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Territorial Ambition: Land and Society in Arkansas, 1800-1840 - Bolton, SC

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historical image. Bellesiles' new story supersedes all previous biographies of Allen.

Jere Daniell
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Territorial Ambition: Land and Society in Arkansas, 1800–1840. By S. Charles Bolton (Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 1993) 152 pp. \$22.00

According to Bolton, historians generally have emphasized the crudeness, lawlessness, and shiftlessness of the settlers in the Arkansas Territory instead of their economic success. He wrote *Territorial Ambition* to revise this depiction, symbolized in Edward P. Washburn's "Arkansas Traveler." Although Bolton marshals ample evidence to support his thesis of economic growth, he also describes a cast of characters who could have been at home on any North American frontier: American Indians, explorers, cowboys, outlaws, hunters, farmers, surveyors, and speculators. In this sense, he offers considerable comfort to historians who argue that the South was as much a frontier as any region, despite the existence of slavery.

In the opening chapter, Bolton surveys the history of Arkansas from the intrusion of Hernando de Soto, through the French and Spanish dominions, and up to the Louisiana Purchase. In his second chapter, he points out that most settlers emigrated from southern states, especially Tennessee, but only in small numbers until Congress carved the Arkansas Territory out of the Missouri Territory in 1819. Another impediment to migration was the designation of nearly one-third of the territory as Indian reservations during the initial phase of removal.

Next Bolton analyzes the growth in the production of livestock, corn, and cotton until 1840. Though he demonstrates that Arkansas offered significant economic opportunity and that per capita production compared favorably with that of neighboring states, his statistics relate only to Arkansas.

In chapter four, Bolton stresses that the territory provided an excellent chance for squatters to acquire property and that it was a land speculator's paradise. Greed and fraud abounded. As was the case in much of the Old Southwest, Spanish land grants caused tremendous confusion and protracted litigation.

Fortunately, Bolton found sufficient sources to include a credible chapter on female settlers. Generally, in their accounts of this frontier, travelers have been as unkind to white women as to white men, but here the author dispels the crude and careless image of women on this frontier. Just as their sisters did on the Great Plains, in the Rockies, and in the Far West, Arkansas women shared in responsibilities while they preserved cultural heritages from the East. One marvels at the extensive

paper trail left by women in the trans-Mississippi West, in comparison to that left by nonplanter women of the South.

The author devotes the final two chapters to discussions of social class and territorial politics. Although the distribution of wealth was unequal, there was sufficient economic opportunity to assure social mobility based on wealth. The ownership of many slaves, for instance, placed one at the top of the socioeconomic ladder. A person possessing only a handful of slaves, however, was not necessarily assured of social acceptance. Society definitely had a Southern flavor. So did politics. Many men brought with them a political legacy from southern states, particularly Tennessee. Politics was a serious activity, and as Arkansas prepared for statehood in 1836, the impact of Jacksonian politics definitely was felt.

Bolton establishes a clear pattern of economic development in Arkansas—especially in the 1830s—but he treats his subject in isolation. The entire Old Southwest experienced flush times in the post-War of 1812 decades—an era of heavy immigration, frenzied land speculation, and phenomenal agricultural growth.

Bolton cites Rorhough's excellent work on the trans-Appalachian frontier, but he does not place his findings in the context of the rather extensive body of scholarship pertaining to the nation's territorial history.¹ Nor does he explain whether the territorial courts contributed to economic stability, as they did in many other territories.

Although the author used Clarence E. Carter (ed.), *Territorial Papers* (Washington, D.C., 1953–1954), XIX, XX, XXI, and searched land records in the National Archives, he evidently did not consult unpublished state and war department documents there. Nonetheless, Bolton deserves credit for extracting so many statistics from tax and census records and for ferreting out an impressive array of manuscript collections, travel accounts, and newspaper files, as research for a book that fills a void in the history of Arkansas and the Old Southwest.

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Masters & Lords: Mid-19th Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers. By Shearer Davis Bowman (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993) 357 pp. \$45.00

Potential readers of this fine book should not be misled by its title. It is not another contribution to the tired debate on the Prussian road to capitalism, but, rather, a comparative study of nineteenth-century East Elbian Junkers and antebellum southern planters—two groups, the author writes, who “constituted perhaps *the* most powerful *regional* elites

1 Malcolm J. Rorhough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775–1850* (New York, 1978).