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Gillum Ferguson, *Illinois in the War of 1812*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2012. Pp. xiii, 349. ISBN 978-0-252-03674-3.

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To judge from its title, this book seems to promise a much-needed account of operations in the frontier theater of the War of 1812, but there are significant problems with its research and writing. Gillum Ferguson, a lawyer and former state and federal prosecutor, devotes his introduction to a brief sketch of the geography of the Illinois Territory. He also succinctly describes the European-American settlers coming from Kentucky, Tennessee, or Virginia, their rough life, and their attitudes about freedom. Further, he looks at the French cultural areas of the Territory, which continued to be Cahokia and Kaskaskia, and notes that its other regions were still Indian-dominated. However, he plays to twenty-first-century conservative sensibilities in calling the Jefferson and Madison Administrations “pacifist” and writing that the Territory “mercifully” did not have many lawyers in 1812. He also claims the British were encouraging the Indians to attack settlers prior to 1812!

Ferguson notes that the Illini tribes at the time were in significant decline in the Illinois Territory after attacks by the Iroquois and Sioux. The Sauk, the Fox, the Potawatami, and the Kickapoo, with smaller numbers of Chippewa (*sic*; read Ojibwa), Menominee, and Winnebago were present as well. Ferguson sketches (too briefly) the decentralized politics of these tribes, their economic and political dependence on whites because of the fur trade, and their willingness to sell or cede land to ensure the continued flow of trade goods. His characterization of William Henry Harrison’s behavior toward Indians as generally honorable (!) casts doubt on his expertise concerning the prewar era. Moreover, he believes that, after the Battle of Tippecanoe, Tecumseh took over from the Prophet as the primary Indian leader. Such statements make one wonder about Ferguson’s historiographical research.

The detailed treatment in chapter 3 of prewar Indian-settler relations and frontier violence is very useful, since most attention has previously been on Indiana. Ferguson recognizes that claims about Indian violence were often based on rumor or purely fantastic stories. Beyond this, however, the default perspective here is that of the white settlers. Thus, he often refers to the Indians as “murderers,” overlooking that this was Indian territory, that the treaties giving it to whites were fraudulent, and that Indians saw their military tactics as legitimate ways to defend their homeland. The general omission of white atrocities against Indians makes this section of the book read like propaganda for the settler cause.

Ferguson attributes the fall of Fort Dearborn first to the disagreements between the commanding officer, his principal subordinates, and civilian officials at the fort. All this dissension, moreover, led to greatly differing explanations for the Indian massacre of the fort’s soldiers and civilians. Brig. Gen. William Hull, the Michigan Territorial Governor, had ordered the fort evacuated after the British took Mackinac. How he expected fifty-five soldiers and their families to get back to Detroit is a mystery, though they were supposed to be escorted by friendly Indians. Hostile Indians, however, were enraged when the commanding officer, while distributing the fort’s supplies to them, withheld and (on Hull’s orders) destroyed the ammunition and whiskey. Short of shot and powder, the Indians wiped out the inhabitants, especially the civilians, as the entourage tried to march east. As Ferguson notes, many of the Americans were saved from captivity, torture, or death only by British officials.

Ferguson understates the great strategic advantage that the loss of Detroit, Mackinac, and Dearborn gave the British and their Indian allies—the entire western frontier was opened to attack. He misses, too, the full significance of the ferocity of the attacks on the American forts. The slaughter of so many enemy women and children contrasts sharply with the Eastern Woodland Indians’ tendency to adopt rather than kill their captives. This may have to do with new and more violent methods of Indian warfare in the early

nineteenth century, born of their desperate straits, such as with the Red Sticks in Creek territory. But Ferguson does not address the question.

In retaliation for Indian attacks on frontier settlements, Illinois launched an assault on the Indian villages around Peoria in fall 1812 with a force of some four hundred men led by Illinois Territorial Governor Ninian Edwards. Two thousand Kentucky mounted militiamen were dispatched to join them and two boats of Illinois militia with heavy weapons and supplies were sent up river. The expedition was meant to drive the Indians from the Illinois River Valley, but it was so poorly coordinated that the forces never met up. Edwards's men, however, attacked one village, killing about eighty Indians, mostly women and children. Along their own fruitless march, the Kentucky militiamen plundered a Shaker village because of its pacifism and then torched a French village near Peoria suspected of Indian and British sympathies. The poor coordination, logistics, leadership, and troop discipline together with vague mission objectives typified the incompetence of frontier authorities and their constituents both in deciding on war to start with and in conducting it once begun. Ferguson sheds no light on these factors.

