

*Uncommon Defense: Indian Allies in the Black Hawk War*, by John W. Hall. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009. ix, 367 pp. Maps, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer John P. Bowes is assistant professor of history at Eastern Kentucky University. He is the author of *Black Hawk and the War of 1832: Removal in the North* (2007); and *Exiles and Pioneers: Eastern Indians in the Trans-Mississippi West* (2007).

The Black Hawk War has received an inordinate amount of attention over the years, most recently in *Black Hawk: The Battle for the Heart of America*, by Kerry A. Trask (2006) and *The Black Hawk War of 1832*, by Patrick J. Jung (2007). Yet not until *Uncommon Defense* by John W. Hall has anyone closely examined the decisions made by the Menominees, Dakotas, Ho Chunks, and Potawatomis who allied with the forces of the United States in that conflict. In what is an accessible and enlightening study, Hall asserts that those Indian allies “were the true architects of an alliance that served their own ends first and always” (10).

Hall begins his examination with a chapter titled “Roots of Conflict,” where readers immediately confront one of this book’s assets. A sentence early in the chapter sums it up best. “The American narrative of the Black Hawk War may begin in 1804,” Hall writes, “but the Indian story begins much earlier” (15). In other words, scholars have most often referred to the treaty of 1804 between the Sauks and the United States as the initial event underlying the actions of Black Hawk and other Sauks in the summer of 1832. But that agreement obtained by fraudulent means did not influence the actions of other Indians in the region. Instead, the relationship between the Sauks and their Indian neighbors existed within a much longer and broader history. Therefore, the decisions made by bands of Menominees and others to ally with the United States need to be assessed according to their past histories with both the Sauks and the French and British colonial powers. This foundational point prepares readers for a new perspective on the Black Hawk War. Unfortunately, only that first chapter delves into events before 1804.

After this brief foray into the eighteenth century, Hall spends the better part of the next two chapters analyzing the Indian perspective on American policies and activity in the late 1810s and 1820s. Indians first sought to establish relations with the United States based on colonial-era diplomacy. By the end of the 1820s, however, the Indians had no illusions about the attitudes of American agents and citizens. Incidents such as the Ho Chunk uprising in the lead mining region of southern Wisconsin in 1827 demonstrated hostility against the encroachment of American settlers. But the federal government’s re-

sponse made it clear that the United States would ultimately favor its citizens over Indians.

Nevertheless, for the Dakotas and Menominees in particular, their battle with the Sauks and Meskwakis over the Des Moines Valley remained more important than the movement of Americans into the territories east of the Mississippi River. Hall contends that Menominee and Dakota participation in the Black Hawk War had nothing to do with Black Hawk and everything to do with "the enduring intertribal contest for control of hunting grounds in the Upper Mississippi watershed" (100). This claim is critical to understanding Hall's book. It is also the perspective that sets his study apart from other scholarship on the Black Hawk War.

Beginning with the fourth chapter, Hall revisits familiar episodes from the early 1830s and sets them within a framework of inter-Indian diplomacy and conflict. Much to his credit, he avoids the pitfall of indiscriminately grouping Indian nations and their motivations. Indeed, he capably illustrates that distinct bands of Ho Chunks and Potawatomis responded to the actions of the Sauks and Americans based on location, kinship ties, and past experience. Residents of the Ho Chunk village at Prairie La Crosse, for instance, had to assess the relative importance of village interests and family bonds. In the end, while Winneshieik, a principal headman, advocated neutrality, other villagers allied with the United States. Such analysis further enhances the focus in *Uncommon Defense* on the local nature of Indian decision making.

In the epilogue Hall notes that the decisions made by Menominees, Dakotas, Potawatomis, and Ho Chunks did not necessarily affect their ability to avoid the widespread removals that followed the conclusion of the conflict. While they took action based on their particular interests, they could not ignore the movement of American settlers and governance into the region. Nevertheless, understanding the reasons behind their decisions adds greatly to our understanding of the larger context of the Black Hawk War. Hall has taken what is too often viewed as the last gasp of northern Indians against the United States and placed it within an Indian framework. Although his argument would have been better served by a more detailed assessment of the pre-1804 history and more information on the first two decades of the nineteenth century, that critique does not diminish what is a very important contribution to the study of the Black Hawk War.