

Book Reviews and Notices

American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State, by Stephen Aron. History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. xxi, 301 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

The Boundaries Between Us: Natives and Newcomers along the Frontiers of the Old Northwest Territory, 1750–1850, edited by Daniel P. Barr. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006. xix, 261 pp. Map, notes, bibliography, index. \$52.00 cloth.

Reviewer Rebekah M. K. Mergenthal is a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Chicago. Her dissertation is "The People of the Lower Missouri River Valley and the Expansion of the United States, 1803–1855."

The Boundaries Between Us, edited by Daniel P. Barr, and *American Confluence*, by Stephen Aron, are worthy additions to the growing literature on midwestern frontiers. The essays collected by Barr investigate "the first national frontier" (ix) of the Old Northwest Territory – what would become the states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Aron examines what he calls the "American confluence" (xiii), which he designates as the area where the Ohio and Missouri rivers meet the Mississippi. Despite their focus on different geographic locations, these books can helpfully be considered together because, following the lead of historian Richard White, both illuminate larger processes of colonialism and expansion and the implications thereof. Both volumes also focus on roughly the same time frame, the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, and foreground interactions between Indians and white settlers. Both deliberately consider their area before as well as after the United States was a factor. In that way, they importantly help us consider how and why borders shifted, as well as the meaning of those alterations for those on the ground and the kinds of intercultural accommodations that were possible. Together, Aron's book and the anthology edited by Barr provide an opportunity to understand the range and possibilities of interactions on early American frontiers.

The Boundaries Between Us begins with a succinct introduction by Barr and contains 11 original essays by scholars whose methodologies range from cultural history to legal history to anthropology. Four essays discuss the period before American presence in the area, and

seven explore continuities and discontinuities in the period when the American government tried to solidify its control of the region. Together, the articles offer a compelling look at the variety of accommodations and conflicts on the frontiers in this region. The anthology's strongest pieces are by Lisa Brooks and Ginette Aley. Brooks explores differing visions of native autonomy after the American Revolution by insightfully comparing and contrasting the views of Stockbridge Mohican leader Hendrick Aupaumut and Mohawk leader Joseph Brant. Aley intriguingly considers the links between Indian removal and the developments of the transportation revolution in Indiana. Also of particular note are the essays by Ian K. Steele and Phyllis Gernhardt. Steele explores the British and Shawnees' contrasting understandings of captivity as well as how the differences shaped the interactions between those two groups in the era of the Seven Years War. Gernhardt focuses on the crucial role of Indian traders in shaping the timing of and the extent of federal payment for the removal of the Miamis and the Potawatomis from northern Indiana. The interactions described in those and the other essays in *The Boundaries Between Us* resonate with relations on other frontiers and thus could be useful for comparison.

Unfortunately the strengths of the specific essays are not fully supported by the volume's too brief introduction. It is fine if Barr does not want to give a "definitive account of the region's history" (xviii), but a more thorough contextualization would help readers better understand the collection's broader importance. The introduction never clearly defines how the anthology uses important terms such as *frontier*, *region*, and *boundaries*, so it is not apparent how the essays together expand upon our understanding of those ideas. More broadly, it does not clarify in what ways the collection can reshape our conceptualizations of frontier history. Barr's claim that the Old Northwest territories served as a "primer" (x) for conflict and contact on later American frontiers is intriguing. However, without further elaboration or engagement with other borderlands literature, it is difficult to assess precisely what he understands the legacy of that area to have been for other frontiers. (For a more effective introduction to a collection of regionally based essays, see Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* [2004]. Although that volume considers an area far from the Midwest, the introduction frames its questions in such a way as to engage with larger historiographical trends and broader implications for other borderlands.) Without a more comprehensive introduction or more explicit thematic connections between the essays, the underlying logic that brings together the particular articles in *The Boundaries Between Us* remains a bit murky.

Thus the usefulness of the anthology for comparisons to other frontiers is less evident than it should have been because of the lack of a clearly articulated identification of its stakes.

