

From Furs to Farms: The Transformation of the Mississippi Valley, 1762–1825

John Reda

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John Reda's relatively succinct and pointed history of the white settlement of the Mississippi Valley challenges the oversimplified and convenient notion of Manifest Destiny.

Before the American Revolution, before the crowded and violent land rush of westward expansion, the "Illinois Country" of the Upper Mississippi River—what are now the states of Missouri and Illinois—was populated by several Native American tribes that existed in relative harmony with foreign traders. *From Furs to Farms* effectively paints a picture not of an idyllic and empty frontier waiting to be subdued, but of a bustling, multiracial, multicultural international boundary economically bound by the powerful fur trade. After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, however, the Mississippi Valley economy was slowly re-gearred toward agriculture as white American settlers sought to take advantage of the area's rich riparian bottomlands.

The transition was not beneficial for all. As the book unequivocally clarifies, the expansion of American sovereignty went hand-in-hand with white supremacy. Not only did the issue of slavery complicate the statehoods of Missouri and Illinois, but past diplomacy and treaties with Native Americans were eschewed in favor of "Indian removal," both through continued violence and through the mass relocation of tribes that would take place in the Jackson presidency.

Like the work of all diligent, mindful scholars, Reda's account of history is complex. Readers are reacquainted with intrepid American legends like Lewis and Clark, yet, at the same time, are reminded that the Manifest Destiny of a nascent empire cost other people their homeland and freedom. As Reda points out, these political and ideological incongruities would break open in the Civil War and persist well into the following century. *From Furs to Farms* is a consequential read that aids our understanding of America's mighty yet contradictory legacy.

SCOTT NEUFFER (Summer 2016)

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