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Facing Empire: Indigenous Experiences in a Revolutionary Age

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colonial administration 'showed any awareness of the existing social and political organisation of the Aboriginal owners of the land and rather than striking out into the wilderness as most settlers believed they were doing' (28) they were entering lands which were managed by firestick farming and governed by complex cultural protocols and obligations. Yet the belief that the Aboriginal owners of Port Phillip were 'untutored savages' remained a key aspect of the pioneer legend for more than 150 years. In this context, it is not surprising that the belief that the Kulin people could not have produced chiefs or headmen who were capable of signing a treaty with the Port Phillip Association has proved so resistant to change.

Male convicts fared little better. Despite the fact that they comprised the majority of the working adult male population in Port Phillip in the 1840s, settler accounts of the period largely ignored them. Rogers offers two reasons for the blatant oversight. Their presence contested the settler myth that Port Phillip was the first part of Australia to be colonised entirely by free settlers; and the 'convict taint' of immorality posed a threat to the settler ideology of moral superiority over the nearby colony of Van Diemen's Land. Yet without convict labour the settler conquest of Port Phillip would have failed.

In deconstructing the final component of the legend, the settler belief that they 'civilised' the Port Phillip frontier without government support, Rogers offers contrary evidence from the diaries of Captain Foster Fyans, the leading police magistrate in the Western District during the 1840s. Fyans operated more like a military governor of an occupied territory and held the actions of every free settler firmly in his gaze. He considered many of them were 'ruffians' rather than men of virtue and completely unsuited to the rigours of frontier life. His telling comments, however, were largely discounted by settler historians by virtue of his legendary bad temper, which they claim distorted his judgement. Rogers, however, considers that without the presence of police magistrates like Fyans, the sovereignty of the Western District would not have been secured.

In deconstructing the ideologies that underpinned the pioneer legend in the Port Phillip District, Rogers has successfully overturned one of the longest-held myths in Australian history. This is a mighty achievement by an emerging scholar and augurs well for the future of the discipline.

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Facing Empire: Indigenous Experiences in a Revolutionary Age
Edited by Kate Fullagar and Michael A. McDonnell. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018. Pp. 376. US$39.95 paper.

How did Indigenous peoples respond to an empire as it encroached on their territories? This is hardly a new question for historians. But the editors of this collection hope to spur a comparative conversation about the subject by bringing together contributors who specialise in encounters on different frontiers of the British empire in 'a revolutionary age', running from the mid-eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. Thirteen chapters examine Indigenous responses to empire in Australia, Bengal, New Zealand, North America, the Persian Gulf, South Africa, the Scottish Highlands, the South Pacific, and West Africa. While widely varied in argument and approach, these chapters offer a stimulating introduction to the rich scholarship on this topic.

Though the editors group the chapters in three rather vague thematic categories – pathways, entanglements, and connections – I was struck by a somewhat different set of connections. Perhaps the most original and intriguing of these connections involve the environmental aspects of Indigenous peoples' encounters with empire. The opening essay by Bill Gammage reprises the argument made in his prize-winning book, *The Biggest Estate on Earth* (2011), that Aboriginal people used fire to manage the landscape, creating a carefully curated, park-like environment that the British mistook as natural. Jennifer Newell examines South Pacific Islanders' responses to the introduction of new plants and animals into their fragile island ecosystems by Captain Cook and other European explorers. Robert Kenny's study of Taungurung resistance to the settlers who laid claim to their territory in the colony of Victoria centres on the

devastating environmental impact of the settlers' huge herds of sheep and cattle. And Joshua Reid shows how both the Māori on New Zealand's South Island and the Makah people who lived on the coastal northwest corner of what became US territory claimed ownership of maritime spaces and their natural resources, causing clashes with European whalers and sealers.

An important, if more predictable, connection among other essays concerns Indigenous peoples' political engagements with the British empire. The common thread in these studies is their authors' insistence on the active and often shrewd agency of these peoples. Colin Calloway shows how the Iroquois skilfully played the British and French against one another. Michael McDonnell's essay on another Indian group advances a similar argument, though he goes even further, arguing that 'the architecture of empire in the new British North American territories was very much built upon Indigenous foundations, and on Indigenous terms' (49). Likewise, Rebecca Shumway insists that the Fanti drew a reluctant British empire into the Gold Coast of West Africa to protect them against the expansionist Asanti. According to Justin Brooks, the Highland Scots, North American Indians, and Bengalis all played 'determinative roles in contesting or reshaping' (300) the British imperial agenda despite its 'genocidal intent' (281) toward them. Meanwhile, an imperial agenda all but disappeared in the 'tangle of politics' (137) that Sujit Sivasundaram describes as the distinguishing feature of the Persian Gulf in the age of revolution.

Finally, a third group of chapters addresses the social encounters and cultural exchanges that occurred between Indigenous peoples and agents of the British empire. Kate Fullagar focuses on two individuals – the Cherokee Ostenaco and the Ra'iatean Mai – who journeyed to London to advance the interests of their peoples. So did the Ojibwe leader and Methodist preacher Shawundais (aka John Sunday), whose career is recounted by Elspeth Martini. Whereas Fullagar stresses the particularistic agendas of Ostenaco and Mai, Martini argues that Shawundais gained 'a more global sense of other Indigenous peoples' similar struggles' (322) from his time in London. The role that Christianity played in the Indigenous engagement with empire is highlighted by Tony Ballantyne. His chapter on the first CMS mission in New Zealand stresses the mutuality of that engagement: the mission was entangled in Māori politics even as the Māori became increasingly entangled in the agenda of empire. Nicole Ulrich describes a very different dynamic in the Cape of Good Hope, where a more fully entrenched colonial system's exploitation of slaves, sailors, the Khoisan, and other subaltern groups provoked popular radicalism and revolt.

A couple of caveats about the editors' professed objectives. Despite their assertion that the Age of Revolution was 'a particularly crucial era' (4) for those who faced empire, it seems little more than a chronological convenience – and a fairly flexible one at that – for conjoining a disparate array of encounters. And despite the editors' insistence that the volume is intended to initiate a comparative examination of Indigenous experiences of empire in this era, they largely leave that task to the reader. Fortunately, the chapters themselves provide plenty of material for the reader to work with.

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Falling Backwards: Australian Historical Fiction and the History Wars
By Jo Jones. Perth: UWA Publishing, 2018. Pp. 273. A$39.99 paper.

I was about to begin writing this review when I read an article by Grace Karskens in the latest *Griffith Review*, concerning a visit she recently made to Dyarubbin (aka the Hawkesbury River) in the company of three Darug women and the historian/archaeologist Paul Irish. Together they are uncovering the Aboriginal history of the early settlers' farms that flank the river – a hidden history that runs in parallel (and sometimes conflicts) with the well-known pioneer history of this country. The name of their project, 'The Real Secret River: Dyarubbin', instantly brings to mind Kate Grenville's award-winning novel, which of course is set on the Hawkesbury.

The Secret River, and the controversy that greeted its publication, provides a touchstone