Enduring Nations: Native Americans in the Midwest

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structure, with information gained from research, traveling in the landscape, and interviewing people. The book is filled with vivid characters, both historical and contemporary, and illustrates the varying ways one can get to know a river and its landscape — by canoe, walking, caving, or driving, for example.

Our public discussions about rivers these days are dominated by science and policy. We understand something about pollutants, ecological integrity, and the difficulties of managing a flowing body of water. Harder to grasp are the ways a river means something — its varying significance to the many people who draw sustenance from it. This is the realm of history and literature, of the humanities, and it is a perspective sadly lacking from our current debate. Faldet’s book demonstrates the critical importance of story for understanding a place, and it serves as a model of how a river book can be done.


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The essays in Enduring Nations cover a wide scope of subjects about the indigenous peoples of the American Midwest. David Edmunds, one of the nation’s leading historians of Native Americans, has assembled a fine group of scholars who have contributed their scholarship to make this superb book. The purpose is clear that the native people of this region helped to define its history and they are still here in the twenty-first century. The essays document how the indigenous people of the region have changed their own cultures to certain degrees while retaining their native identities. Organized into a dozen well-written chapters, the book’s topics range from early Illinois Indians to women and social welfare on the White Earth Reservation. All of the chapters are balanced and demonstrate sound scholarship.

Edmunds sets the tone of the book with his introduction describing the resilience of the native nations of the Midwest. The three maps following the introduction provide a visual geography of where the native groups resided and important historical points such as trading posts. Three photographs accompany Susan Sleeper-Smith’s essay on the white Indian Frances Slocum. Possibly the only criticism of the book is that more photographs would have enhanced the other essays.
Alan G. Shackelford does a splendid job of describing the Illinois Indians and their relations with the French in the 1670s and thereafter. Shackelford concludes that the cordial Illinois, who were accustomed to change, interacted with the French colonial settlements to reshape the history of the region. Lucy Eldersveld Murphy’s essay, “‘Their Women Quite Industrious Miners’: Native American Lead Mining in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1788–1832,” illustrates the same point. Murphy adds a new dimension by showing how native women participated in the shared experience of the Midwest, and she also provides new information in writing about Ho-Chunk women working as lead miners in an area that was a part of the future states of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa.

Iowa and western Illinois become more of the focus in Thomas Burnell Colbert’s essay, “‘The Hinge on Which All Affairs of the Sauk and Fox Indian Turn’: Keokuk and the United States Government.” Colbert describes Keokuk’s diplomatic skills and shrewd leadership as he negotiated for his people after Black Hawk’s defeat in 1832. Iowans are likely familiar with the Sauk and Meskwaki (Fox), but Colbert helps to lift Keokuk to the national stage of American Indian leaders. In “The Ohio Shawnees’ Struggle against Removal, 1814–30,” Steven Warren shows the effectiveness of another native leader, Black Hoof of the Shawnees. Warren demonstrates the resilience of the Shawnees in resisting removal from their Ohio homeland as they founded a new nation in the West. Bradley J. Birzer’s essay, “Jean Baptiste Richardville: Miami Métis,” addresses another native biography. Birzer describes the mixed-blooded Richardville as a shrewd businessman, much like Colbert’s depiction of Keokuk. Both chose to identify with native people, but Birzer notes that such individuals helped to shape the history of the Midwest. Susan Sleeper-Smith writes about a similar person in “Resistance to Removal: The ‘White Indian,’ Frances Slocum.” But this story is about a white captive who became a native woman among the Miamis. During the removal of her Indian tribe, she reinvented herself as a white woman to survive. This essay points out the complexity of native history in the Midwest, involving tribes and individuals, men and women, in transition.

In his essay, “Michigan Murder Mysteries: Death and Rumor in the Age of Indian Removal,” Gregory Evans Dowd illustrates how rumors and presumptions added to uncertainty about what was happening in the Midwest during the Indian removal era. Case studies by Dowd use the examples of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft reading his own obituary in 1846, rumors of removal for the Ottawa and Ojibwe, and the rumored murder of John Tanner. In “Reworking Ethnicity: Gender,
Work Roles, and Contending Redefinitions of the Great Lakes Métis, 1820–42,” Rebecca Kugel shows how the roles of people changed in the native Midwest. External influences of missionaries, trade relations, and working for white men altered the Indian world. Kugel concludes that the métis adjusted to these changes. In the twentieth century, native people, especially the youth, learned to live like non-Indians, as demonstrated in Brenda J. Child’s essay, “A New Seasonal Round: Government Boarding Schools, Federal Work Programs, and Ojibwe Family Life during the Great Depression.” Child reminds us that for those who stayed in the Midwest, the change proved greater than for those native people who removed to the West.

Following World War II, James LeGrand writes in his essay, “Indian Work and Indian Neighborhoods: Adjusting to Life in Chicago during the 1950s,” the pace of change increased as native people became a part of life in Chicago. That put native identities at risk. LeGrand proves that the new urban Indian became a part of the native Midwest. Brian Hosmer adds to this point in his essay, “Blackjack and Lumberjack: Economic Development and Cultural Identity in Menominee Country.” Hosmer also demonstrates that the Menominees became successful in the white man’s business world in the lumber and gaming industries. In “White Earth Women and Social Welfare,” Melissa Meyer concludes that the Anishinaabe women contributed to the economic and political life of the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota. On the reservation, Meyer demonstrates, the women adjusted their ways to survive and succeed.

Overall, this is a major contribution to the literature on the history of native peoples of the Midwest. The essays are very readable and accessible to students at all levels. The final message of Enduring Nations is that native people adjusted to their cultures, altered their roles, participated in the new mainstream society in many ways, operated businesses, and helped to reshape the history of the Midwest.


This short book is a collection of odd, mal-fitting chapters loosely held together by a vague connection to the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The author is quick to say that she “did not write these essays with the