



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*The American National State and the Early West* by William H. Bergmann (review)

Peter J. Kastor

Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Volume 111, Number 3, Summer 2013, pp. 447-449 (Review)

Published by Kentucky Historical Society

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/khs.2013.0062>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/522751>

to transcend the era in which he lived (pp. 5-6)? No, Clark did not. Indeed, Clark was far ahead of his time in science, natural history, psychological warfare, and invention. Nester clearly cites examples of all of these in his text, yet concludes that Clark was trapped in his own time and “failed to transcend his own tormented self” (pp. 5-6). If you are a student of history, especially Clark history, you will find more errors in Nester’s book than you will find positive revisionist contributions. Nester’s book, in my opinion, falls far short of making a constructive impact or contribution that would increase our understanding about Clark history. In short, and sadly, it is my opinion that Nester’s book falls far short of its intended goal.

KENNETH C. CARSTENS, PhD, is professor emeritus of anthropology and archaeology, and works currently as an adjunct professor of history at Murray State University. He also directs the Institute of Frontier History in Murray, Kentucky.

*The American National State and the Early West.* By William H. Bergmann. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. 288. \$90.00 cloth)

The western United States remains a place possessed by a striking contradiction. At one moment it is the West that is the greatest recipient of federal resources, including the creation of water and power systems, the economic spillover from the large military installations in the West, or management of large areas of land, including the national parks. And yet it is western residents who are among the most vocal critics of a powerful, intrusive federal government that threatens to interfere with individual opportunity. As William H. Bergmann shows, this relationship was there from the start, and it is a relationship that is more inevitable than coincidental.

In *The American National State and the Early West*, Bergmann argues that western policy, in particular the struggle to replace Indian sovereignty with federal power in the Transappalachian West, would

transform the capacity of the federal government and the meaning of federalism itself. Focusing primarily on the 1790s and the first years of the nineteenth century, Bergmann describes how the military and economic demands of western governance forced the United States to dramatically expand its reach and its resources. The reasons for this change are jarringly clear: white settlers coveted Indian land and the federal leadership claimed the right to govern that land. In response, Indians established a resistance that waxed and waned as a result of the internal politics of native peoples, but one which nonetheless dealt the United States a series of devastating setbacks. It was only by reconceiving of federal governance—and creating a much larger army and civil administration for the West—that the United States was able to achieve its goals.

This state of affairs was most abundantly clear in the Northwest Territory, where the federal government wielded direct authority. But it was also the case in Kentucky and Virginia, where state officials not only *permitted* a larger federal presence but *demand*ed one in the interest of a cohesive regional military policy.

Bergmann offers a detailed, yet clear, overview of the conflict, but his most original and revealing narrative concerns the economic ramifications of this military conflict. Drawing from numerous archival collections, Bergmann reconstructs the effort of the federal government to use trade as a means of regional development for whites and racial subjugation for Indians. Equally important, he shows how budding white entrepreneurs capitalized on these circumstances, whether they were establishing lucrative contracts as military contractors or joining an Indian trade that operated under federal supervision. The economy was never entirely dependent on the federal government, but federal resources provided vital revenue in the precarious economic circumstances of emerging settlements. And yet in the process of securing the West as a place for white settlement, the federal government unleashed the energies of white settlers who would make the first western states into models of participatory government and economic growth.

Much of this analysis emerges from the close study of numerous

western locales, with conclusions based on the judicious reading of materials from numerous archival collections. And yet if the western locale becomes clear, the federal leadership remains fuzzy. Bergmann rarely explains how policymakers in the federal capitals of Philadelphia and Washington formulated their policy. It is a striking omission for a book that claims to engage the scholarship on statebuilding.

What emerges instead is not necessarily a national story but rather a western one. White settlers would eventually create a narrative of how individual entrepreneurship released from government interference remade the West. Bergmann reveals not only the problems in that claim but also the process through which it came into being.

PETER J. KASTOR is professor of history and American culture studies at Washington University in St. Louis. His most recent book, *William Clark's World*, was published in 2011 by the Yale University Press, and he is currently working on a book as well as a major digital project that will examine federal policymaking in the early American republic.

*Jackson's Sword: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1810-1821.* By Samuel J. Watson. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012. Pp. 460. \$39.95 cloth)

This is the first volume of a monumental two-volume study of the U.S. Army officer corps along the southern and western borderlands of the United States from the era of the War of 1812 to the era of the Mexican War. Watson chronicles the army's efforts, as seen from the eyes of army officers on the frontier and not from Washington, to extend and maintain U.S. national sovereignty in the vast frontier regions of the young and rapidly expanding nation. It is not an institutional history but rather a detailed and magnificent study of the relations of the officer corps with the outside world, as they labored under difficult conditions to carry out national diplomacy, to avoid and engage in numerous conflicts, maintain peace, and secure the expansion of U.S. borders. In short, the officer corps was a mediator between national policy and diverse local inhabitants, agents of