

Introduction

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This book is the result of a collaboration launched in the summer of 2019. Its editors attended the annual Midwestern History Association conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where David McCullough’s recently released book, *The Pioneers: The Heroic Story of the Settlers Who Brought the American Ideal West*, received a significant amount of attention, overwhelmingly negative, despite its ascent to the *New York Times* bestseller list. The book and its reception resonated particularly strongly with us because we came from Ohio University, a campus peppered with reminders of the “heroic” members of the Ohio Company of Associates and nestled south of a national forest named after their military protector, General Anthony Wayne. Indeed, as *The Pioneer’s* acknowledgments suggests, its genesis came from the two-time Pulitzer Prize–winning historian’s campus visit to deliver the commencement address in 2004, the year Ohio University celebrated its bicentennial.

Like many in our locale, we read and appreciated the book’s humanizing of select individuals we knew only as names on buildings, and its description of early life in Marietta and smaller surrounding communities. Although we are both transplants, these are the places that many of our students call home, and we enjoyed learning more about the origins of our university and its claim to being the oldest public institution in the Old Northwest territory. I assigned the book in an Early American Republic class, and students from urban, suburban, and rural places alike devoured it with atypical resonance, several noting they had no idea “so much history happened here.” Even longtime locals knew little about the Cutlers or that Blennerhassett Island was the center of a treason trial involving Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, or that Gallipolis was settled by French refugees. It is understandable why, both off and on campus,

the book inspired civic pride, and even a hoped-for increase in tourism. Told by one of the nation's master storytellers, *The Pioneers* brought welcome attention to a region that is at once part of both Appalachia and the Rust Belt, two areas with interesting histories and populations who have felt increasingly overlooked.

Yet, as midcareer scholars who study and teach this era, we share many of the frustrations on display at that conference in Michigan, criticisms subsequently reinforced in scorching academic reviews of the book's content and conclusions. Many of those can be found in the Summer 2021 issue of the *Journal of the Early Republic* and accompanying blogs available in *The Panorama*.¹ The central cast of *The Pioneers* was limited to a small group of White men, with a supporting cast of wives and daughters. Indian leaders such as Captain Pipe and a few escaped slaves briefly appear, but mostly as "others" seen only through the lens of the book's adventuring protagonists and not on their own terms. Unintentionally but problematically, the racialized assumptions of New England settlers substitute for a far more accurate, dynamic, fraught, and ultimately interesting understanding of how Ohio was "settled."

Accurate histories require a deep interrogation of sources, especially when they are scarce in number. In many key places—the Big Bottom Massacre and Ohio's 1802 debate over slavery, for example—the central characters' words are accepted as truth rather than as imperfect and possibly self-serving versions of events. The book's narrative arc, while offering compelling human stories of personal tragedy and triumph, ignored many of the new insights that rigorous research and debate has brought to light about this period, about westward settlement into this region, and especially about Indigenous peoples who inhabited it.

In the final analysis, we concluded that *The Pioneers* told a story that needed telling but did so in an oversimplified way that lacked context and unnecessarily silenced the voices of other overlooked groups whose stories also deserved to be told. The title, like the story, betrays a worldview, ultimately rooted in a nineteenth-century "Whiggish" understanding, whereby progress and civilization move from east to west and are "brought" forth almost exclusively by pale-skinned peoples. So, in the spirit of recovering a more holistic and accurate account, we designed a conference aimed at elaborating on important aspects of the book but also and especially on filling in the many gaps. For while the Ohio Company of Associates left an indelible, and even at times a

positive, legacy, the story as told through their eyes was only a partial one. We sought to elevate the stories and voices of others and to offer a more complete assessment of the contributions of the many population groups who shaped the human and physical landscapes of the upper Ohio River valley. With the support of the Central Region Humanities Center and then university president Duane Nellis, we brought speakers to campus to share their expertise about both the topics covered in that book, but also those left out.

