubles with the English colonies and with the United States began when frontiersmen increasingly pressed Indians for their land. No amount of adaptation or compromise could be reached between the two sides because one side wanted to take all of the natives' lands and the other side wanted to preserve a small part of the territory that their

ancestors had lived on for thousands of years. In *Sacred Revolt*, Martin explains that the contact with Europeans forced Muskogee Indians to significantly re-shape their culture. Adopting customs from other native tribes and from Europeans, including their technology, was part of this change. They borrowed “among other things folktales from Africans and the symbolically powerful idea of the Book from Europeans.”<sup>5</sup>

By 1670, when the English first encountered the Muskogee, they were no longer aboriginal. For decades, the Indians’ interaction with the Spanish tuned them into European civilization and they benefited in the way of getting trade items, such as European glass and imported beads.<sup>6</sup> The Indians especially benefited because the Europeans accepted the natives’ practice of gift giving. Consequently, the English had not trouble getting the Muskogee to participate in the deerskin trade. This trade, however, depleted the Indians traditionally abundant supply of hunting animals. In order to make up for the low supply of game on their land, Muskogee Indians wandered into Choctaw land, which resulted in a war between the two sides. Following the American Revolution, the United States abandoned the traditional practice of gift giving to the Indians who were predominantly allied to the English. Consequently, with no furs to trade, the Indians “could not avoid going into debt if they were to obtain arms and cloth and consume other goods.”<sup>7</sup> In the process, U.S. agents, including Benjamin Hawkins, pushed America’s agriculture means of subsistence on the Muskogee and drove a wedge in Muskogee society that resulted in the “Red Sticks” revolt against their own nation. Martin explains, “Colonial contact positively heightened the Muskogees’ appreciation of their responsibility to and for their culture.”<sup>8</sup>

Like the Muskogees, European contact also forced the Shawnees to adapt to the new circumstances. First, American settlers illegally disobeyed England’s Proclamation of 1763,

which prohibited colonists from crossing over the Appalachian Mountains into Indian Territory. In Edmunds' work, he explains that subsequent quarrels with Lord Dunmore over the matter resulted in the Shawnees forced surrender of part of their territory.<sup>9</sup> The sale of Shawnee land by the federally recognized Iroquois confederation further depleted their land. Shawnee land cessions became more common as time progressed and they became more dependent on European materials and technology, including cloth. Edmunds explains, "The European technology was a mixed blessing. It provided the Shawnees and other Indians with more durable and efficient tools. Yet it made them more susceptible to innumerable influences over which they had little control."<sup>10</sup> Like U.S. relations with the Muskogee, it also encouraged the Shawnee to become farmers. This was not an easy undertaking for the Shawnee to accept as they considered farming to be "women's work."<sup>11</sup> These changes in Shawnee society resulted in a religious revival that sought to restore order to their once peaceful society.

Forced land cessions and alterations to Indian society were not only a phenomenon of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but as Russell Bourne explains in *The Red King's Rebellion*, they also took place in the seventeenth century. English colonists took Indian land and exploited their resources. Miantonomo, the Narragansetts sachem, or leader, complained to his neighbors, the Algonquians, "Our fathers had plenty of deer and skins, our plains were full of fish and fowl. But these English have gotten our land...Their cows and horses eat the grass; their hogs spoil our claim banks; and we shall all be starved."<sup>12</sup> Wampanoag problems mounted by the 1660s as they became increasingly dependent on the English for survival since their resources were diminished by English exploitation. Religious

intolerance by the Puritans and squabbles with the Indians over land and resources increased suspicion on both sides. These heated tensions commenced in King Philip's War.

Religion played a significant part in the history of New England and in other confrontations between colonists and Indians over land, resources, and changes to the Indians' traditional way of life. The Puritans used their religion to justify their massive slaughter of Indians during the Pequot War of 1634, claiming that they were "uncivilized." This belief was widespread among the Puritans, to the point where "many of the devout [Puritans] even concluded that it was God himself who had 'let loose the savages, with firebrand and tomahawk.'"<sup>13</sup> With this attitude, the Puritans justified taking Indians slaves and more of their land after the war. Historian Jill Lepore believes that "the language of cruelty and savagery was the vocabulary Puritans adapted to distinguish themselves from the Indians."<sup>14</sup> Such intolerance also allowed the English to conduct a sham trial to gain revenge for the murder of their bi-cultural intermediary, John Sassamon, after he informed New England governor Josiah Winslow of King Philip's plan to attack the English colony.<sup>15</sup>

