

tive, Frederick Jackson Turner, in 1893, wrote the valediction for the American frontier in his famous essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Growing up in Portage, Turner witnessed firsthand the panoply of nineteenth-century Wisconsin history. In saying his eloquent farewell to the frontier he also provided tools for historians to analyze and understand it. In *The Wisconsin Frontier*, Mark Wyman uses Turner's tools wisely and well, and demonstrates that Turner's bold schema still has utility, at least for the trans-Appalachian frontier.

In Prairie du Chien, every June, for just one weekend, it is possible to go back to the beginning of Wisconsin history. A huge rendezvous sprawls across the flats next to the Mississippi River, in the shadow of Villa Louis, a fur trader's mansion. Buckskins and tipis reappear and campfire smoke wafts across the breeze to the graves of the ancestors in the French cemetery nearby. *The Wisconsin Frontier* tells the story that rendezvous recalls and the stories of the generations who followed. Anyone interested in the history of Wisconsin, of the Great Lakes region, or of the trans-Appalachian frontier will learn much from this book.

Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic, by James Simeone. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000. ix, 289 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$38.00 cloth.

Reviewer Gunja Sengupta is assistant professor of history at Brooklyn College, City University of New York, and the author of *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860* (1996).

Scholars have long debated the pungent paradox of slavery and freedom in American society. The historian Edmund Morgan argued persuasively that the advent of black bondage helped alleviate social conflict among whites and facilitated the grant of political concessions to propertyless males in colonial Virginia. Along a similar vein, many interpreters of the antebellum South have suggested that slave society represented a "herrenvolk democracy," defined as "democratic for the master race and tyrannical for the subordinate groups" (7). Now, in a provocative new work on frontier Illinois, political scientist James Simeone reconceptualizes the dynamic between class and race in shaping the politics of democracy and slavery in a "free" state. Focusing on a campaign by a group of state legislators in the early 1820s to amend the state constitution and introduce slavery into Illinois through popular sovereignty, Simeone contends that this convention movement (as it was called) represented a populist moment in the

state's political history. The proslavery conventionists claimed to uphold the interests of the so-called "white folks"—backcountry southerners who had emigrated to Illinois in search of social and economic opportunity—against the pretensions of an arrogant elite. Offering the vision of a bottomland republic of free white yeoman farmers with equal access to slaveholding, the conventionists cast their antislavery adversaries in a mantle of aristocratic privilege. The defense of slavery became, in their hands, a rhetorical strategy to supplant the system of virtual representation embraced by the "big folks" with a government *by* as much as *for* the people. Yet their non-conventionist opponents appropriated the populist rhetoric as well, ensuring the triumph of "white folk" majoritarianism. The convention debate generated an identity politics of the "white folks"—a construction defined explicitly by class (that is, by opposition to the elites) and implicitly by race (that is, by the denial of black rights). In the end, however, the defeat of the "big folks" obviated the need to appeal to class or racial cleavages among voters and enabled the white masses to divide politically along cultural lines.

Complex and nuanced, Simeone's work demonstrates compellingly that the politics of frontier Illinois exposed the contradictions in America's liberal democratic tradition and anticipated the advent of majoritarian politics in the nation at large. What is less clear is the precise connection between politics and culture in opening breaches within the "white folk" constituency, especially as it related to slavery. Simeone suggests that in the 1820s, the politics of class conflict gave way to two distinct approaches to "white folk" politics—the Calvinistic "whole-hog" style characterized by a strong sense of group identity, and the Arminian "milk and cider" path defined by a more universalistic view of western society. According to the author, the generally proslavery conventionists usually adopted the "whole hog" perspective, and yet antislavery non-conventionists such as T. W. Smith exhibited "whole-hog" attributes most completely. What then was the relationship between one's position on salvation on the one hand and one's stance on slavery on the other? If some Calvinists supported slavery while others opposed it, to what extent is it possible to posit a relationship between religious affiliation and political ideology? Moreover, in the absence of empirical evidence on voting behavior, the question of whether the masses divided politically along the same cultural lines as their leaders remains debatable.

Notwithstanding the somewhat esoteric quality of Simeone's discussion of the politics of cultural conflict between Arminians and Calvinists, this is a valuable book. Combining the theoretical rigor of the

political scientist with meticulous archival research into the papers and writings of leading political and religious figures in frontier Illinois, the author offers penetrating insights into the nature of liberal democracy in the age of Jackson. His work reminds us that western-style republicanism configured race, class, and culture in ways that tested the limits and possibilities of democracy in nineteenth-century America and resonates in the identity politics of our own age.

Wages and Labor Markets in the United States, 1820–1860, by Robert A. Margo. NBER Series on Long-term Factors in Economic Development. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. xii, 200 pp. Tables, references, index. \$28.00 cloth.

Reviewer Mark A. Lause is assistant professor of history at the University of Cincinnati. His field is labor and reform history; his most recent work, *The Civil War's Last Campaign* (2001), is on the third party movement of 1880.

To what extent did American civilization offer a land of opportunity with relatively higher wages and more upward mobility than contemporary nations of the western world? To get beyond the rhetoric of national chauvinism requires historians and social scientists to study the often dry-as-dust record of past economic activities. Social scientists have also tried to employ often controversial models of the present state of economic life to reconstruct earlier conditions. Whether favoring an optimistic or a pessimistic assessment of such models, economists have debated whether the antebellum labor market was effective in allowing for the optimal distribution of workers and work.

Economist Robert A. Margo attempts to ground the discussion of antebellum wages and labor markets in hard statistical data. In doing so, he reaches beyond contemporary census materials and later nineteenth-century compilations into hitherto undigested payroll records for civilian employees at U.S. forts and military installations. He breaks those figures down among various census regions: the Northeast, the Midwest, the South Atlantic, and the South Central, with a separate section on California in the Gold Rush. Within those regions, he distinguishes between wages paid in three occupational categories: unskilled laborers, artisans, and white-collar workers. While seeking to translate "nominal wages" (the amount of money paid) into "real wages" (the purchasing power of that money paid), Margo also applies various formulae to adjust for the disproportionately isolated circumstances of these installations.

In the end, this masterly demonstration of the economist's art uses the available sources to construct a plausible model of wage level

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