Our authors, all presenters at that conference, were asked to draw upon their deep research and pose questions and answers that are of interest to other scholars, but to avoid the jargon that sometimes bogs down academic writing. We believe they have succeeded, making this a volume of interest and utility to both scholars and a broader public curious to learn more about the diverse peoples and the dynamism and contestation that shaped the history of what became known as “Ohio.” By adding new voices, offering broader context, and embracing and explaining the true complexity that defines the past, *Settling Ohio* offers us truer stories and ultimately deeper drama, stories perhaps more appropriate and relevant for our own complicated present. For one thing, it highlights that human settlement of the region was a continual process that began long before people of European ancestry arrived west of the Appalachian Mountains. First settlers likely came from the North and the West rather than the East. The settlement of the region by various Indigenous and European peoples that took place from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries was in truth a resettlement into terrain already shaped by the economic, social, and cultural activity of past peoples. Furthermore, the continual settling and resettling of the region ensured that geopolitical and social dynamics of the region remained constantly in flux, lending an admittedly ironic meaning to this volume’s title.

The stories told in this volume draw from a rich vein of interdisciplinary work on the early American republic and on frontier and borderland studies that is too vast to fully summarize here. Rather than provide a complete encapsulation of the insights that geographers, anthropologists, educators, and historians have offered, this introduction provides a brief overview and frames new insights about the topics explored in this volume. As such, it seeks to highlight some of the themes that emerge from the chapters, appreciating that such collections necessarily prioritize the

breadth and depth of knowledge of each individual author and topic at the expense of a clear or unified narrative.²

European settlers were of course not the first pioneers into the river valley that would become known as the Ohio, originally an Iroquois place-name. Archaeological evidence suggests the first pioneers to the region were the Adena, who may have arrived as early as 800 BCE, although the very first people arrived even earlier, perhaps eight thousand to ten thousand years prior. As Joseph Gingerich shows, they moved a lot of earth, creating the impressive conical mounds and effigy earthworks that remain a part of the state's landscapes even today. Judging from how they transformed the environment and the artifacts they left behind, they possessed the population density, economic prowess, and political ability to mobilize significant amounts of labor. Their efforts fascinated those of European ancestry who first encountered them and, as Chief Glenna Wallace's epilogue reminds us, leave an important legacy, the proper use and preservation of which demands attention.

We do not know precisely what brought early humans to this region, although presumably the area's river systems and the remarkable natural resources available in the Ohio River basin had something to do with it. Those assets ensured that the region we call Ohio attracted diverse Indigenous groups even before European contact, but especially as many were dispossessed of lands along the Eastern Seaboard and Great Lakes. Cameron Shriver shows us that displaced Indians created vibrant communities and trading posts, including Pickawillany (near present-day Piqua, Ohio), which in 1750 was possibly the most populous city in the Ohio River valley. Europeans and Indigenes engaged in trade that was generally mutually beneficial, and discerning Indian consumers negotiated the best deals they could.

During the colonial period, French and English traders traversed the region, and Virginia and Pennsylvania speculators covetously eyed it. Various Indian groups, though, including the Miami and Shawnee, dominated it, and contested one another for control of it. The Seven Years' War (as Europeans know it), or the French and Indian War (as White Americans called it), began to shift that story as access to trade and the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains emerged as a central motive for the conflict, one that Winston Churchill and subsequent historians have argued was the first "world war."³ By several accounts, the restrictions that British imperial officials placed on access to the

lands beyond the Appalachians contributed to colonists' dissatisfaction with British control, one of many complaints that precipitated a war for independence.⁴

The American Revolution brought British and American military outposts, and accelerated violence, including the horrific 1782 Gnadenhütten massacre, in which American militia murdered nearly one hundred innocent Lenape men, women, and children. No criminal action was ever taken against those who perpetuated that atrocity. Many Indian leaders, such as Captain Pipe, sought to remain neutral, but continued attacks eventually drew them into the conflict, often on the British side. The treaty ending the Revolutionary War furthered US aspirations for the wealth and opportunity that existed across the Ohio River. In an important and often underappreciated demonstration of national ambitions and a recognition that no individual state could exert sovereign power over their northwestern lands, Virginia (1784), Massachusetts (1785), and finally Connecticut (1800) ceded their western claims to the new national government.

Federal claims did not, as the subsequent chapters demonstrate, equal national control. The process of state-building was slow and messy work that included land ordinances, the Northwest Ordinance, and the often-muddled legal business of constitution making. Nor did settlers wait, as farmers and traders trickled across the mountains and the Ohio River, hoping to make better lives for themselves. Aspirations for wealth brought investment from White-controlled land companies and, as Anna-Lisa Cox reminds us, Black settlers. They were joined by French and especially German immigrants who, as Tim Anderson demonstrates, left an enduring mark on the state's cultural landscapes.