Religious tensions also increased between the English and the Shawnee Indians of the southeast after the warrior Tecumseh's misfit brother, Lalawerthika, had a spiritual awakening, when he claimed that he spoke with the "Master of Life." Following this encounter in April 1805, Lalawerthika changed his name to the Prophet Tenskwatawa.<sup>16</sup> Tenskwatawa feared the complete loss of the natives' land, and so, he "urged his disciples to return to the food, clothing, and implements used by their ancestors."<sup>17</sup> Followers from both near and far traveled to Prophetstown to hear his message. Edmunds explains that these religious revivals were common among American Indians who had trouble coping and adapting to changes in their lifestyle and the loss of their land. Such ideas, as the ownership

of property were in and of itself hard for the Indians to accept. Tenskwatawa religious visions garnered him supreme religious and political authority among the Shawnees until the Miamis, Potawatomis, and Delawares signed the Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809. This treaty transferred three million acres of Indian land, including land belonging to the Shawnees, to Governor William Henry Harrison. In exchange for this land, the Indians received a small amount of trade goods that they became dependent on for survival. Following this event, Tecumseh's respected warrior leadership among the Shawnee propelled him to become chief of the tribe, but Tenskwatawa still retained his religious power.<sup>18</sup> In the meantime, Tecumseh continued to recruit followers for his brother's cause who could be at his disposal for a brewing battle against the English.

The "Red Sticks," who revolted against the Muskogee nation also wanted an end to land cessions and to restore as much of their ancestral lifestyle as possible. In *Sacred Revolt*, Martin explains, "These people found their very existence profoundly threatened, and, to meet extraordinary economic, political, and cultural crises, they responded with bold and extraordinary spiritual creativity."<sup>19</sup> But, even they were able to compromise and partially adapt to the changed circumstances, including the adoption of a new dance for their tribe that they borrowed from the Shawnees.<sup>20</sup> In part, their ability to adapt stemmed from the fact that one of their leaders, Joseph Francis, was himself a bi-cultural individual of Indian and European descent. His group learned this "new dance" that became a symbol of the "Red Sticks" Millenarian Movement, from Tecumseh, who traveled into Muskogee territory in search of allies to fight off the Americans.

Tecumseh and the Shawnees hoped to form an alliance with the Muskogeese and other Native Americans in order to keep Americans off of their territory. The Muskogeese warmly

received him and the religious followers, but chaos soon came to the Muskogee's land. Upper Muskogee Shaman Captain Isaacs saw a clear vision following violent earthquakes that occurred in 1811 and 1812. He believed that "the powerful Tie-Snake...recklessly shook the earth and unleashed a new force for recreating the world."<sup>21</sup> This vision began the "Red Sticks" Millenarian Movement, but he was not part of the movement for very long. Pressured by U.S. agent Benjamin Hawkins to respond to the murder of seven Ohio families in summer of 1812, Isaacs found and killed the men responsible.<sup>22</sup> After this incident, the spiritual movement became a political movement to rid Muskogee society of American influence. The prophetic shamans, who led the way, killed Isaacs and they "urged swift gestures of popular justice against several other Upper and Lower Muskogee chiefs, an unprecedented act tantamount to a revolution in Muskogee political life."<sup>23</sup> Their cause, however, was not shared by the majority of Muskogees. The civil war against both Lower and Upper Muskogees who collaborated with Americans did not last very long and ironically, it resulted in the end of Muskogee independence. American leaders quickly intervened in this civil war that began in the spring of 1813 and within a year, they purged all hostile elements from Muskogee territory, forced the Muskogee nation to sign the Treaty of Fort Jackson in 1814 that made them subjects of the U.S., and "took fourteen million acres [of land] from the Muskogees, the largest cession of land ever made in the Southeast."<sup>24</sup>

In *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, Edmunds explains that the Shawnees also suffered a similar fate. In September 1811, while Tecumseh was campaigning for support among the Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Muskogees, Tenskwatawa learned that William Henry Harrison's American forces loomed near and stood ready to attack Prophetstown. In order to catch them off guard, Tenskwatawa struck preemptively



against Harrison's forces. Teskwatawa poor wartime leadership skills that dated from the time he was a child, showed up once again. Within a matter of hours, Harrison won the Battle of Tippecanoe, which forced Teskwatawa and the Shawnees to retreat from Prophetstown.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, with the loss of Prophetstown, Teskwatawa also lost his credibility as a prophet. Tecumseh scolded his brother for this wartime loss. Edmunds explains that Tecumseh "seized his brother by the hair and threatened to kill him if he ever again jeopardized the Indian movement."<sup>26</sup> But, Teskwatawa still had one more loss left in him as he tried and failed to take Fort Harrison in mid-November 1812.

