

Several have covered Perry's actions adequately, but few have looked at other American commanders (such as Jesse Elliott), and no one has taken the American seamen into account. The last two authors, Stuart Sutherland and Douglas E. Clanin, have put together two most helpful and seemingly complete bibliographical essays. Sutherland describes the Canadian archives, while Clanin describes and lists the various collections in the United States containing War of 1812 materials. This book will be invaluable to researchers of the period for these two essays alone.

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Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and the Public Lands before the Civil War. By James W. Oberly. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990. Pp. xii, 222. Tables, illustrations, maps, figure, appendixes, notes, sources, index. \$28.00.)

In this well-focused study, James W. Oberly examines the origin, operation, and effect of land grant bounties in the 1840s and 1850s. In so doing, he provides valuable insights on federal administration of the national domain in the transitional period between the Distribution Act of 1841 and the Homestead Act of 1862. Although the underlying intent of established policy remained constant—to transfer public lands to private ownership and facilitate the settlement of new farmers—the assumptions that defined and framed governmental action were altered significantly. Administration officials and Congress had long considered land sales as a source of national revenue. In the late 1840s, Oberly argues, with land sale receipts depressed, government expenditures modest, and customs revenues healthy, the connection between public lands and the public debt attenuated. Politicians and citizens came to view the government as a proprietor, which could dispose of the national domain in order to meet various federal obligations. Accordingly, land grants were used to abet recruitment during the Mexican conflict, reward survivors of past wars, drain swamps, and promote railroads.

Oberly confines his analysis to a judicious statistical sampling of the sixty million acres of land grants given to American veterans and their heirs from 1847 to 1855. Perhaps mistaking effect for intent, Oberly contends that bounties functioned as a substitute for cash pensions plied from a penurious government by single-interest veterans organizations. Consequently, he concludes that warrants did not prove to be a fillip to western expansion; most assignees sold them for cash. Nor did grant holders who chose to locate their claims travel far, for they generally came from, and took up residence in public land states. Longstanding fears of

speculation, sharpening, and land monopolies notwithstanding, Oberly finds that warrant transactions were reasonably equitable, sellers realized handsome profits, and competition among big buyers tended to lower—not raise—acreage prices. In addition, he painstakingly explains the manner in which the warrants were processed and issued by the federal government as well as the way they were used by sellers and settlers in the upper Mississippi valley.

Yet to describe is not to explain. Anticipating the corruption of the Gilded Age, Oberly suggests that veterans lobbies, interest-group politics, and congressional land giveaways together signaled “the end of the old republic of Washington . . .” Perhaps. Early national and Jacksonian debates over the disposition of the public domain were structured and informed by a political culture defined by the interaction and tension between classical republicanism and nascent liberal capitalism. Oberly, however, roots the land bounty system in opportunism and pragmatism. That the older debate was eclipsed is clear; why it failed to resonate with the public is not. Nor is Oberly’s assessment of the dynamics of interest-group politics wholly persuasive. Many Jacksonian scholars contend that the function of antebellum politicians was to identify a hobby and ride it to power: that is, to give the public what it wanted. And by Oberly’s own account, the language and arguments employed by veterans organizations were rooted in the assumptions of that political environment.

The strengths of Oberly’s book are many. Its organization, research, and in-depth analysis shed light on a dimly understood, albeit narrow, development in national economic policy. Oberly also provides a number of healthy correctives to assumptions in the extant literature on land usage. Yet the absence of a broader historiographic context and, specifically, the failure to root this policy in the fluid political economy of the 1840s and 1850s, limits understanding of the transition to and popular appeal of the land bounty system. By extension it vitiates Oberly’s contribution to the economic history of antebellum America.

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Lee Considered: General Robert E. Lee and Civil War History. By Alan T. Nolan. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991. Pp. xii, 231. Illustration, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$22.50.)

A Virginia-born slaveholder and career military man once indicted for treason against the United States, Robert E. Lee some-