While the specific land that comprised the Ohio Company purchase proved to be rather unfertile, ample wildlife and more agriculturally productive lands were found farther west. The settlement's chief sources of revenue were, well, other immigrants. Trade continued to define the settlement, but eventually the arrival of new White settlers lessened the need to trade with Indian peoples. As Kim Gruenwald's chapter illustrates, individuals like Marietta's own Dudley Woodbridge Jr. tied together the growing number of White settlers via networks of credit that brought eastern and even European goods to "frontier farmers." The growth of the vast trading networks might lead one to conclude that White settlers were doing quite well for themselves. Many were, but

as William Kerrigan's essay reminds us, most early US settlers were just scraping by. It was into this world that Johnny Chapman (a.k.a. Johnny Appleseed) arrived. By introducing an affordable supply of food at a crucial moment of increased settler mobility, Chapman furthered the ability of Ohioans to sustain themselves. Apples, eaten or distilled into cider, created a culture that transformed several aspects of Ohio life and even shaped the national political culture. Yet history is never static, and by the 1830s, new technologies and an emerging middle-class ethos recast apple culture, making Chapman into a folk hero of a bygone era.

A true account of the settling of Ohio must place the complicated story of Indian-White interactions in the upper Ohio River valley firmly at the center. Most new settlers of European descent did not come intending harm to Indian peoples. Indeed, the Ohio Company specifically made peace a goal and misinterpreted Captain Pipe's and others' initial greeting as a sign that they would be welcomed. Few investors or American settlers, however, developed the cultural awareness or empathy that would allow them to pursue peace, especially if it inconvenienced their material interests. In truth, their presence was quite unsettling to an already fragile geopolitical situation.⁵ The political and social disorder experienced among Whites looking to settle Ohio pales in comparison to the long-term damage exacted upon Native peoples by the actions of Europeans and White Americans, and eventually the federal government. From start to finish, the acknowledgment of that loss (in some ways impossible to fully express) pervades this volume, even as several essays evidence just how resilient and adaptive Indian peoples were in the face of fast-changing realities.

Taken as a whole, this volume furthers the ongoing reimagining of what Americans still commonly refer to as "the frontier" but which many scholars call the "borderlands," a term that acknowledges there were people on both sides of a porous, largely imagined line. Scholarship on the Great Lakes and Ohio River valley has been at the forefront of such studies. For over half a century historians and geographers have considered White westward expansion less as a civilizing line whereby "pioneers" pushed westward, and more as a shared space of collaboration, negotiation, and contestation between different peoples who traded, shared cultures, and married one another in what one celebrated work from the 1990s referred to as a "middle ground."⁶ Recent scholars, though, have pushed back against the idea of a fluid borderland in which

multidirectional influences shaped White and non-White societies.⁷ Borrowing from world history methods, some apply instead the term “settler colonialism” or what Bethal Saler describes, for the post-Revolutionary period, as a “settler nation” or “settler empire,” terms suggestive of the asymmetrical power that European peoples brought with them.⁸

Settling Ohio both illustrates and somewhat problematizes this approach. Chapters herein acknowledge the fact that imperial and national armies supported White settlers’ claims with devastating consequences for Indian peoples, including ultimately, for most, removal. Yet chapters also suggest the limits of reducing the story of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ohio to White conquerors versus conquered Indians. The competition for land, trade, and power took place not just between Indians and Whites but within those groups, with the presence of Black settlers further problematizing the story. Intra-Indian competition also shaped geopolitics. As Cameron Shriver notes, the region was not known as “Ohio Country” or as “Indian Country,” but as “Miami Country, Shawnee Country, Wyandot Country, and Seneca-Cayuga Country.” Furthermore, as John Bickers beautifully shows, internal group dynamics worked alongside the pressures exerted by US federal power to create fissures among the Miami, who, after the Treaty of Greenville, survived and found new ways to resist and preserve their shared identity. Nor was there a monolithic “White” opinion over what should happen in the West, which generated considerable political division within the United States. “Conquerors” came in many forms, including not just Black pioneers but also the multiple ethnic groups evidenced in Tim Anderson’s cultural geography of the state, and within the competing companies that attempted to sell Indian lands. Taken as a whole, this book demonstrates the considerable value—and the necessary nuance required—in applying the methods of settler colonialism to Indian and borderland studies.

