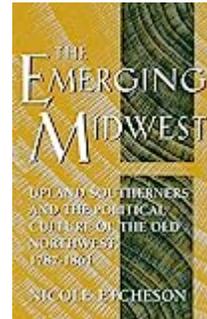




Nicole Etcheson. *The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1787-1861.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. xiii + 205 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-32994-3.



Reviewed by Lucy Jayne Kamau (Northeastern Illinois University)

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The Old Northwest and Western Identity in the Antebellum US

The Emerging Midwest is a welcome addition to the growing body of studies of upland southerners in the Old Northwest. Nicole Etcheson has performed a laudable service by synthesizing widely dispersed primary material to create a coherent description of the sectional and political leanings of antebellum southern settlers in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. She has written not only a political account, but also a cultural survey. The book is clearly written, free of jargon, and makes excellent use of both primary and secondary sources.

In the early nineteenth century, the western states were often pivotal in the rivalry between the South and the North. The West was settled by migrants from both these regions. Southerners and northerners brought with them mutually uncomplementary stereotypes, and each also held loyalties to their home regions. The task Etcheson sets herself is to document the process whereby these two groups forged a new identity as Westerners during the Jacksonian era. The process she describes is a political one, as the mutual interests of those living on the frontier overrode older loyalties and as an emergent two-party system made it possible for political ideology to override

sectionalism. She examines, and devotes a chapter each to, a number of key constructs that were of particular importance to southern settlers. These are the constructs of manliness, interest, opportunity, and rights.

As Etcheson points out, the regional unification of the West that existed during the Jacksonian era began to disintegrate under the sectional crisis of the 1850s. Upland southerners resented the abolitionism of Yankees, yet they disliked slavery, with which they had not been able to compete. In the end, they chose the Union, marching off to war and dying side by side with Yankees. Indeed, an ancestor's Civil War service is a point of pride for many modern descendents of these upland southerners.

The book's strengths are also its weaknesses. Etcheson's material on northerners lacks the persuasiveness of her analysis of upland southerners. For the most part, she asserts Yankee constructs with very little of the sort of research and detailed documentation that she provides for southern constructs. As a result, the way in which southern and northern subcultures merged to create a new western subculture is murky. Furthermore, her emphasis

on macroanalysis obscures the importance of local issues and personalities in political action. Broad ideologies had their effect, but voting behavior, both at the polls and in Congress, often was in response to very narrow matters, sometimes no more than who had been appointed the local postmaster. Etcheson's failure to consider local politics results in a blurring of the particularities of sub-regions within the West. Although local interests are not her direct concern, a discussion of the possible influence these might have had on regional events would have been useful.

These are minor flaws. *The Emerging Midwest* is a valuable addition to the literature. It goes beyond a

purely political account to provide a description of important cultural constructs that influenced not only the voting behavior of upland southerners in the West, but also many other aspects of their lives. In doing so, it provides an outstanding interpretation of the motives and acts of a significant portion of the population of a significant portion of the country.

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