As a great leader, Tecumseh rebounded from these losses and tried to inspire his people and other groups who supported his anti-American movement. "He expressed that "as for us, our lives are in the hands of the Great Spirit. We are determined to defend our lands, and if it be his will we wish to leave our bones upon them."<sup>27</sup> Those prophetic words rang loud as Tecumseh was fatally wounded in the subsequent Battle of the Thames in October 1813. With Tecumseh's death, any possibility to gain independence from the Americans ended. There was no respected, charismatic leader who could command the support of his people and the many alliances that he made. Had more Indian groups joined together into a pan-Indian force, the results might have been different, but history remains history.

Like Tecumseh, almost one and a half centuries earlier, in the early 1670s, Philip of Pokanoket visited his English friends in Rhode Island, where he spoke powerfully about his disdain for the Pilgrims and Puritans. He proclaimed to the Quaker, who was Rhode Island's Attorney General, John Easton, "Soon after I became sachem they (the English) disarmed all [of] my people...their land was taken. But a small part of the dominion of my ancestors

remains. I am determined not to live until I have no country.”<sup>28</sup> Bourne explains, “Conditions had reached the point where, in an English court, the word of any witness *against* an accused native was accepted; whereas a witness *for* the accused was not given a hearing.”<sup>29</sup>

Philip subsequently attempted to lure his native allies from within the Wampanoag Federation to his side, but he was not very successful. Bourne argues that Philip had no choice but to fight back against the English in King Philip’s War because, if he had not fought back against the English and their religiously inspired hatred towards them, then another leader would have risen to take his place.<sup>30</sup> At the same time that Bourne depicts Philip as the leader of the Indians movement in New England, he maintains that Philip was not very important to the actual war. He claims that Philip was simply a romanticized figurehead who the Puritans used to symbolize as their enemy in King Philip War. Bourne reasons that Philip was really a prince and not a king, but that “Puritan chroniclers needed a king (representing the Devil) to oppose them; otherwise, what was the war about?”<sup>31</sup> Throughout the war, Philip was on the defensive and spent most of the war in retreat. When King Philip’ War ended in August 1676, both sides had suffered severe casualties, but the English, like the Americans in the following century and a half, emerged as the victor. King Philip’s War ended in August 1676, in a war where both the English and the Indians suffered severe casualties, but with the English as its ultimate victor. The war in New England ended with the beheading of King Philip, whose head was subsequently sent back to Plymouth as a trophy that represented their conquest.<sup>32</sup>

Using predominantly secondary sources, with primary quotation excerpts spread throughout his work, Russell Bourne, an editor of historical books, produced a narrative that

flows very nicely and brings the characters to life. His work, *The Red King's Rebellion*, does a good of taking readers from the point of contact in 1620 between the English colonists and the Wampanoag's of New England through the death of King Philip and beyond. To his credit, he provides several maps and a bibliography in his book, but he fails to include any source citations in his study. Consequently, scholars cannot review any of the claims he makes in his book. Additionally, his work is highly biased, with an understandably sympathetic tone towards the Indians.

Bourne also harps on the concept that King Philip's War was not inevitable because fifty years of relative peace preceded the war. He fails to explain, though, how it could be avoided when King Philip was in the midst of making battle plans and securing allies when the war began. Bourne also assumes that the Puritans wanted to continue an alliance with the Wampanoag's. King Philip's speech to Rhode Island Attorney General in the early 1670s alludes to the fact that peace only existed for as long as it did because the Indians continually appeased the colonists by providing them with land. If Philip no longer wanted to appease the English by giving them land, then preserving their longstanding coexistence was impossible.<sup>33</sup>

In *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, historian R. David Edmunds also does an admirable job of bringing his story to life. His story offers college students a good, captivating introduction to an important, but often neglected aspect of the War of 1812: the Indians' perspective. He uses manuscript papers on individuals, like William Henry Harrison, the Tecumseh Papers that are based on individuals who corresponded with the Shawnee chief, in addition to materials from the National Archives, and many other important manuscript collections. As part of the Library of American Biography series, he

unfortunately cannot include source citations in the book, but he does provide “A Note on the Sources” at the end of the work that will be of use to scholars. Classroom discussion questions at the end of this study will undoubtedly make it popular with college professors.

