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## Review of "The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860," by W.A. Dunaway

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*The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700–1860.* By Wilma A. Dunaway. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996. xvii + 448 pp. \$49.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper)

Wilma A. Dunaway writes that the Turnerian myth of self-sufficient “happy yeoman” farmers has fostered a fundamental misinterpretation of southern Appalachia as a region “where time stood still” and capitalism did not raise its head until the twentieth century. (p. 4). Using “world-systems analysis” and a vast and impressive array of primary sources, including quantified tax, census, and business records, she offers a “radical and purposeful departure from that conventional wisdom” (p. 5). In *The First American Frontier* Dunaway reaches two major conclusions. First, capitalism came to Southern Appalachia before, not after, the Civil War. Second, this antebellum Appalachian capitalism created a “landless semiproletariat” of “coerced workers,” which included African-American slaves, Cherokee Indians, tenant farmers, and other victimized Appalachian folk (p. 90).

This book will change the way we think about selected portions of antebellum southern Appalachia. Dunaway’s major accomplishment is her extensive documentation of the early stages of capitalism along the lower stretches of Appalachia’s navigable river valleys (crucial here is the inclusion of an “urban” Appalachian element via the Cumberland, Tennessee, and Ohio River cities of Nashville, Chattanooga, Louisville, Cincinnati, Wheeling, etc.). However, because Dunaway’s first thesis is grounded firmly on data from the Jacksonian era (a forty-year period of pronounced industrialization and economic expansion), the dates in the subtitle of this book are somewhat misleading. Moreover, this argument for antebellum Appalachian capitalism is much less convincing as regards the upper reaches of southern Appalachia’s major navigable rivers, much less the tributaries, creeks, and up-country hollows of Appalachian river valleys. There, land title offices, tax collectors, and census takers were non-existent. For example, Tennessee’s and Kentucky’s Upper Cumberland comes immediately to mind as just one place where reliable pre-1850s economic data is non-existent. And in the antebellum Upper Cumberland, as in most of southern Appalachia, there were most certainly no African-American slaves or Cherokee Indians to comprise a victimized “semiproletariat.”

This second thesis of an Appalachian “semiproletariat” certainly deserves close scrutiny. Since the days of Charles Beard, eco-

conomic and social historians have searched for and constructed statistical "proletariats" on the North American frontier. Their work has very often proven polemical and tedious. Dunaway veers away from the worst excesses of this kind of politicized scholarship, and in specific cases her data and arguments are strong. Yet in countering the Turnerian yeoman myth with her own neo-Marxist myth, she tells only part of the story. First, more common folk (including Appalachian folk) owned land in antebellum America than in any other place on the planet. Moreover, while material well-being was undoubtedly of great importance to these Appalachian folk, so too were their immediate and extended families, neighbors, religion, oral traditions, folk medicine, drink and floodways, recreation, material culture, music, and much, much more. Since Dunaway does not aim to address these folkways in this book, her economic determinism inevitably overlooks the heart and soul of southern Appalachian folk culture.

Like much of the new social history, *The First American Frontier* will find its audience among a few hundred specialists. Had the "new" western historians not eliminated colonial America and the concept of a "frontier" from their purview, this book might have served them well in training fresh troops. All graduate libraries should possess a copy. As an antidote, readers should keep close at hand the works of Frederick Jackson Turner, Frank L. Owsley, Thomas D. Clark, Arthur K. Moore, Malcom J. Rohrbough, Grady McWhiney, and John Mack Faragher.

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*French Fur Traders and Voyageurs in the American West: Twenty-five Biographical Sketches.* Edited by LeRoy R. Hafen. (Spokane, Wash., Arthur H. Clark Company, 1995. 333 pp. \$26. 50)

This is a collection of twenty-two unrevised biographies by fifteen different authors, originally published between 1965 and 1972 in LeRoy Hafen's ten-volume series, *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*. In the introduction, the volume's editor, Janet Lecompte, identifies the stereotypes which have idealized, denigrated, and otherwise misrepresented the understudied Frenchmen, French creoles, French-Canadians and métis who constituted an estimated four-fifths of the fur trade labor force; these essays, she writes, were chosen for their "quality of writing, strength of sources and richness of context" (p. 9). Challenging these stereotypes, these biographies are a compelling representa-