

Masters of the Middle Waters: Indian Nations and Colonial Ambitions along the Mississippi

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After the famine, for example, Irish-born farm men and women who arrived from the East had made several stops before permanently settling in midwestern states. Most had acquired American farming skills and accumulated a cash reserve to purchase land and support themselves until they could raise crops for livestock and sale. Walch's study encourages us to ask whether this trend applied to Iowa as it did to Minnesota and Nebraska. Moreover, did the clergy primarily encourage immigrants from the eastern cities to settle in Iowa? Or did they seek those who arrived directly from Ireland? Why did the bishops forgo attempts at organized colonization after the famine? Was it a matter of insufficient land, money, or interest? Who came to Iowa in terms of gender and age?

Walch's study encourages us to ask other questions. He notes that Irish women immigrants were opportunists, not victims. They had the physical and mental strength to leave Ireland forever and create a new life. Who were they? In the absence of letters and diaries, what can census records tell us about them? The Sisters of Mercy made a major contribution to health care, and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary operated a parish school in Dubuque. What can we learn about their work in terms of medical care and curriculum? Moreover, since the Irish primarily lived in Iowa's cities, did they come to dominate city services and government?

Although never the predominant immigrant group in Iowa, the Irish, like others, saw Iowa as a place to begin anew. Their footprint remains on the state's history from Loras College in Dubuque and St. Ambrose University in Davenport to abandoned railroad trestles and heritage farms. Walch's brief survey of the Irish in Iowa is intended for the state's history enthusiasts and readers of Irish heritage. The subject awaits other scholars to provide details and qualifications.

Masters of the Middle Waters: Indian Nations and Colonial Ambitions along the Mississippi, by Jacob F. Lee. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019. 360 pp. 11 photos, 4 maps, notes, index. \$39.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Robert Michael Morrissey is associate professor of history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *Empire by Collaboration: Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country* (2015).

Masters of the Middle Waters is a major contribution to the colonial and indigenous history of Iowa and the Midwest generally. The title is an adaptation of an ethnonym, *Ni-u-kon-ska*, by which Osage people once knew themselves, and which translated to "Children of the Middle

Waters" (9). The premise of Lee's book is that power in the Midwest rested on control of important waterways, in particular the Mississippi, Illinois, and Wabash Rivers. Indigenous groups—including especially the Illinois, Chickasaw, and Osage nations—as well as would-be European and eventually American imperialists built and maintained power in this region often by controlling important "choke points" on these rivers (9, 91, etc.). In a certain sense, this framework echoes W. J. Eccles's long-ago insight about how New France was a "river empire." But where Eccles centered on (and, Lee's book leaves no doubt, exaggerated the significance of) the French, the most powerful actors in this book are Native people. Like Michael McDonnell's recent *Masters of Empire*, which showed how the Odawa achieved critical imperial power by controlling the straights of Michilimackinac, Lee's book tells a Native-centered story about how indigenous people controlled territory and built power on the riverways of the mid-continent, forcing Europeans to play by their rules or fail.

The "rules" by which indigenous people created and maintained their power, and to which Europeans had to adapt, were the rules of kinship and family. Lee's great thematic innovation in this book is to see early midwestern history through the lens of kinship-based social networks, complex webs of relationships that were often much more important than strictly economic or military alliances, and in fact were the basis of them. In a brilliant analysis, Lee shows how Indians and Europeans relied on kinship as the most stable and mutually comprehensible space for building relationships. Through marriage, adoption, and other forms of fictive and real kinship, indigenous and European people created the truly important institutions of empire, the bedrock of political, economic, and military power.

The book opens with a tour-de-force of historical reconstruction of "ancient history" in the Mississippi Valley. Following in the path of Juliana Barr, Robbie Ethridge, and others, Lee begins his book by integrating precolonial indigenous history (once problematically known as "pre-history") into the main drama of the creation of Native power in the early Midwest. The resulting chapter, "In Cahokia's Wake," synthesizes a dazzling array of archaeological and ethnohistorical literature on the indigenous past of nearly the entire upper Mississippi watershed. To this reader, the chapter is the most impressive example of its kind in all recent early American scholarship, a signal achievement especially given the extraordinary complexity of the post-Cahokia archaeological record in the Midwest. Suggesting that the roots of indigenous kinship-based social networks were planted in this distant past, Lee emphasizes "the well-ordered social and political world" (47) that emerged in the Midwest after the fall of Cahokia, and that shaped all that was to come.

French people arrived in this world in the late 1600s, but they hardly transformed it to any “imperial” purpose. Cross-cultural conversions happened in both directions, but most of the power continued to rest in long-standing indigenous kinship networks, particularly outside of tiny European beachheads like Kaskaskia. As Lee shows in another one of the book’s impressively innovative chapters, French ambitions to mediate between the Chickasaw, Illinois, and Miami — let alone to project imperial power outright — failed. Except in certain individual and short-term cases, French officials remained outside of these indigenous networks, which limited their power. When British officials and merchants tried to establish a foothold in the region, as did the Philadelphia-based merchant George Morgan, who arrived in the Illinois Country in the 1760s, they, too, largely failed to gain access to social networks that controlled trade in the midcontinent. More successful, as Lee shows in a chapter that might be of the most interest to readers of early Iowa history, were the kinship networks established by Osages and ethnically French families like the Chouteaus in Spanish-controlled upper Louisiana. In the final chapter, Lee narrates how American empire worked in what had become the region’s familiar patterns, gaining crucial control over riverways by extending kinship networks between prominent Anglo elites and Francophone upper Louisiana families, who now used their influence to help dispossess the indigenous peoples with whom they had previously built their power.

This book takes its place among the best recent works in a recent outpouring of scholarship on early midwestern history. Lee’s original argument is backed by superb research, and his narrative style is engaging. Those interested in the indigenous and colonial history of the Mississippi Valley will find this book indispensable.

How the West Was Drawn: Mapping, Indians, and the Construction of the Trans-Mississippi West, by David Bernstein. Borderlands and Transcultural Studies Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. xvii, 303 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$65 hardcover.

Reviewer Rebekah M. K. Mergenthal is associate professor of history at Pacific Lutheran University. Her research explores the accommodations and exclusions among the variety of racial and ethnic groups in the lower Missouri River valley during the first half of the nineteenth century.

In *How the West Was Drawn*, David Bernstein argues that “Indians were central to the cartographic creation of the trans-Mississippi United States” during the nineteenth century and thus must be put “squarely into stories of American state building” (3, 11). Building on insights from previous works of the “new Indian history,” including those of Kathleen DuVal,