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*On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism
since 1945* by Jenny Barker Devine (review)

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or Tenskwatawa's dream of pan-Indian identities. Both survived removal and today flourish throughout Indian Country. Tenskwatawa may have come up short against Manifest Destiny at Tippecanoe. But today Manifest Destiny comes up short against Indian Country, a country that is at once tribal and Pan-Indian. Today's Indian Country thrives in no small part because the ideas of both Black Hoof and Tenskwatawa proved impervious to American musketry at Tippecanoe and elsewhere.

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Jenny Barker Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism since 1945*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013. 188 pp. \$19.95.

Feminist and rural historians frequently bemoan the conundrum of understanding gender relations in farm country. In her 2009 book, *More than a Farmer's Wife: Voices of American Farm Women, 1910–1960*, Amy Mattson Lauters found “a cultural gap” so wide that by 1960 “urban women and rural/farmwomen had virtually nothing in common: no common language, no common ideology, no means of communication that made sense to either party.” Nevertheless, Jenny Barker Devine attempts to make sense of farmwomen's reality in *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism since 1945*. Devine's objective is to create a conceptual frame for understanding a distinct “agrarian feminism,” fashioned by midwestern farmwomen in the context of near catastrophic economic change due to depopulation, technology, and agribusiness. “Agrarian feminism” challenged the men who shaped state and federal policy, agribusiness, and farm organizations. Farmwomen drew on the deep traditions of farm families and rural communities by deploying strategies of negotiation and promoting mutuality to ensure the survival of the family farm and community.

Because Devine limited her research to Iowa she is able to provide detailed accounts of the ideological, political and institutional context in which farmwomen's activism grew. She devotes a chapter to women in each of the major twentieth century farm organizations including the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF), the Iowa Farmers Union (IFU), the National Farmers Organization (NFO), and the Iowa Porkettes. While the title suggests the topic is activism since 1945, in fact Devine begins her story

with the vibrant civic culture of rural communities in the early twentieth century and the “social feminism” nurtured by farm organizations. Beginning in 1919 the IFBF and its affiliate, the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation Women’s Committee (IFBFWC), successfully organized at the township and county level. Programing provided educational opportunities geared to women’s concerns, including home improvements, nutrition, health, farm management, and legislation. The IFU, a smaller, more political, and class conscious organization, also nurtured farmwomen’s activism. Though politically different, both the IFB and IFBF empowered women by politicizing and valorizing women’s work and by providing a public space for women. Women organized local groups, membership drives, and conferences and served as columnists who wrote not only about home and family but also about social and political issues in the publications of both IFB and IFBF.

Farmwomen’s activism had nineteenth century roots and depended upon gender and labor relations shaped by strategies of mutuality and cooperation in the family and community. From the Progressive era until 1945, farmwomen reflected the commitments of a “social feminism,” a maternalist ideology emphasizing women’s roles as wives, mothers, homemakers, and producers devoted to improving family life, homes, and communities. Social feminism facilitated women’s leadership and allowed them to define women’s space and roles in the inclusive IFBF and IFU. Women promoted membership, education, and the activities of youth. Women’s leadership and success in these organizations reflected the well honed strategies and values of mutuality in the family and community. The public roles of farmwomen empowered them as leaders and promoted localism and community unity.

After World War II, though, financial institutions, state and federal government policies, and agribusiness brought unprecedented changes and challenges to farm families. Devine tracks farmwomen’s activism as the Iowa farmers faced the instability and decline induced by the solvents of depopulation, accelerating economic change, and new technologies. Cold war politics particularly destabilized and diminished the numbers and activism of women in the IFBF and IFU after 1945. The IFU’s liberalism and resistance to corporate agriculture made it a political target of conservatives, but the attacks also drew politically and economically engaged farmwomen into ever more important roles in the IFU. Some IFU women, like labor and civil rights activists, resisted the pressures of cold war paranoia. But while the second red scare divided and damaged farm organizations,

the need for women's support resulted in more gender inclusivity. The cold war pressed male leaders of farm organizations to expand women's roles as leaders and organizers who mobilized the grass roots. Agrarian feminism began in this context.

