

*The Fault Lines of Empire: Political Differentiation in Massachusetts and Nova Scotia, ca. 1760–1830.* By ELIZABETH MANCKE. *New World in the Atlantic World*. New York: Routledge, 2005. 214 pages. \$85.00 (cloth), \$27.95 (paper).

*At the Edge of Empire: The Backcountry in British North America.* By Eric Hinderaker and PETER C. MANCALL. *Regional Perspectives on Early America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. 210 pages. \$17.95 (paper).

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The discriminating reader may wonder if these two books have enough in common to merit a shared review. Elizabeth Mancke does not address the backcountry as a place or category of analysis in her comparative town study, and Eric Hinderaker and Peter C. Mancall scarcely mention northern New England or Nova Scotia in their overview of British North America's hinterlands. Both works, however, are concerned with the formation of colonial societies on the periphery of the British Atlantic Empire. Each work takes a fresh approach to its subject matter, and each struggles with problems of scale and the applicability of their conclusions. Mancke puts two towns—Machias, Massachusetts, and Liverpool, Nova Scotia—under a microscope and ends up with a finely detailed argument of limited relevance elsewhere. Hinderaker and Mancall step back to examine their subject as broadly as possible, stretching the definition of the backcountry so far that it loses usefulness as a regional designation. Together the books raise questions about the nature and location of an empire's periphery.

Mancke's purpose in comparing Machias and Liverpool is to uncover the point of divergence between political cultures in the United States and Canada. She has selected fitting subjects for her analysis. Both towns were established by New Englanders in the early 1760s and had similar economies. By immersing herself in the local sources for each community, Mancke traces the factors that led them to develop along different paths despite their common origins. Machias organized and governed itself like earlier generations of New England towns and identified wholeheartedly with the American side in the American War of Independence. Liverpool, on the other hand, departed significantly from New England precedents in its organization and government and, like the rest of Nova Scotia, remained loyal to the Crown during the Revolution.

According to Mancke the roots of this split are not to be found in the revolutionary experiences of these two communities but rather in changing imperial policies that the Crown and Parliament had imposed on American colonies decades earlier. The most significant was the Crown's effort to roll back local self-government in its colonial possessions by refusing to grant corporate town charters that conveyed political rights and responsibilities along with grants of land. The payoff of Mancke's research comes in her careful reconstruction of how this reorientation in colonial administration affected land ownership, militia service, and religious institutions in these two communities, one of which clung tenaciously to its seventeenth-century New England heritage whereas the other adapted to the realities of centralized power in a more recently established colony.

Mancke tackles her subject with the rigor of a social scientist but the vocabulary of one, too. The phrasing of the research question, for example, is unnecessarily opaque: "Was developmental convergence normative throughout British America, or was there also developmental divergence" (2)? Likewise, the discussion of political relationships within and outside these towns would be clearer without reliance on references to "horizontal linkages" and "vertical ones" (26). The local institutions of Machias and Liverpool are rendered clearly, yet their human inhabitants are for the most part ghostly presences, slipping in and out of the narrative without emerging as distinct or engaging personalities.

Mancke makes a convincing case for tracing the differences between Machias and Liverpool to the imposition of new policies from above rather than variations or adaptations at the local level. The fault line of empire she uncovers is not 1776 but 1688, when political revolution in England marked a divide between a previous method of colonization that awarded corporate privileges of self-government to private entrepreneurs and a new one that centralized power in the empire under the Crown in Parliament. This conclusion seems to make sense when discussing political differentiation between Massachusetts and Nova Scotia, but can it be applied elsewhere in the eighteenth-century British Empire? Georgia's founding, like Nova Scotia's, reflected the newer model of colonization, yet Georgia joined the Revolution. And what of the British Caribbean colonies, most of which were established at roughly the same time as those in New England but remained loyal with nary a peep in 1776? The conclusions Mancke draws from Machias and Liverpool cannot explain the fault lines of revolution elsewhere within the British Atlantic Empire.

Drawing from a wide variety of scholarship on early American frontiers, Hinderaker and Mancall's objective is to weave together a narrative that can sustain sound generalizations about the backcountry. The synthesis, however, often gets the better of the analysis. At times the book reads more like a tour of early America from the Elizabethan era through the American Revolution than a distillation of what might be called backcountry studies. Readers will find much in *At the Edge of Empire* that is familiar from textbook coverage of the Colonial era: the demographic effect of European diseases on native populations, the gradual expansion of the transatlantic commercial economy, the tensions between colonial officials' efforts to govern, and the stubborn localism of small, dispersed communities.

The wide-angle lens through which Hinderaker and Mancall view their subject can also distort the very meaning of backcountry. The authors define this central concept quite clearly: "By 'backcountry' we mean the territory that lay beyond the core settlements of mainland English colonies, and generally also beyond the control of an often weak imperial state" (4). This definition is more applicable to the eighteenth century, and especially the period after 1740, than it is to the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. Opening their narrative in the Elizabethan Era, the authors classify Ireland as "the first real 'backcountry' in what became the British Empire" (1). The parallels between English methods of conquest in Ireland and North America are well documented, but does calling sixteenth-century Ireland a backcountry draw the reader any closer to understanding the social and economic evolution of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania or North Carolina? Likewise, Hinderaker and Mancall devote considerable space to retelling the seventeenth-century foundings of the Chesapeake and New England colonies, yet whether John Smith's Jamestown or John Winthrop's Boston meet the authors' own definition of backcountry is debatable. These places were "the core settlements of mainland English colonies" of their time. Further, almost every English colonial region in the seventeenth century, from Ireland to the Caribbean to North America, was "beyond the control of an often weak imperial state," making it all backcountry. For the most part, it is impossible to tell where the core settlements of English colonization ended and the backcountry began in the years before 1700.

As Hinderaker and Mancall move chronologically forward, their definition of backcountry resonates more clearly within their narrative. The latter chapters are better than the earlier ones because they focus less on mainland North American colonies as a whole and more on the Appalachian frontier region that most readers will instinctively associate with the backcountry. Describing the heavy flow of Scotch-Irish, German, and other migrants through the Shenandoah Valley in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the authors note that "by the time of Revolution . . . the great western corridor that stretched from central Pennsylvania through Maryland and Virginia into the Carolinas had become synonymous with 'the backcountry' in the minds of Anglo- American observers" (86). Here, then, is a coherent regional definition of the

backcountry. The chapter on the revolutionary backcountry presents convincing, albeit brief, explanations of the distinctive characteristics of backcountry agriculture and notions of political liberty. In describing the peculiar characteristics of backcountry culture and society in this era, the authors rightly cite observers such as Charles Woodmason and J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. In the end Hinderaker and Mancall would have been better served by jettisoning their efforts to cover the colonial period comprehensively and focusing instead on the mid- and later eighteenth century, when the backcountry clearly existed as a place and society apart from coastal North America in the eyes of contemporary observers.

Each of these books sheds light on the wider Atlantic context in which eighteenth-century British North America developed. Mancke focuses intently on the effect imperial policy had on local communities, whereas Hinderaker and Mancall describe the rapid and often violent mixing of cultures on a frontier that imperial authorities could barely control. Read together *The Fault Lines of Empire* and *At the Edge of Empire* raise questions well worth pondering. What constituted peripheral status in Britain's Atlantic Empire? Was it a function of geography and distance, or were the fault lines and edge of empire less easily discernable reflections of political and cultural differences between Britain and its overseas dominions? As both titles suggest, analyzing empires requires drawing lines, and that task is difficult no matter the scale of the map (or the study).