In contrast, Stephen Aron's volume has an abundance of broad claims and sweeping analysis. *American Confluence* makes a strong case for the comparison of "how overlapping forms of colonialism mapped multiple frontiers" (xviii) and just as importantly shows how those remappings shaped and were shaped by the interactions of people on the ground. The introduction explains the distinction Aron draws between *frontier* (a meeting place of different groups) and *borderland* (a meeting place—or boundary—between different colonial regimes). Aron uses the tension between those two types of boundaries to illustrate how the French, Spanish, and British colonial powers were not able to dictate the shape of colonialism in the confluence region. Indeed, in the book's first several chapters Aron fruitfully explores the opportunities presented by the fluidity of the confluence region, and even makes the case that in the mid- to late eighteenth century that area was the best poor man's country, better than the usually designated Pennsylvania frontier.

Aron effectively moves between the larger imperial negotiations and demands of the area's diverse and changing inhabitants. In particular, the Osage become a regular touchstone for Aron as he traces the opportunities they seized and the limitations they struggled under, whether their nearest Euro-American rivals were French, Spanish, British, or American. Another strength of Aron's work is his underlying insistence on the importance of rivers in shaping the settlement of the period. On that aspect and others, *American Confluence* offers several intriguing points of comparison and contrast to those primarily interested in other frontier regions.

As the introduction makes clear, Aron wants to keep the boundaries of the confluence region loosely defined. That approach allows him to follow a variety of groups and trace a range of intercultural interactions. However, it also leads to a certain amount of fuzziness about where exactly some of those groups were located at particular times. To that end, the discussion is hampered by the book's not very detailed maps. They do not identify some places important to the story, such as the Boon's Lick area, and when Aron's attention moves farther west of the Mississippi, the maps do not follow him. That westward shift is most apparent in the last chapter, which offers a fine overview of early Missouri history. That allows Aron to illustrate his claim that once borderland conditions (the meeting of Euro-American empires) were removed from the area after the Louisiana Purchase, "the history

of congenial minglings and peaceful accommodations" was "erased" (211). Yet, with this change in focus to a bounded state, the discussion is less rich than what precedes it, perhaps in part because it moves away from the earlier emphasis on rivers. Aron also increasingly emphasizes politics and sectional negotiations and gives less consideration to the cultural interactions and negotiations on the ground than he had in previous chapters. Given this discontinuity with his earlier discussions, it is not always possible to see the full implications of the trajectory he traces.

Together, *American Confluence* and *The Boundaries Between Us* contribute to a kind of greater midwestern history for the mid-eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. Both illustrate the importance of including and understanding the range of actors in a frontier story. Giving full consideration to that variety allows these books to illuminate the richness and possibility of frontier relations, even as neither glosses over the tensions and conflicts also to be found there.

Forbidden Fruit: Love Stories from the Underground Railroad, by Betty DeRamus. New York: Atria Books, 2005. xiv, 269 pp. Illustrations, bibliographies, index. \$25.00 cloth, \$14.00 paper.

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Among the most compelling stories of the Underground Railroad are those of enslaved people who, when faced with separation from their beloveds, daringly eloped to freedom in the northern United States and Canada. Award-winning journalist Betty DeRamus turned her investigative skills and poetic sensibilities to this neglected topic, including also biracial couples. She tells the stories for a general as well as scholarly audience. She read primary and secondary accounts, explored historic sites, and interviewed descendants and local historians. The chapters are documented by separate bibliographies.

Most of the stories take place in central North America; one, chapter eight, unfolds largely in Iowa. Henry Pyles, a free mulatto, lived with his enslaved wife, Charlotta, on the farm of her owner in Kentucky. Frances Gordon inherited Charlotta and some of her children, but Frances's brothers kidnapped and sold one child and sued for control of her assets. Frances fled with the family to Keokuk, Iowa, where she freed the enslaved Pyleses and lived close by. In the 1850s the Pyleses became Underground Railroad agents.