

Mastering the Inland Seas: How Lighthouses, Navigational Aids, and Harbors Transformed the Great Lakes and America, by Theodore J. Karamanski. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020. ix, 368 pp. Bibliography, illustrations, notes, index. \$36.95 paperback.

Reviewer James Feldman is a professor of history and environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

In the past several decades, historians have spent considerable time debating the boundaries of distinct geographic regions (the West and the South) and also of less distinct regions (the Borderlands and the Atlantic World). In these debates, historians and scholars have mostly overlooked the Great Lakes and the American Midwest—overlapping regions with distinct histories and characteristics and with largely unappreciated contributions to the larger framework of North American history. In *Mastering the Inland Seas*, Theodore Karamanski urges historians to consider this underappreciated region. “To understand the importance of the Great Lakes,” suggests Karamanski, “we need to appreciate them as a part of the broad pattern of North American history” (4). Karamanski focuses on lighthouses and navigational aids, arguing that it was the state-sponsored establishment of a Great Lakes navigational infrastructure that paved the way for the development of the mid-continent. The story of Great Lakes navigation, suggests Karamanski, is “fundamentally a story of state formation” (8). Private citizens and civic boosters would never have raised the capital necessary to provide navigational mastery of the inland seas. “The history of the Great Lakes region, perhaps more than any other area of the country, counters the laissez-faire, rugged individualist myth. The establishment of a distinctive maritime province in the heart of North America occurred because of government action” (9). This centralized economic activity tied the American Midwest into the emerging national economy.

Throughout, Karamanski continuously reinforces how attention to Great Lakes navigational history can deepen and broaden our understanding of national trends. For example, he explores how the development of lighthouses and other navigational aids shaped—and was shaped by—the history of Yankee mercantilism, antebellum sectional politics, and military industrialism during both World Wars. Karamanski routinely demonstrates that ignoring the role of the Great Lakes region risks misunderstanding the nation’s past.

Karamanski’s prodigious research anchors the book. He provides the kinds of gritty detail that derive only from exhaustive research in primary sources. He mines archival and newspaper collections from around the Great Lakes, the records of government agencies, diaries of ship captains, and more. He uses these sources to detail the histories of

specific ports and navigational aids, key technological innovations, and larger patterns of trade and economic activity. He sprinkles in a handful of stories about shipwrecks and life on the lakes—drawn from the letters and accounts of ship captains and lighthouse keepers—to keep the tone light and to do justice to any book with a picture of a lighthouse on the cover. Karamanski blends these details with a synthetic economic history of the Great Lakes region, building his case about the mutually reinforcing histories of navigation, economic development, and state formation. At times, the fine-grained detail obscures the book’s larger argument. On the other hand, the primary source research will surely benefit future scholars exploring similar subjects.

Some topics deserve more attention. For example, Karamanski convincingly proves that economic activity was spurred by the creation of a Great Lakes navigational infrastructure, but he devotes only a few pages to the environmental impact of these developments. Karamanski introduces the intriguing term “Marine Industrial Complex,” but the implications of this concept for regional economic and social organization could be spelled out in greater detail. These subjects might serve as points of departure for other scholars exploring the regional history of the Great Lakes and the Midwest, and *Mastering the Inland Seas* has charted a course for such studies.

When It Was Grand: The Radical Republican History of the Civil War, by LeeAnna Keith. New York: Hill and Wang, 2020. 352 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$30 hardcover.

Reviewer Melanie S. Gustafson is Professor of History at the University of Vermont. She is the author of *Women and the Republican Party* (2001) and most recently, the producer and co-director of the digital visual exhibit *Visualizing Votes for Women*.

In August 1856, a group of travelers preparing themselves for an anti-slavery war in Kansas set up an encampment in Tabor, Iowa. They had come overland from Massachusetts, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Illinois. Iowa residents, recruited as the group crossed the state, joined them. These Kansas Filibusters were led by men dedicated to the new Republican Party. More distinctly, they were Radical Republicans and Iowa was their staging ground.

LeeAnna Keith’s *When It Was Grand: The Radical Republican History of the Civil War* has little more to say about Iowa, but the events of Bleeding Kansas are described in vivid detail in early chapters. The book is divided into two parts: “Warriors Before the War” and “The War Years.” Keith writes with flair and the book is solid in its use of established