

## **HIST 5453 – New American Republic**

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10/11/2022

### **A Spirited Resistance:**

*The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*

#### **Response Paper**

Struggle is the main story of the livelihood for the North American Native American Indian communities throughout history once Europeans step foot on the North American continent. In Gregory Evans Dowd's *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*, this story of struggle is identified in the subtitle and focuses on a time that is not discussed as much from what I have seen: the events gearing up to the American Revolutionary War, the war itself, and the aftermath of the Rebels winning American independence. Throughout this book Dowd discusses the multiple skirmishes, raids, battles, and overall act of violence that occurs between the different tribes and between the native communities and European settlers. These violent acts may be the pinnacle of the overall story about how the natives struggled to keep their homeland, but they faced other struggles which in turn had big consequences, including, loss of faith and religion. One topic that Dowd discusses on page 31 is the idea of struggle with social change. The relationships built between Europeans and the native community during trade influenced both sides. Some native communities were open to the change whereas others were resistant due to fear of what was to come. One fear was

that the reliance on European goods could lead to the natives' downfall. If they get used to the new way of living with the European influences, traditional culture could start disappearing. This dependence on European goods assisted in their struggle with losing their land by being reliant on ammunition and firepower for their own protection. Dowd discusses their struggle with lack of firepower and losing people in these battles on page 53. Open hostility towards Europeans by both the British and American rebels developed when trading posts started emerging on their lands. Page 35 hints at the struggles the natives went through trying to remove the British trading posts. Not only was there native American struggle with the invading Europeans, but there was internal strife amongst the different tribes. The strife between the different tribes had to do with the discussions on how to handle the European occupation. Some tribes wanted to support due to the inevitable, some wanted to stay neutral for the safety of their communities, and others wanted to fight. Page 56 discusses the divisions between the tribes in these councils. The author goes into detail with the struggle of controlling these councils on page 136 as different tribes tried to build unity to fight against the European invaders.

Unity is another theme that runs throughout the book which is also in the subtitle. The Native American tribal communities did their best to try to form a "Pan-Indianism" to fight against European occupation. Different tribal communities traveled to each other's territories in order to promote unity amongst each other against a common enemy: European occupation. The majority of Dowd's book discusses the different attempts in obtaining unity either between tribes or with the European occupants through treaties. The journey through the quest for unity was discussed in detail in the first portion of the book. Unity amongst the tribes started during the Seven Years War which was discussed on page 25. This discussion continued with the interchangeable name of the French and Indian War on page 26. Dowd discusses the unity of the

tribes with the French prior to the French leaving the continent. Their common enemy was Britain. This unity took place during meetings, councils with representatives and delegates, as well as conferences between the different tribal nations and the French. As tensions build between the colonists and the British empire, the native communities could sense the need to band together for protection. Page 40 discusses the natives' sense of urgency to unify against the coming threat of an all-out war. The struggles that the native communities have endured separately helped encourage the idea of uniting as one as mentioned on page 46. As the tribes unified, they would band together and travel to other tribes to try to promote unity for protection. This intensified even more with the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War as discussed on page 51. The majority of the native communities did combine together to protect themselves and their land as the threat of who would win the war hung over them. Whomever won the war, the Natives knew neither situation would be ideal. These connections that were being made were renewed after the war as the threat of removal from their land became clearer. Dowd goes into depth in this topic towards the latter half of the book as seen starting on page 94.

Communication is a key underlying theme throughout the book. To deal with struggles and finding unity, communication needs to happen. Communication came in all forms for the native communities of North America. Some forms of communication took shape in traditions such as rituals and oral histories and tribal myths. In the beginning of the book, Dowd describes different beliefs of different tribes that would be discussed throughout the book. He goes into detail about the different rituals that were passed down through action and oral traditions to younger generations. Myths from different tribal beliefs were explained so the reader can understand the context of the rest of the book. Storytelling is important to the Cherokee (page 4). The Creek and Shawnee have myths from oral traditions that survive today (pages 6-7).

Communication was of the utmost importance for the natives who traveled from tribe to tribe in delegations to persuade other tribes to unite together. Speeches were made. Debates ensued. Arguments developed on both sides of the spectrum decided on how to handle the European intruders. However, Not only does Dowd discuss the different styles of communication that the tribes go through with each other, but how false communication from the attempted peace deals made with the white men fail and turn into bloodshed. This turns into mistrust and the failure of tribal unity. The first example given by Dowd is the well-known biological warfare implemented by the British. A specific example is discussed by Dowd on page 36 when a fierce standoff occurred at Fort Detroit and Fort Pitt between the natives and British occupation. The British decided to distribute smallpox tainted blankets to the natives so the standoff would end. Communication through manipulation occurred between the peace talks between the natives and the British. Treaties were made under the guise of the benefit for the native communities. However, the British, and later on the Americans, would use this manipulation with treaties to manipulate the naïve natives to hand over their land.

Gregory Evan Dowd's *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* is a book that has a good concept, but, at least for me, it is a difficult read. I would not only say that it is academic, but I found the book to be dense and the writing to be dry. I was excited when I read the subtitle for the book. For someone who's undergraduate degree was heavily concentrated in Native American histories, the concept of studying the Revolutionary War and building of the Republic's effect on the Natives was a new one for me. Most of my education is prehistory, pre-Revolutionary War, 19<sup>th</sup> Century overland trails, and Native American removals. This book covered the gap that I was missing. However, I had a hard time reading this. I ended up reading the book twice which took approximately 35 hours to do so.

I read it twice to try to retain information. Even after the second read, I still do not feel confident enough to discuss this book into any great length or detail. With the broad range and multiple characters at play, it all blurred together for me. I can appreciate what Dowd was trying to do by tackling this more unspoken era of Native American history. This book is a good jumping off point for more scholarly study in a realm that, at least with my experience, is less discussed. While we wait for those ventures to produce fruit, this book is an option to fill the void in Native American studies. I can see myself suggesting this book to my undergraduate professor (if he wasn't retired) with a warning label attached.