As in chapter 5 on Governor Edwards's expedition in fall 1812, Ferguson finally concedes that recurrent Indian raids and violence in winter 1812-13 were at least partially the fault of the Americans. Here again, Edwards's efforts at frontier defense illustrate what was wrong with the entire American war effort. Though one major war goal was to chastise the frontier Indians, Edwards was not even properly reinstated in office until months after his term expired. He never received adequate instruction from the Secretary of War, and Illinois received no Federal troops. The Indians feared an American attack to the west and took to the frontier to deter it. So, too, the Americans feared Indian attacks from the east. Consequently, Edwards had to constantly rotate mounted ranger and militia units to patrol the frontier and then pursue Indian raiders after attacks. These Indians were seldom caught and even another offensive in spring 1813—again led by Edwards—only temporarily deterred them. Meanwhile, Harrison had resigned as Indiana Territorial Governor to command an army in the Lake Erie area. Edwards himself found out only in the spring that he had been relieved as Territorial Governor and that defense of the Missouri, Indiana, and Illinois Territories had been turned over to Brig. Gen. Benjamin Howard! Here, at least, Ferguson's analysis of poorly planned command decisions is fuller and more cogent.

In summer and fall 1813, Illinois's defensive efforts met with both better results and some setbacks. Ferguson points out that it was more difficult to call out the militia, who had not been paid by the Federal Government for most of their duty in 1812 and the first half of 1813; many of the men and their families suffered significant material distress, since militia duty prevented them from pursuing their civilian occupations. Ferguson demonstrates that Howard's grasp of his larger command was weak, though the Illinois Territory did finally receive some Regular Army forces from St. Louis and more companies of mounted Rangers as reinforcements. This allowed him to return and build a fort at Peoria and regain control of the surrounding portion of the Illinois River Valley. Fort Madison in Iowa, however, finally had to be evacuated because of its vulnerable location. But, since many warriors had left Illinois to fight in Ohio, Michigan, and Ontario, the defeats at Fort Meigs and especially the Thames—not to mention Tecumseh's death—spared Illinois the sort of fighting seen in the east. The British defeat also demoralized many of the tribes. When their surviving warriors came back after October 1813, they were a spent force. The Potawatami, Winnebago, and Kickapoo tribes resigned themselves to peace with the United States. The Indian Agent William Clark convinced most of the Sauk to evacuate to St. Louis and form a stronger diplomatic alliance with the Osage.

Ferguson writes that during winter, spring, and summer 1814, Illinois at long last enjoyed a clearer chain of command, as Howard finally came under Harrison's command. But confusion persisted as Howard was first sent east to fight under Harrison, while William Clark became military and civil leader of the Missouri and Illinois Territories, but was then sent back to resume his military duties! To account for this, Ferguson claims Secretary of War John Armstrong saw the situation in Illinois and the other western territories as a low priority matter compared to retaking Mackinac and fighting on the Niagara front. Thus, little Federal money was allocated to mobilize either militiamen or regular troops. In fact, only a half-strength detach-

ment was posted to the new Fort Clark in Peoria. In spite of this, Clark and Howard decided to mount an offensive up the Mississippi to bypass Fort Madison and retake Prairie du Chien. Though they succeeded, the operation merely yielded another undermanned and exposed fort to defend, especially since the Americans had not retaken Mackinac.

The Americans' failed attack on Mackinac allowed the British to rally the Sauk against them in summer 1814. Ferguson explains that the British recapture of Prairie du Chien enabled them, together with their Indian allies, to project power back into northern Illinois and down to the southern third of the Territory. The American relief column's effort to take back Prairie du Chien ended in failure, as did Maj. Zachary Taylor's attempt to attack Sauk cornfields and build a fort at the mouth of the Des Moines River. Howard's death in September 1814 threw the command situation into even greater confusion; further, the Americans still lacked the men and resources to reassert themselves in the interior of the Territory. As a result, Indians attacked outlying American settlements in the fall and early winter. The Americans struck back against any Indians that could be found, including bands of Potawatomi who had already made peace with the United States. As in the first three chapters of the book, Ferguson should have concentrated on the mutual aspects of the violence; he is, however, more forthcoming about white atrocities in this later section.

The book concludes with the decline of military activity in winter 1814-15 because of the weather and then the end of the war itself. Ferguson shows, however, that the vast expanse of the frontier meant that word did not reach all the American and British posts until spring. Indian war parties continued to fight even then, since they did not see themselves as defeated and were unwilling to endure a perceived third betrayal by the British. The rest of 1815 and early 1816 saw peace conferences intended to assure the Indians that the war was indeed over, but also to force them to submit fully to US control—the British were gone for good and there would be no separate Indian state. This displeased many of the Sauk, especially Black Hawk, so Indian raiding continued, as did killings by white militia troops. Many of the treaties, while promising the Indians annuities and trade goods, also stipulated the cession of land. Yet Ferguson returns to his “frontier thesis”—that the conquest of the Indians was inevitable and the achievements of the “pioneers” laudable.

What happened to the Indians was tragic, to be sure, but it was also inevitable, and the heroism of the generation of pioneers that subdued them must not be overshadowed by the darker aspects of the story. Where the hard-handed men and women of 1812 had destroyed, they also planted and built. It is all too easy, two hundred years later, for those who enjoy the wealth and security of the state they made, to condemn them for doing what they had to do to make it. (207)

While it is good to have a history of Illinois during the War of 1812, this book is deficient in its research into Indian life, the realities of white encroachment on Indian lands, and the war's consequences for tribes that lost their autonomy. I hope that historians of the prairie frontier will take up the call.