

In sum, *Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* is a disappointing book. It rehashes material more clearly and thoroughly presented elsewhere, contains controversial assertions for which no evidence is adduced, and is salted with errors of fact and interpretation. Those who wish to know about the philosophical underpinnings of the nation's most important political document are better advised to go elsewhere.

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*A Journey through the West: Thomas Rodney's 1803 Journal from Delaware to the Mississippi Territory.* Edited by Dwight L. Smith and Ray Swick. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997. Pp. xiii, 280. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$44.95.)

When Thomas Rodney, Delaware supreme court justice, was fifty-nine years old, Thomas Jefferson appointed him a Mississippi territorial judge and a land commissioner for part of the territory. To assume these responsibilities in Natchez, Rodney crossed the Appalachians and helped crew the custom-built *Iris* down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. His journey lasted from August 14 to December 1, 1803, including seventy-one days on water. Although Rodney's checkered life included a stint in debtors' prison, he was well-connected, intelligent, well-read, intrepid, insightful—and prone to exaggeration. His travel journal reveals his passion for history, geology, botany, zoology, river dynamics, archaeology, social questions, and morbidity. His journey from Delaware to Natchez was more than simple travel; it was a rite of passage, one that dispelled burdens and opened new worlds.

Boatmate conversations, fiddle and flute music, and his journal enlivened Rodney's spirits. Reflecting prevailing thought, Rodney lamented that western soil "is fine but in the hands of Indians . . ." (p. 158). Observing some assimilation of Indians, he also noted a white woman and her Indian husband. Rodney delighted in the unfolding natural and social environments and bubbled with expectation, awe, and mystery. Faulty guide books heightened the mystery.

Rodney recorded much: peaceful contacts with Indians, ubiquitous alcohol, "uncultured" Pennsylvania Germans (p. 10), lodging, food and food prices, tavern signs, "monstrous vines" (p. 49), river towns, the Blennerhasset mansion, Presbyterians who experienced "frenzy and shouting and falling down" like Methodists (p. 41), an "air gun" designed to fire twelve balls simultaneously (p. 50), lingering British influence north of the Ohio, illnesses, backwoodsmen, high wages and leveling among westerners, social tensions, Indian mounds, a "handsome blackeyed" river "nimph" (p. 97), the American

penchant for speed, numerous kindnesses among hustling travelers and local denizens, a backwoodsman's family refusing to migrate to Illinois and "the finest land he has ever seen" (p. 55), saline operations, upwardly mobile immigrants, geologic and river formations, French and Spanish influences, Natchez strumpets, and flora and fauna, but virtually no deer, bear, or insects.

In fact, much is revealed by what is not in the journal: murders, scrapes with Indians, predators, mean-spirited people, and other conflict. Attentive to detail and quick to spot troubles, Rodney would have noted violence had it occurred. Although his mates took potshots at raccoons, ducks, pigeons, and other wildlife, no shot was fired in anger. His journal is virtually conflict-free and abounds with instances of kindness and trust among strangers, Indians coming aboard, and perfect strangers meeting and getting along well via ad hoc activities.

Technically, this work is virtually flawless. Dwight L. Smith and Ray Swick employ a sensible editorial policy. Endnotes illuminate significant people and places, idioms, context, and historiographical material. The editors, moreover, make modest claims and readily admit uncertainties. Nine illustrations, four adequate maps, an index, and rich primary and secondary sources (including material on epidemiology) grace the work. Although one could wish that Rodney had recorded far fewer sandbars and river bends, superb editing helps this work succeed.

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*John Quincy Adams*. By Lynn Hudson Parsons. (Madison, Wis.: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1998. Pp. xviii, 284. Illustrations, suggested reading, index. \$29.95.)

This volume is one of a series entitled *American Profiles*, edited by Norman K. Risjord, who explains that he looks upon biography as "a pedagogical device," designed "to sugarcoat the pill" of history (p. ix). Thus interpreted, biography is to provide "a context for history," and the history here featured, according to Risjord, is to center on the "debate whether American expansion meant that human slavery necessarily went with it" (pp. ix, xv).

It is questionable whether Lynn Hudson Parsons held so limited a view of the life of John Quincy Adams. In fact, through the first six of eight chapters, until the discussion of Adams's congressional career in the mid-1830s, the only passages that relate Adams's identification of the slavery issue with American expansion are the accounts of the Louisiana Purchase, when the author comments that Adams "was ambivalent, even inconsistent" (p. 27), and the Missouri