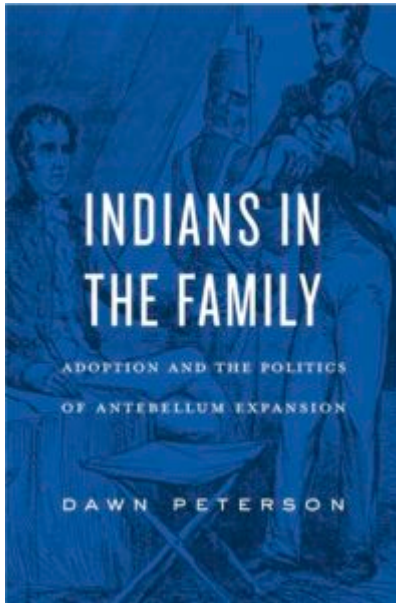


Manufacturing Kin



Dawn Peterson, *Indians in the Family: Adoption and the Politics of Antebellum Expansion*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017. 432 pp., \$39.95.

Why would Molly McDonald, a prominent Choctaw woman, place her eleven-year-old son in the care of American government official Silas Dinsmoor, a man who had already expressed his judgment that Choctaws were inferior? And why would Dinsmoor readily accept Molly's son James McDonald into his home? Untangling this contradiction, that McDonald's and Dinsmoor's seemingly opposing interests would converge in McDonald's son, is the goal of Dawn Peterson's new monograph *Indians in the Family* (1). Peterson finds that the arrangement between McDonald and Dinsmoor was not so unusual in the antebellum period. Many indigenous families chose to send their children, most frequently boys, to live and learn among white families. Native families hoped that these sons would gain English literacy and some fluency in American culture and perhaps forge some bonds of affinity or obligation with their white benefactors. For their part, white patriarchs such as Dinsmoor "framed their actions as a part of a broader initiative on the part of their new republic to assimilate Indian people into its expanding territorial borders" (2). Not surprisingly, these goals came into conflict. Native sons used their educations to protect indigenous sovereignty and to oppose American efforts to seize Native territory. Americans then accused such Natives of not being "real Indians" who pursued their own personal interests rather than what was best for Native people.

Peterson organizes her study into nine largely chronological chapters that follow several families and their experiences with adoption. Her first chapter describes the emerging racial hierarchy in the years after the American Revolution. People such as Thomas Jefferson made judgments about the place of various categories of people in the social order. In chapter two Peterson shows

that Native leaders such as Seneca chief Cornplanter turned to the placement of their children in white households to create kinship ties and diplomatic relationships to protect Native sovereignty following the American Revolution. The third chapter traces the contours of Silas Dinsmoor's life as well as the social and cultural practices he encountered among the Choctaws. Peterson sketches an overview of Molly McDonald's life in the next chapter to further illuminate why some Southeastern Natives chose to send their children into white homes. In matrilineal societies such as the Choctaws, fathers were benevolent kin who did not make many demands of their children. Rather, maternal kin had greater responsibility for a child's education and upbringing and a greater claim to a child's loyalty. Peterson suggests McDonald may have viewed Dinsmoor in this light. Thus, McDonald likely did not see her son James's placement with Dinsmoor as a threat to her traditional authority over her child.

Chapter five centers on the household of future President Andrew Jackson. Peterson reframes the acclaimed "Indian fighter's" decision to incorporate the Creek boy Lyncoya into his household as similar to Native captivity practices in which Natives adopted the child of an enemy. In a departure from traditional Native practice, however, Jackson gifted Lyncoya to his young son. Peterson's sixth chapter describes Superintendent of Indian Trade Thomas McKenney's strategies for civilizing Native peoples such as the factory system, in which the federal government traded manufactured goods for hides and furs; federally supported mission schools to educate Native children; and apprenticeship to further train them. Peterson poses the question of whether James McDonald's time with McKenney was "apprenticeship or kinship" and concludes that it was the former: "There was never any talk of inheritance or property rights, of McDonald's eventual return to the McKenney household for holidays or family events" (195).

Next Peterson deploys James McDonald as an example of the many Native young men educated within white families who returned to Native communities and served as diplomats. Much to the chagrin of officials such as McKenney, these young men often became staunch defenders of Native sovereignty and land rights rather than allies to American imperialism. Peterson also asserts the centrality of property rights in slaves of African descent to McDonald's defense of Choctaw sovereignty. Chapter eight outlines some of the provisions of the Choctaw constitution and conditions at the Choctaw Academy. The constitution included prohibitions on interracial sex between Choctaws or whites and enslaved people that suggest that the Choctaws had much in common with their white neighbors; however, the Choctaws also reserved the right to determine citizenship and preserved Choctaw women's property rights, both of which affirmed the nation's sovereignty. Peterson contends that young men attending the Choctaw Academy at Blue Springs, Kentucky, tested the limits of masculine authority in their assumption of sexual access to the enslaved black women in Richard Mentor Johnson's household. Johnson did not oppose indigenous men's rights to the bodies of enslaved black women; rather, he opposed their access to his property.

The final chapter of *Indians in the Family* turns to Removal policy. Native men educated in American settings often worked to defend indigenous sovereignty, which Peterson argues created a shift in thinking: Natives who adopted American practices regarding property, slavery, and governance were no longer seen as positive and exemplary by American officials. Instead figures such as Andrew Jackson began describing such Natives as not “truly Indians” (279). Thus, ironically, the presence of educated Native young men who pursued legal action in American courts, addressed American legislative bodies, and created written constitutions did not confirm the success of American acculturation efforts; rather, it threatened American efforts to seize Native land.

Peterson posits that “the politics of adoption took on singular importance, becoming a means to define citizenship within a slaveholding republic and to undermine indigenous resistance struggles based upon pan-Indian unity movements and transatlantic commercial, trade, and military alliances with European empires” (8). She defines adoption to encompass a variety of practices of differing duration aimed at incorporating Native people in the American polity (3). Thus, Greenwood Leflore’s five years with the Donly family in Nashville, Lyncoya’s life with Andrew Jackson’s family until Lyncoya’s death at the age of 16, and James McDonald’s time with Quakers, Dinsmoor, and Thomas McKenney are all forms of adoption. The differences in these situations, however, warrant more discussion. Moreover, in the Southeastern native communities that Peterson focuses on, formal adoption transformed an outsider into an insider with clan membership and all of the attendant rights and obligations. James McDonald’s mother, Molly, and Greenwood Leflore’s parents did not imagine their sons losing their clan affiliations because of the time spent living with American families. Similarly, as Peterson points out, many of the white families who “adopted” such sons saw the experience as temporary and did not fully incorporate Indian youths as kin. In some ways, Americans used the language of adoption to obfuscate that kin was not being created at all.

Peterson uses a variety of sources in this work including the papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, personal papers, and official correspondence from the Office of Indian Affairs and the Secretary of War. She focuses largely on Southeastern Natives, especially the Choctaws, and bookends this study with the American Revolution and Removal. In the end, Peterson argues that Americans used ideas about adopting Native youths in their households to “mask the violence of U. S. territorial expansion, Indian dispossession, and African American servitude,” while for Native people the practice was a way to protect Native sovereignty (312). These cross-purposes came to a tragic head in the forced Removal of indigenous peoples from the American Southeast.

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