One benefit of applying such approaches comes from linking western expansion to another recent development in the historiography of the Early Republic: a new appreciation for the power of institutions, both governmental and nongovernmental. This approach, ascendant since the 1990s, sees politics less through the lens of parties or individuals and more as the product of policies carried out by an administrative state that used post offices, tax collection agencies, and, of special note here, land offices and armies to enact change.⁹ Such methods are readily apparent

within this volume, which suggests some of the ways that the region's political and cultural landscape was crucially shaped by the application of governmental power. By framing the "Northwest Ordinance" as a "Founding" constitutional document, contextualized by the formation of a more cohesive Indigenous confederation and the Ohio Company's planned settlement, Jessica Roney shows how the concept of western statehood was necessarily linked to national power and accelerated by four contemporaneous events. Born largely out of concerns of Indian war and a desire to pay off the national debt, the Northwest Ordinance offered a pathway to replicate Republican governance and, for citizens at least, eventual entrance into the union as equals. As important as that pathway toward stability proved, the trip down it remained bumpy. Indeed, Joseph Ross's chapter shows how the complexity of private-public partnerships, however designed, initially generated as much chaos as clarity, especially during the Federal era. It was not, he provocatively argues, until Jeffersonian Republicans controlled the federal land offices and brought about statehood that a modicum of political order emerged within the region.

Bill Hunter shows how the desire to nationalize Ohio led to Colonel Ebenezer Zane's congressionally funded postal road, a road that not only delivered the mail but transformed the physical space and economic lives of those leaving near it. Although small by twenty-first century standards, the federal government of the Early Republic, evidenced further in the repeated appearance of the US Army, left a lasting imprint on the peoples and geography of the Old Northwest.

While this book's focus is regional, the events that unfolded here are of global significance. The Hopewell mounds stand as some of the most impressive structures ever built in North America, evidence of a sophisticated and complex ancient civilization worthy of UNESCO status. The seventy-five-year period around which this book concentrates was one in which Indian groups and European empires battled for control over access to one of the more elaborate river systems in the world and to adjacent lands with a remarkable array of natural resources. As Cameron Shriver nicely shows, Ohio in the eighteenth century was not a coherent place but rather a constellation of men and women claiming and using different portions of land, and quite frequently fighting over it. Standing at the mouth of the Muskingum in 1763, one would have had little idea of what might become of lands that a recent royal decree

announced were to be off-limits for British subjects and declared Indian possessions. There were multiple possible histories for the region. By 1816, however, control of the Upper Ohio was no longer in doubt. The French and Indian War, the Northwest Indian Wars of the 1790s, and those of the early 1800s that eventually became folded into the War of 1812 evidenced the near-constant tension and violence that accompanied that process. When something resembling peace was restored, American settlers expanded their economic and political activities, and Ohio's White and Black populations quickly expanded and diversified. Indian groups like the Miami and Shawnee, however, faced the possibility of cultural, or even actual, genocide or removal. That story, poignantly and tragically told by Chief Glenna Wallace, ended with the forced removal of groups like the Mixed Band of Seneca and Shawnee in the 1830s. For her people, false and broken promises forced unimaginable hardships and choices between bad and worse options.

A final thread woven through this book, then, is how we today might understand the cultural institutions and legacy of Ohio's earliest settlers of various ethnic backgrounds. One of the lasting legacies of the Ohio Company was the creation of Ohio University. Although it struggled financially in the early years, it has served, and continues to serve, students and the state for well over two centuries. New England settlers like Ephraim Cutler and Rufus Putnam carried with them a belief in public education and a faith in republican governance that endured and unquestionably shaped, in mostly positive ways, the civic life and cultural legacy of Ohio. Yet as Adam Nelson demonstrates in his chapter, well-intentioned ideals also clashed against hard political realities and racist assumptions. Who would foot the bill for educating people and how? What groups were deserving of a public education, a question that often left Black settlers and non-Anglo immigrants fending for themselves? Indeed, as Anna-Lisa Cox and Chief Glenna Wallace remind us, the battles to preserve those groups' heritage, although sometimes less immediately visible, are no less important. Ohio University rightfully stands proud as a site of knowledge creation, aimed at accomplishing just that. It serves as a beacon of hope not only for Ohioans but for diverse students across the country and around the world, including thousands of first-generation college students.

