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The Edge of the Woods: Iroquoia, 1534-1701. By Jon Parmenter.

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of performance” within an American Indian world version (95). Ceremonies literally make and remake a world that is animate, dynamic, and unfolding, rather than inert, fixed, and finished, a world continually being created by procedures and performances—the “dances of persons” alluded to in the title.

This sketch of the book’s key elements can only hint at the richness of its extraordinary and unique accomplishment. In scope, ambition, and (respectful) success, I know of no other work that comes close. More than a stunningly creative synthesis of relevant scholarship from within both the analytic and indigenous philosophical traditions, its highly original, extended argument exposes and erodes deeply entrenched assumptions about the inferiority of indigenous thought. Moreover, in the process of refurbishing constructivism so that it can display the intricacy, subtlety, and conceptual sophistication of an American Indian world version, Norton-Smith sets out a well-developed philosophical position in its own right. Finally, the denigration and dismissal of indigenous knowledge systems has been a global phenomenon that has accompanied, eased, and sustained the rise of the state system, and thus this “constructivist rendering of the Native world” (135) has significant implications for indigenous peoples not only in North America, but globally.

*Laurelyn Whitt*

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**The Edge of the Woods: Iroquoia, 1534–1701.** By Jon Parmenter. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010. 474 pages. \$49.95 cloth.

This innovative and provocative work asks scholars to rethink what they thought they knew about Iroquoian history before the Great Peace of 1701. Each chapter begins with an event that Parmenter ties to a specific aspect of the Iroquois condolence ceremony, allowing the author not only to develop a chronological structure, but also to place the reader within a particularly Iroquoian frame of reference. As a result, readers find themselves referencing the events described from an Iroquoian perspective, rather than the traditional Euro-American position. The “Edge of the Woods” portion of the condolence ceremony is centrally important. Arguing that this ritual “marks the metaphorical boundary between the secure/civilized/home and the dangerous/uncivilized/outlands in Iroquois symbolic thought” (xlvi), Parmenter shows how Iroquoians used the component parts of this ceremony to incorporate new people, new land, and new ideas into the *kanosioni* (or extended lodge) that represented the Five Nations in the years 1534 to 1701. This is where

Parmenter locates a new understanding of Iroquoian actions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

To make his case, Parmenter reminds the reader that the first part of the Iroquois creation story ceremony involves lamenting “the loss of ritual knowledge” and the second stage “delivers rules” to the new office holder about the office he is about to assume (xlvi). It does so, however, with an understanding that the new chief would operate from a different perspective (xlvi). The result is a cultural tradition that acknowledges change while maintaining its connection with the past. Adaptation is the underlying theme, so rather than seeing Iroquoian political and social culture as fixed in time, the author finds that change was the norm among the Five Nations.

Parmenter challenges the importance of “upstreaming” as a methodological tool for understanding Iroquois history in that upstreaming projects information from “better-documented eras into the distant past,” reducing Iroquoian culture to those items that “manifest stability or continuity over time” (xxxi–xxxii). This approach has produced the notion that there is a rigid Iroquoian homeland and a static Iroquoian culture for the period. By focusing on change, especially in the realm of spatial mobility or geographic knowledge, Parmenter challenges the notion that one particular period of time, or one specific location, is more authentically Iroquoian than another.

Thus, as well as emphasizing the importance of change in Iroquoian culture, the book examines League efforts to extend its kinship networks beyond its “established” territories. Nowhere were these efforts more successful than in the St. Lawrence River Valley. Earlier scholars, such as K. I. Koppedraayer, have seen communities such as Kahnawake or La Prairie de la Madelaine as places where Iroquois Christians, often Iroquoian adoptees, could be segregated from both Europeans and their indigenous kin, with the implicit argument that Kahnawake or La Prairie were not truly Iroquoian. Here the author’s familiarity with both archaeological and historical sources proves invaluable. Parmenter uses the archeological evidence to show how these communities assumed particularly Iroquoian characteristics.

He also argues that the residents of these communities offered wonderful opportunities for the Five Nations. In addition to being familiar with trade routes, local resources, and having similar cultural patterns, adoptees had knowledge of the Europeans who were making their way up the St. Lawrence River. As a result, incorporating these Laurentian Iroquois and adoptive Algonquians into their kinship networks “had important spatial consequences” for the Five Nations. Indeed, they were essential for implementing Iroquoian strategies toward Algonquian neighbors and the French.