Devine eloquently connects the activism of farmwomen with national trends but also demonstrates that agrarian feminism originated in the verities of rural women's lives. The 1960s brought to the fore a wide variety of groups unafraid of conflict and controversy which eventually transformed gender relationships along with much else. In farm country the National Farmers Organization (NFO) radicalized and politicized women. Devine notes that as much as Betty Friedan articulated the "problem that has no name" for urban white women, the NFO did the same in relationship to the "farm problem." Like Friedan, the NFO targeted systemic social and political inequality to explain the crisis in farming and fought for strategies that could empower the farm family in a corporate world. For NFO women it provided "a transformative experience that linked women's legal, political, and social rights directly to the well-being of the family and their farm." The personal became political for farmwomen, and grassroots activism followed. However appropriate their analysis and vision, like other social movements of the time, the NFO raised the collective consciousness, but it ultimately failed—it could not stop the depopulation of the countryside, the encroachment of corporate agriculture, or the loss of family farms.

Modern agriculture demanded that women claim a voice and speak for the needs of farm families and communities as they adjusted. Farmwomen challenged gender hierarchy when sexism threatened their farms and communities in ways that mattered in farm country. In farmwomen's agrarian feminism, the politics and economics of the farm always took precedence over gender issues. Farmwomen as partners and producers prioritized matters related to agriculture—commodity price, government policy, and farm safety—over gender equality, and they worked above all to save the family farm. While they did not call themselves feminists, farmwomen acted upon feminist ideals. Theirs is a story of hard work, commitment, and activism on behalf of themselves and their families, farms, and community. One caveat with Devine's analysis—she argues that rural women increasingly abandoned the earlier maternalist social feminism strategies for an "agrarian feminism" and a "politics of dependence." This new "politics of dependence" stressed the role of women as partners, producers, and political actors on behalf of their husbands. This new politics might be bet-

ter described as the “politics of interdependence,” built upon traditions of gender mutuality and negotiation.

Devine’s careful research and engaging writing brings to life women’s stories and voices and is an important contribution to our understanding of farm organizations, rural activism, and the varied nature and locales of feminism. She rightfully concludes that the Iowa farmwomen’s agrarian feminism is representative of midwestern farmwomen generally. The assertion by Iowa farmwomen in the 1970s that “We always were liberated” was echoed by farmwomen across the Midwest. Devine has brought us much closer to understanding the experience and sense of identity that prompted that response and produced agrarian feminism.

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Erik M. Redix, *The Murder of Joe White: Ojibwe Leadership and Colonialism in Wisconsin*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014. 282 pp. \$34.95.

At the intersection of violence, American colonialism, and Ojibwe sovereignty rests Erik M. Redix’s book *The Murder of Joe White: Ojibwe Leadership and Colonialism in Wisconsin*. Redix begins, “scholars have the power to not only influence future policy makers, but also shape how Native people themselves understand their sovereignty” (xxii). Redix sets out to demonstrate how Ojibwe sovereignty was, and is, a shape shifting concept, constantly challenged and constantly reasserted. Through a detailed examination of Joe White’s murder, Redix demonstrates that colonization of Ojibwe land in Wisconsin was a three-pronged attack. The Ojibwe had to reckon not only with the United States federal government, but also, after 1848, with the Wisconsin state government and corporate interests, especially logging companies. While the Ojibwe at times were able to play these competing interests off one another, more often than not this strategy failed. The shooting of Joe White and the subsequent murder trial resulted directly from U.S. colonization of Ojibwe lands in Wisconsin. These developments demonstrated that white Americans accepted violence committed against American Indians (xiii).

The book’s title is strategically provocative. The white men who killed