This volume, like the conference from which it emerged, challenges a misperception, common in academic circles and among the public

alike, that there is an impossibly wide chasm between the type of work that academics do and the historical interest of the broader public. The public (or a certain subsection of the public), some professors are wont to lament, just do not want to be challenged by hearing the seedier or less celebratory parts of the American past. Humanists in particular fret about a public allegedly losing interest in our fields (a claim ironically similar to traditionalists' lamentation that people today do not care about the past). The conference organizers wondered that, too, as we built a program to be presented in a college town that, in the 2016 primary, went Bernie Sanders blue but is in a county that Trump handily won.

Our experience was a starkly different one. As we talked up the conference to civic groups and spread the word to alumni, it became clear that those who had read and enjoyed *The Pioneers*, and in several cases provided McCullough material, were eager to know more. They were excited to learn that Chief Glenna Wallace of the Eastern Shawnee nation would be joining us to tell her story. They wanted to know about the African American settlers who Anna-Lisa Cox shows fought discrimination and carved out communities. They were receptive to the idea, offered by Bill Kerrigan, that Johnny Appleseed's importance needed to be seen through the lens of class inequality. An audience of nearly three hundred people, about half of whom were from the general public, listened not just attentively but inquisitively and, best we could tell, empathetically, as John Bickers, a citizen of the Miami Tribe, welcomed them in Myaamiaataweenki (the Miami language) and explained how his ancestors coped with dispossession by creating a recognized sovereign nation. Although admittedly only one data point, and one taken from the generally generous and hospitable people of southeastern Ohio, the lesson we took from this is that people can handle the tough stuff and we do them and ourselves a disservice to assume otherwise. This book, then, is offered as testimony to the collective aim of not only remembering but also recovering and reclaiming the rich and diverse cultural heritage of this region.

Notes

1. See special Critical Engagements symposium edited by Jessica Choppin Roney and Andrew Shankman, "Scholars, Scholarship, and David McCullough's *The Pioneers: The Heroic Story of the Settlers Who Brought the*

- American Ideal West*,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 175–76. Also accompanying pieces in *The Panorama*, including Michael A. Blaakman, “How Should History Make Us Feel,” *The Panorama: Expansive Views from the Journal of the Early Republic*, June 11, 2021, <http://thepanorama.shear.org/2021/06/11/how-should-history-make-us-feel/>.
2. See, for example, Andrew R. L. Cayton and Stuart D. Hobbs, *The Center of a Great Empire: The Ohio Country in the Early Republic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).
 3. Quoted in H. V. Bowen, *War and British Society, 1688–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7; Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1764–1766* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001).
 4. The role of the backcountry in shaping the coming of the American Revolution is explored in several recent works, including Patrick Spero, *Frontier Country: The Politics of War in Early Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Patrick Spero, *Frontier Rebels: The Fight for Independence in the American West, 1765–1776* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018); Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008); Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); and Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750–1804* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016).
 5. Rob Harper, *Unsettling the West: Violence and State-Building in the Ohio Valley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).
 6. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and David Andrew Nichols, *Peoples of the Inland Sea: Native Americans and New Comers in the Great Lakes Region, 1600–1870* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018).
 7. See, for example, Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).
 8. Bethel Saler, *The Settlers’ Empire: Colonialism and State Formation in America’s Old Northwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019). For a fuller discussion of this concept, see the special edition edited by Jeffrey Ostler and Nancy Shoemaker, “Settler Colonialism in Early American History,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (July 2019).
 9. Historians who lived through the New Deal and Great Society saw state power in the early period as practically insignificant. Yet scholars who

have lived through the political fights over deregulation and downsizing that started in the 1970s and took new form after the Cold War ended looked back to the early period and discovered there was sufficient power within federalism to shape outcomes. For good examples and summary views of this literature, see Richard John, “Government Institutions as Agents of Change: Rethinking American Political Development in the Early Republic, 1787–1835,” *Studies in American Political Development* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 347–80; Gautham Rao, “The New Historiography of the Early Federal Government: Institutions, Contexts, and the Imperial State,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2020): 97–128; William J. Novak, “The Myth of the ‘Weak’ American State,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 3 (June 2008): 752–72; and Max M. Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).