Reviewer Reginald Horsman from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee respects Edmunds for not “embellishing the thin primary evidence relating to Tecumseh with romantic, apocryphal details drawn from unreliable secondary accounts.”<sup>34</sup> He goes beyond not embellishing his account and attempts to discredit many of the myths that surround Tecumseh’s life and death, including who exactly killed him and where his body is really buried. Answers to this and other questions are the focus of Edmunds’ concluding chapter, “Tecumseh in Retrospect.” Furthermore, his work lends more importance to Tecumseh’s brother, Tenskwatawa, than other studies give to him, notes reviewer Donald J. Berthrong.<sup>35</sup> Most likely, this is because he previously authored a book on the life of Tenskwatawa, called *The Shawnee Prophet*, and so, he has a better foundation to write this dual biography on the two brothers. With no noticeable faults, this succinct account of Tecumseh, Tenskwatawa, and the Shawnees struggle to defend themselves against encroaching American frontiersmen, deserves a wide readership.

Joel Martin’s *Sacred Revolt* is also a fine work that nicely continues the Indians’ battle against the Americans, at the point where Edmunds’ study left off. Martin offers a view of Muskogee society before and after its interaction with Europeans. His work elegantly builds up to the “Red Sticks” revolt against American influence in their nation. Additionally, *Sacred Revolt* allows the reader to view events from the Muskogees’ perspective by using the natives’ term of Muskogee, rather than the English word, Creek. Martin believes that the Indians’ civilization can best be understood by studying their

religious system, as they truly believed in the existence of mysterious forces in the universe. Additionally, he wrote this book because he was “disturbed at the way historians left [the Red Sticks] dead on the battlefield without ever bothering to ask who they were and why they fought?”<sup>36</sup>

While readers will come away with a genuine understanding of Muskogee beliefs, they will be left puzzled as to why he devoted only sixteen pages to the actual revolt. Martin explains that he wanted to know why the Red Sticks fought, but maybe he really was not interested in the story of how they died? The addition of a bibliography also would have improved the value of this study. However, these flaws do not detract heavily from what is otherwise an important and intriguing study of Muskogee religion and how it shaped their perception of events. Martin’s thorough use of primary sources, including letters and journals, makes what historian R. David Edmunds refers to as “the most analytical and comprehensive examination of the Muskogee revolt that has been written, and the volume is an important contribution to native American historiography in this period.”<sup>37</sup>

Collectively, *The Red King’s Rebellion*, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, and *Sacred Revolt* provides a useful lens to better understand how American Indians adapted to European and American imperialism, and how religion and trade affected the natives’ perception of events. In all of these cases, individuals and/or groups stepped forward to lead opposition forces against colonists, and later Americans, who were determined to take their land away. Without a doubt, the American Indians’ experience was radically altered by the introduction of Europeans into their society. In the end, the Indians could not stop America’s quest to achieve Manifest Destiny. Consequently, the remaining groups of Indians on the eastern coast of the United States were forced to march west on the

“Trail of Tears.” One thing that cannot be said about American Indians is that they went down without a fight.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joel W. Martin, *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 46, 48.

<sup>2</sup> Russell Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion: Racial Politics in New England, 1675-1678* (New York: Atheneum, 1990), xii.

<sup>3</sup> R. David Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 2d ed. Library of American Biography, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Pearson-Longman, 2007), 70.

<sup>4</sup> Joel W. Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, ix, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>9</sup> R. David Edmunds. *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>12</sup> Russell Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion*, 79.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998; Vintage Books, 1998), xiv.

<sup>15</sup> Russell Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion*, 104-06.

<sup>16</sup> R. David Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 66.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-11.

<sup>19</sup> Joel W. Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, 133.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>25</sup> R. David Edmunds. *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 143-45.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>28</sup> Russell Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion*, 107.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3. 102-03.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Reginald Horsman, review of *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 2d ed., by E. David Edmunds, *The Pacific Historical Review* 54, no. 2 (May 1985): 213-14.

<sup>35</sup> Donald J. Berthrong, review of *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 2d ed., by E. David Edmunds, *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 5 (December 1989): 1464-65.

<sup>36</sup> Joel W. Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, x.

<sup>37</sup> R. David Edmunds, review of *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World*, by Joel W. Martin, *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (September 1992): 649-50.

## Bibliography

Berthrong, Donald J. Review of *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 2d ed., by E. David Edmunds. *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 5 (December 1989): 1464-65.

Bourne, Russell. *The Red King's Rebellion: Racial Politics in New England, 1675-1678*. New York: Atheneum, 1990.

Edmunds, R. David. Review of *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World*. by Joel W. Martin. *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (September 1992): 649-50.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 2d ed. Library of American Biography, ed. Mark C. Carnes. New York: Pearson-Longman, 2007.

Horsman, Reginald. Review of *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, 2d ed., by E. David Edmunds. *The Pacific Historical Review* 54, no. 2 (May 1985): 213-14.

Lepore, Jill. *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*. New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1998; Vintage Books, 1998.

Martin, Joel W. *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.