

Book Reviews and Notices

Beneath the Backbone of the World: Blackfoot People and the North American Borderlands, by Ryan Hall. David J. Weber Series in the New Borderlands History. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. xiii, 258 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer Christina Gish Hill is associate professor of World Languages and Cultures at Iowa State University. Her research focuses on Native American cultures of the northern Great Plains and the Midwest, and she is the author of *Webs of Kinship: Family in Northern Cheyenne Nationhood* (2017).

Ryan Hall masterfully illuminates the value of putting Indigenous places at the center of history in his meticulously researched account of Blackfoot efforts to maintain their homeland during the tumultuous changes brought about by British, Canadian, and American encroachment. He uses extensive archival research to reveal new perspectives on Blackfoot participation in the fur trade that crossed the northwest plains in the borderlands around what would become the current U.S.-Canada boundary. He demonstrates that starting in the early eighteenth century Blackfoot nations wielded an incredible amount of power in the region, dominating trade and access to resources for approximately 150 years. He argues that in this area the fur trade did not lay the foundations for European-American settlement, but instead allowed Blackfoot nations not only to remain sovereign but also to dictate the actions of other peoples—both Native and Euro-American.

Hall reveals that Blackfoot people dictated the terms of trade throughout their territory, and later set the limits of settlement and safe passage, sometimes by violence but more often through economic and political negotiation. He convincingly makes the case that Blackfoot country was not a doomed homeland fated for colonization (7). Instead he argues that Blackfoot people responded to shifting political alliances and the influx of new goods and new peoples creatively and not reactively. He demonstrates that through their strategic economic and political action, Blackfoot people actively shaped the colonial history of North America. Hall's careful research and analysis reveals that the economic and political actions of Blackfoot people had impacts that were felt throughout the global economy at the time. In this way, Hall makes it

evident that early North American history must include regions once considered remote and therefore irrelevant to global forces. He encourages scholars to shift their perspectives away from naturalizing the horizontal axis of east to west and argues that “facing east” from Native homelands is not enough (6). Instead, we must center Native nations because when we do, we realize the far-reaching impacts of Native actions even before the influx of Europeans or Euro-Americans. By centering Blackfoot history, Hall reveals that far from Blackfoot homelands, American and European powers reshaped policy and economic strategy in response to Blackfoot actions. Hall illustrates the power that the Blackfoot nation had in influencing the course of global affairs when he states, “Like a stream around a stone, the course of empire shifted to avoid Blackfoot country” (83).

Hall’s analysis provides a useful methodological approach for scholars of Iowa, a location that has often been considered on the periphery of global events, like Blackfoot country. Blackfoot strategies influenced the historical trajectory of Iowa as well, demonstrating that the histories of both lend insight to the impact that the actions of both Blackfoot people and Iowans made on the fur trade and in turn on the trajectory of global affairs. U.S. fur traders stayed away from the upper Missouri for decades because Blackfoot people dominated the region. St. Louis-based traders restricted their operations to the lower Missouri around Council Bluffs (94). Finally, in 1859 steamboats from Council Bluffs were able to venture all the way northwest to Blackfoot country. As a result, the American fur trade changed dramatically. Hall describes the mineral rush to Blackfoot country in the 1860s—one of the largest in U.S. history (148). Iowa was a starting point for these new enterprises. By taking seriously Hall’s encouragement to shift our perspective to center previously neglected places and to emphasize Native histories of the region, historians of Iowa have the opportunity to demonstrate the early impact this area has had on global events. Hall inspires this position as he opens the possibility to consider the growth of the territory in a new light.

The Great Medicine Road: Narratives of the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails, Part 4: 1856–1869, edited by Michael L. Tate. Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark, 2020. 327 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 hardcover.

Reviewer J. T. Murphy is professor of history at Indiana University South Bend. His research focuses on the American West, the idea of manliness, and the connection between memory and history.