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Conspiracy of Interests Iroquois Dispossession and the Rise of New York State. By Laurence M. Hauptman.

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**Conspiracy of Interests: Iroquois Dispossession and the Rise of New York State.** By Laurence M. Hauptman. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999. 304 pages. \$34.95 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

The “conspiracy of interests” in Laurence Hauptman’s title is the collection of self-reinforcing industrial engines that propelled the European-American settlement frontier through upstate New York—Iroquois country—mostly during the first half of the nineteenth century. Hauptman’s book presents a fascinating study of the various interlocking interest groups that won when the Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas, and Mohawks lost most of their land. While their land base was severely diminished (the Cayuga to this day have no land in New York State), most of the Iroquois resisted removal westward.

Hauptman combines the narrative of dispossession (most of it familiar to students of Iroquois history) with another set of historical events: the land-speculation business, especially as it related to the development of canal transportation in New York State. The importance of analyzing all these events in tandem cannot be overstated. During 1825, as the Erie Canal opened its westward portal near Buffalo, New York, providing barge links for the first time between eastern urban areas and the Great Lakes, Buffalo was a tiny hamlet. All but two of Buffalo’s handful of residences had been burned to the ground by the advancing British during the War of 1812. It was the Erie Canal, “the mother of cities,” which made Buffalo, a city whose population rose to 42,000 in 1850 and 81,129 in 1860 (p. 101).

Within three decades of the Erie Canal’s opening, on the eve of the Civil War, Buffalo was the ninth largest city in the United States, and one of its major transportation centers. Suffice it to say—as Hauptman describes in lavish detail—a large number of Senecas lost land in and near the hills that became Buffalo. Hauptman points out that an extensive canal system was presented as a harbinger of national defense as well as a purveyor of commerce, two professed attributes of the interstate highway system when it was initiated during the 1950s.

Hauptman follows a complex documentary trail, utilizing memoirs, letters, newspapers, personal correspondence, and records of state income from its canals. He also possesses a good historical reporter’s ear for descriptive phrases, such as when he describes Skennandoah, the Oneida leader, remarking that alcohol “made mice” of the Oneidas in the face of white men, “who are cats” (p. 47).

According to Hauptman, no other Indian community was affected more by the Erie Canal than Skennandoah’s Oneidas. The canal and its associated waves of European-American transients ran directly through the most fertile Oneida lands. Five million acres of these lands were shaved, acre by acre, to about thirty acres by the mid-twentieth century. It should be noted that since then, profits from the Turning Stone Casino have allowed Ray Halbritter’s Oneida enterprises to repurchase several thousand acres of local land.

Hauptman makes skillful use of statistics to illustrate just how swiftly the canal system opened Iroquois lands for non-Indian utilization, with or without legal title. Many land cessions were arranged with liberal use of liquor and bribes, as well as encouragement of multiple factional conflicts among various

Iroquois leaders. Many of the “sales,” including the blatantly fraudulent Buffalo Creek Treaty of 1838 (afflicting the Senecas) were carried out in violation of the federal non-intercourse acts, which forbade alienation of land by state-level interests lacking federal approval. Disregard of these provisions has proved instrumental in several modern land-claims suits in Iroquoia and elsewhere, notably in Maine.

To my knowledge, *Conspiracy of Interests* is the first work that correlates the loss of Iroquois land base during the early nineteenth century to the growth of state tolls from the Erie Canal (330 percent between 1836 and 1856). The merit of this book is not so much the novelty of its parts, but the deftness with which Hauptman intertwines the various elements.

The land-speculation industry had permeated the state government at Albany by the early nineteenth century, turning the dispossession of the Iroquois into a civil and commercial imperative. Along the way, Several self-described “friends of the Indian,” according to Hauptman, “used their strategic positions to undermine the Indian land base from the mid-1780s on” (p. 58). Most notable among these persons was Peter Schuyler, who to Hauptman was “the major player in the events leading to the dispossession of these Indians” (p. 58). Schuyler, like few others, embodied the common interests of land speculation with other political and commercial interests sweeping over Iroquoia at this time.

As a United States senator during the postrevolutionary period, Schuyler was one of New York’s most powerful individuals. Political power translated directly into some of the largest private land holdings in central New York. Here and elsewhere, policymakers doubled as land speculators. Sometimes speculators did their best to make public policy, as when the Ogden Land Company became one of the leading advocates of Iroquois removal west of the Missouri River—all the better to conduct company business in what had been until recently Iroquois homelands.

Although his historical narrative ends, for the most part, before present time, Hauptman’s book helps to inform debate over present-day news in upstate New York, where each Iroquois nation has an ongoing legal struggle to address parts of the dispossession that Hauptman describes. The Onondagas, for example, have a claim to portions of the Syracuse urban area—one indication of the historical and legal stakes that Hauptman describes in *Conspiracy of Interests*.

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**Coosa: The Rise and Fall of a Southeastern Mississippian Chiefdom.** By Marvin T. Smith. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2000. 147 pages. \$49.95 cloth.

In this brief book, Marvin T. Smith accomplishes several remarkable feats. He brings to life a prehistoric Native American polity and links the historic past