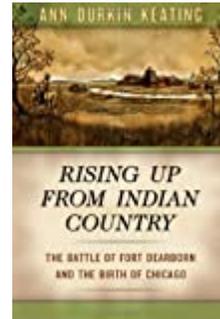




Ann Durkin Keating. *Rising Up from Indian Country: The Battle of Fort Dearborn and the Birth of Chicago.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. 320 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-42896-3.



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America's First West

In popular memory, America's West is geographically located between El Paso and Deadwood. Ideologically, the West has long been home to rugged individualists who eschewed federal government involvement in their affairs. Hollywood scriptwriters and novelists have also informed their patrons that self-reliant westerners avoided living in cities, preferring to be out on the range standing alone against hostile Native Americans and the harsh elements. Over the past few decades a legion of historians of the American West, as well as those who study U.S. policy history, have tirelessly (and perhaps futilely) sought to set the record straight. With *Rising Up from Indian Country*, Ann Durkin Keating has enlisted in what may be the historians' Lost Cause.

Keating's subject is America's First West, the region that we now call the Midwest and, in particular, Fort Dearborn, a frontier outpost that became the city of Chicago. (Tellingly, it has been fifty years since a Hollywood blockbuster, *How the West Was Won* [1962], explicitly recognized the Midwest as the First West.) Through the early pages of *Rising Up from Indian Coun-*

try, Keating maps out the tribal boundaries of what the U.S. government had designated as the Northwest Territory. Many of the tribes distrusted each other almost as much as they disliked the Americans. For their part, British government officials played power politics from the relative safety of Canada and Detroit, Michigan. At least until the War of 1812, it was a low-cost proposition for the British to encourage anti-American sentiments among the northwestern tribes.

As Keating recounts, the tribes raided white settlements and took (often female) captives. Meanwhile some white entrepreneurs, whose political allegiances were aligned with the British, took native wives—sometimes several over the span of two decades. Such practices led to the creation of a mixed race (mestis, to use the then common French appellation) population. The American military on the frontier depended on this mixed race population, and certainly counted on white males, such as John Kinzie, who helped advance the cause of intermarriage, for provisions and intelligence. This relationship was often one of mutual mistrust and interdependence.

Traders, whose loyalties may have been more inclined toward the British or a particular tribe, needed military contracts. In turn, American officers had to have local sources for supplies and needed people who could speak native languages.

The tense, ambiguous relationship among white traders, mixed race people, and American soldiers had its counterpart among the tribes. After the 1790s and a series of Indian retreats and American advances following the Battle of Fallen Timbers and the Greenville Treaty, there arose more hard-line native leaders. Among the most famous of these was Tecumseh. While other accounts of Tecumseh have emphasized his political genius in attempting to unite the tribes, Keating underscores that he and his followers had racial views that mirrored those of American soldiers. Such natives consciously identified whites as an alien and aggressive race, though they chose to slacken their hatred of the British since they needed them to supply weapons. They also had little love for the mixed race population among them. Were mixed race individuals loyal to the Indians or to the whites? Readers may justly suspect that if Tecumseh had been ultimately successful against the Americans, the mixed race population would have been next on his to-do list.

As Keating makes very clear, the federal government played an enormous role in the settlement of the "First West." The U.S. government provided the military might to drive away native tribes and then construct frontier outposts which became the basis for white settlements. Such outposts created an economy of cash and barter—thanks to military payrolls and contracts for provisions. As Keating shows, there is no American West—First or Second—without the federal government providing security, and a source of income, to white settlers.

What evolved at Fort Dearborn after its construction in 1803 would be replicated through the nineteenth century. In west Texas immediately after the Civil War, for instance, the settlement of San Angelo sprang up to provide provisions, alcohol, and prostitutes to the soldiers at Fort Concho. Perhaps the key distinction to be made between the examples of Fort Dearborn and Fort Concho is that the latter proved to be an initial success. Bear in mind that the ultimate basis for judging the success or failure of a frontier outpost is whether or not a bat-

tle ever occurred there. Fort Concho proved to be such a successful deterrent against native attacks that no battle ever occurred. Fort Dearborn would not be as fortunate.

Fort Dearborn had an excellent strategic position on the Chicago River close to Lake Michigan. Having access to water transportation, nature's best highways into the North American interior, was vital. Moreover, as Detroit had demonstrated in 1763 during Pontiac's native uprising, the ability to be supplied by a water route that an attacking force could not close down is a useful military advantage. Sadly for Fort Dearborn, whatever advantages it possessed were undercut by three major facts of life: first, the outpost was simply too far away from the center of American military gravity to have much chance of succor; second, it was situated among an increasingly aggravated native population which offered the prospect of fewer and fewer potential allies; and third, the British could not resist destabilizing American influence at what appeared to be at little cost.

The War of 1812, which led to the quick surrender of Fort Dearborn, demonstrated the power of the first two points in particular. As for the third point, the British may have scored an initial success, but over time would feel American wrath with the torching of York (Toronto, Canada) and the destruction of its fleet on Lake Erie. Ultimately, Americans would reassert themselves and lay the foundations for the nation's "Second City."

Keating had a number of challenges in writing *Rising Up from Indian Country*. Inevitably, the work had to include a significant ethnographic history; there are numerous tribes that had to be analyzed and located geographically. Given the number of players, and the fact that documentary sources are often fragmentary, or are refracted through the lens of white traders and soldiers who interacted with the natives, this was no simple undertaking. She also had to write a social history of racial interactions, as well as a sociological account of military life on a frontier outpost. She does all these exceptionally well.

In spite of the subtitle of the book, however, this is not a history of military campaigns and combat. General readers who want violence, gore, and Daniel Day-Lewis might be disappointed.

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