Far from weakening the Iroquois Confederacy, these St. Lawrence villages were vital to it. First, as locations where “a comprehensive pattern of outreach

to New France and New Netherlands after 1645” could occur, they aided the Iroquois *kaswentha* tradition, or two-row diplomacy (62). Second, by establishing a Five Nations presence in New France, these communities literally represented the *kanosioni* or extended lodge of the Five Nations. Over time, these communities became places where traditional Iroquoian values—reciprocity, traditional hospitality, and communal harmony—continued to exist, even while European forays into Iroquoia challenged the Five Nations’ ability to maintain these values. Third, officials in New France certainly saw communities such as Kahnawake as integrated into the Five Nations by kinship, and as a result these communities offered the Five Nations unique economic and diplomatic opportunities. In 1691, for example, Intendant Champigny gave up any hope that Laurentian warriors could be used in New France’s struggle against the Confederacy and sent them “exclusively on campaigns against New England” (216).

Parmenter also rejects the practice of dividing Iroquois leadership into Francophile, Anglophile, and neutralist camps, instead viewing Iroquois leaders such as Garacontié, Onnonougaren, or Teganissorens as independent. These men used their diplomatic relationships with various European powers to pursue uniquely Iroquoian policy objectives—whether it was territorial expansion, intertribal alliances, securing new adoptees, economic opportunity, or limiting European access to the *pays d’en haut* (north country). Limiting access was certainly the objective in 1701 with the response of Teganissorens and the Onondaga to the arrival of royal engineer Willem Wolfgang Römer. Römer came to Onondaga with a party intent on surveying the region. Teganissorens and his followers forced the surveyor to retire before he could accomplish anything, but not because they were “neutral” in their position toward either European power. They were trying to maintain their monopoly over the region’s geography. By controlling this geographic knowledge, the Five Nations could limit European success in the region, whether diplomatically with other indigenous groups or economically by controlling how many furs came out of the *pays d’en haut* in a year. Such power allowed the Five Nations to engage “the new European presence on Iroquois terms,” rather than on European ones (18).

The coherence of Parmenter’s narrative relies upon his argument that the Five Nations emphasis on *kaswentha* was more than just a metaphor for conducting relations with the new immigrants from Europe. *Kaswentha* allowed Iroquois spokesmen to simultaneously negotiate with the French or English while attacking Algonquian groups allied with both European nations. *Kaswentha* was a relationship between peoples “based on mutual benefit and noninterference” (24). While many scholars have examined the “mutual benefit” side of the equation, Parmenter is interested in what “noninterference” meant. In focusing on terms such as *kaswentha* and *kanosioni*, and then reading the

documents in light of how Iroquois (not Europeans) might have interpreted the diplomatic decisions, Parmenter offers a rich and vibrant historic overview of Iroquoia before 1701.

Some Algonquian scholars may feel that the author has downplayed the significance of Iroquoian losses during the Beaver Wars, particularly in the Ohio Valley, and others may fret that the author has ignored actual favoritism toward the French or English among Iroquoian leaders. Nevertheless, Parmenter has returned the Iroquois Confederacy to an important (if not preeminent) position in our understanding of the contest for control of the American interior during the seventeenth century.

In his recent study *The Elusive West*, Paul Mapp has documented how Euro-American knowledge about the “West” foundered when there was no single dominant power, lingua franca, or ceremonial rite that allowed for the transference of that knowledge from one culture to another. Parmenter’s examination of spatial mobility and the geographic awareness it produced in the context of the condolence ceremony shows what happened when this common cultural link was present: it brought new peoples into the Iroquoian sphere, enlarged their geographic knowledge, and limited French and English awareness of the *pays d’en haut*. The Iroquois controlled the geographic knowledge necessary to dominate the first American West, and they used that control to further their own ends.

Finally, the book’s epilogue represents a welcome trend in scholarly writing: contemporary application. Parmenter wants his work to have relevance in Indian country today. He hopes his work will help Iroquoian peoples in Canada and the United States fight governmental attempts “to disqualify many Iroquoian people and communities” from claiming “indigenous citizenship and nationhood” (279). How successful his efforts will be is unknown, but it is a worthy goal.

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**Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England.**  
By Jean M. O’Brien. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 320 pages. \$75.00 cloth; \$25.00 paper.

Near the Merrimack Valley town where I live, a sign proclaims that this area was once known as “Old Dunstable . . . the original town chartered by Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1673, which embraced parts of New Hampshire and Massachusetts.” Such signs are ubiquitous in New England. Anyone