

genealogical cultures. For example, Weil chronicles how, during the antebellum period, New York City emerged as “the capital of parvenu genealogy” (88), while genealogists in Boston and the broader New England area used genealogy to bolster extant social statuses, not to forge new ones. Unfortunately, similarly close attention to how place-based identities affected genealogical cultures does not inform Weil’s analysis of genealogy in the Midwest (the state of Iowa is not mentioned in the text).

Despite this limitation, the book offers the most comprehensive extant survey of the development of genealogy within American culture. Weil has comprehensively mined the secondary literature on the topic, which helps him synthesize across his archival research in New England and the mid-Atlantic. Historians of many interests and backgrounds will find Weil’s text a useful addition to their libraries. Many more stories need to be told about the history of genealogy in America, but Weil has produced the best one currently available.

*Old Man River: The Mississippi River in North American History*, by Paul Schneider. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2013. xvii, 394 pp. Maps, illustrations, source notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 hardcover, \$16.99 e-book.

Reviewer Patrick Nunnally coordinates the River Life program at the University of Minnesota’s Institute for Advanced Study.

With hundreds of books in print about the Mississippi River, why do we need another one? Paul Schneider’s entry into this crowded bookshelf is, by turns, personal and researched, focused and rambling, historical for much of its length but contemporary in several of its central concerns, stellar in some of its insights and maddening in some of its errors. Schneider’s title is ambitious, promising a treatment of the continent’s greatest river that contributes to our understanding of the continent’s history. Ultimately, the book, like the river that is its subject, becomes many disparate things at once, leaving readers often wondering just what mad adventure they have undertaken.

Schneider is a journalist, a storyteller who weaves vignettes of his own travels by canoe, kayak, and automobile on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers through longer, more historically inclined passages. These short set pieces, like the highly engaging voice with which Schneider writes, remind readers that the author has a distinct point of view, that what is being told to us is one perspective.

Besides his trips on the river, and to historic sites such as the Great Serpent Mound, Schneider’s heart seems to be most engaged by the

region bounded by the Great Lakes, the Ohio River, and the Mississippi during the period of French exploration and the fur trade through the population of the region by Americans in the early nineteenth century. He devotes most of the book's attention to this region and era, has researched it more thoroughly, and writes more vividly about historic figures such as La Salle, leaders of the Iroquois Nation, and Henry Shreve. This section, the middle three of the work's seven "books," highlights a broad array of historical figures beyond "great men" yet also draws for much of its insight on the traditional narrative histories such as work by Francis Parkman and the *Jesuit Relations*.

There's a lot to like about Schneider's book. For the most part, he writes well, clearly establishing character, scene, and narrative. He employs some wonderful turns of phrase, closing his section on the Civil War in the Mississippi Valley by noting that Grant's victory at Vicksburg in 1863 closed the book on three centuries of war up and down the Mississippi Valley, but then adding, "The American war against the river, however, had only just begun" (302). That war, with levees, dams, and oil and gas facilities as the battleground and the Army Corps of Engineers as its chief protagonist, carries Schneider's story up into the second decade of the twenty-first century, but is covered in a few relatively short chapters.

While there's much to admire in Schneider's writing, there are also some important problems. Readers with some familiarity with Schneider's subjects will wish in vain for an argument, a thesis, a perspective, or a response to any of the several historical themes and inquiries that the book could take up. A lot more could be said about the valley from the perspective of an environmental or social historian, or someone seriously exploring historical developments of relations between native people and the Europeans and Americans who invaded the region. Schneider's notion that images of steamboats and slaves are "cultural levees" bounding the popular view of the Mississippi's history (263) is extremely interesting and would warrant much further exploration and development. What, for example, might be some of the implications of this limited popular imagination as planners and policymakers decide the future of this great river and its valley? It's unfair to criticize Schneider for not writing the book he didn't intend to write, but a substantive treatment of his putative subject really does call for more analysis than he gives himself scope for.

More troublesome, perhaps, are the places where Schneider simply gets the facts wrong. The U.S.-Dakota War in Minnesota did not last for eight years (190); the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico took place in 2010, not 2009 (314); he dates the Ephraim Squier survey of

ancient mounds in the Ohio Valley in two different years. It may be too much to say that errors of fact (and I could cite more examples) hurt Schneider's credibility, but they are annoying to the careful reader with knowledge of the subject at hand, and they could cause some readers to question other aspects of Schneider's tales.

On balance, there's probably more to like, and more interesting insight to be gained, from Schneider's book than there are fatal flaws. Ultimately, the book offers a great deal to readers interested in the histories of the upper Midwest. The Mississippi River is a central element for the history of Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Schneider's treatment of the period beginning when Europeans were first coming into the upper reaches of the watershed and his focus on the watersheds to the south and east of the upper Mississippi are important contexts for understanding much of what has happened here. Readers should be advised, though, that Schneider's tales are like the tales of a steamboat passenger: engaging, interesting, and seductive, but always in need of skepticism and critical inquiry.

*River Republic: The Fall and Rise of America's Rivers*, by Daniel McCool. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. xix, 388 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, index. \$34.50 hardcover.

Reviewer Mark Harvey is professor of history at North Dakota State University. He is the author of *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act* (2005) and *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (2000).

Dan McCool has written a hopeful book about the rivers of the United States. McCool, a political scientist at the University of Utah, is the author and editor of several books on water policy and history, especially in the American West. As such, he brings to bear considerable expertise on the subject, especially in regard to the political and policy-making struggles affecting rivers and water use generally. But McCool also knows his history. Throughout this fine study he is mindful of the powerful forces that have reshaped American rivers for decades. In the book's early chapters, he reveals how the Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation, along with irrigation districts, private power companies, and a variety of economic and political interests connected to municipalities and states, largely had their way in reshaping rivers for human uses. Since the early nineteenth century, rivers have been dredged, laced with levees, and dammed to control floods, generate power, provide irrigation, and ensure ease of transportation on the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio rivers. The often