

Book Reviews and Notices

The Upper Country: French Enterprise in the Colonial Great Lakes, by Claiborne A. Skinner. Regional Perspectives on Early America. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. xiv, 202 pp. Glossary, Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$50.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

Reviewer Justin M. Carroll is a Ph.D. candidate at Michigan State University. He is working on a dissertation titled "John Askin's Many Beneficial Binds: Sex, Servitude, and Family in the Great Lakes."

A lively and lucid work of historical synthesis, Claiborne Skinner's *The Upper Country* provides a detailed exploration of the French colonial regime in the Midwest from 1689 to 1763. By asking what triggered the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), Claiborne recovers a cast of often overlooked historical characters, such as Père Marquette, sieur de La Salle, Comte de Frontenac, Henri de Tonti, and sieur de Cadillac, whose imperial designs, political machinations, and economic interest pushed the French into the Indian-defined upper country or the *pays d'en haut*. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the fur-rich Great Lakes basin proved to be a region of perpetual imperial contestation as the Iroquois invaded the land and their British allies moved toward Canada. In the face of this threat, the French and the devastated Indians of the Great Lakes allied, successfully defeated the Iroquois, stymied the British, and secured the interior. However, as the external threat dissipated in the early eighteenth century, the French-Indian alliance became increasingly fragmented, rebellious, and internally conflicted. By the 1750s, when the British began again to push into the Ohio Valley, the French aggressively overreacted and, Skinner argues, precipitated the Seven Years' War.

Over the past 30 years, historians such as Richard White, James Merrill, Daniel Usner, and others have employed regional approaches to the encounter between Euro-Americans and American Indians to construct powerful explanatory models, and have demonstrated the importance of non-Anglo-American experiences for understanding colonial North America. By focusing largely on the Great Lakes states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, Skinner's work illuminates a history of North America that most "American students have little awareness of" (x). It thereby frames the French history of the region as central to understanding U.S. history and American identity.

As Fred Andersen argues in his magisterial *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* that the Seven Years' War was the central event of the eighteenth century, Skinner demonstrates that the standard narrative of North American history cannot be cast as proceeding east to west. However, as a regional history, *The Upper Country* stops short of truly connecting French imperial and colonial enterprise to the larger processes of North American development. For example, by ending the narrative before the Seven Years' War, Skinner misses the chance to show how the French persisted, often through intermarriage with the region's Indians and their continued importance within the Great Lakes' fur-trade economy, to influence later British and American political, social, and economic understanding.

Postured toward undergraduates and survey courses, and largely eschewing historiographical debate, except when Skinner writes that "expediency has always taken precedence over culture" (xii), *The Upper Country* richly deserves a place in the classroom or on the bookshelf. While light on historiography, which the author readily admits, the book includes a detailed and informative bibliographical essay that alerts readers to the major historical literature on the French and the Great Lakes. What most makes this book useful and important to those interested in midwestern history, however, is that Skinner goes beyond politics, economics, and war, and actually details the cultural and social lives of the French and Indians in the Great Lakes, which is a difficult task. Moreover, Skinner's mining and close reading of primary sources, along with his well-written and concise narrative, brings the historical actors and events to life and succeeds in re-creating and contextualizing the Great Lakes world those individuals inhabited.

The Sangamo Frontier: History and Archaeology in the Shadow of Lincoln, by Robert Mazrim. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. x, 352 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$55.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper.

Reviewer Debra A. Reid is associate professor of history at Eastern Illinois University. She teaches and writes about material culture, public history, and African American history.

Robert Mazrim has produced an engaging forensic analysis of what occurred during the frontier era along the Edwards Trace in Illinois. That focus might not attract readers, but the more provocative title should. Mazrim draws from a period place name, Sangamo, thus accurately reflecting the blending of Native, French, and American cultures that occurred in the region between the 1790s and the 1840s.