

Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and a Great American Land Grab

Adam Pratt

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Review

Pratt, Adam

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Inskeep, Steve *Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and a Great American Land Grab*. Penguin Press, \$29.95 ISBN 9781594205569

Making the South in Jackson's Image

Early on in Steve Inskeep's book, *Jacksonland*, he makes the audacious claim that Andrew Jackson, "more than any other single person, was responsible for creating the region we call the Deep South" (9). Although other contenders (John C. Calhoun, Strom Thurmond, Bear Bryant) come to mind, the radio host-cum-writer makes an interesting case for his assertion. Inskeep never really defines what he means by Deep South, other than a geographical region, but it seems what he is really getting at is the mindset that allowed thousands of whites to take Native land, expel or kill the Native residents, force slaves to grow cotton, and create a race-based hierarchical society. For Inskeep, this is what defines the Deep South, or as he calls it, Jacksonland, which is not so much a place as it is a process. Western historians, no doubt, would be horrified to find Frederick Jackson Turner lurking so far south.

Jacksonland details the ascent of Andrew Jackson, from his youth to his days as a successful general and heady speculator who used his position and influence to set up himself and his friends with the choicest acreage. The title is also apt because Jackson personified the mindset that made the eponymous land and process possible. He worked his way up from the bottom in a place that was only recently occupied by Indians and became a wealthy slaveowner, who used his influence to aid his friends, which only furthered the loyalty of those in his sphere. In a rather clever way, Inskeep is sidestepping the issue of the "Age of Jackson," by turning his attention to the process that took land away from Natives. The land appropriated by Jackson and his allies, of course, was neither unoccupied nor unclaimed. Although the title may be misleading, Inskeep also gives equal weight to John Ross, the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation,

whose diligent use of the law prevented Removal until 1838. The chapters dedicated to Ross flush out the narrative and complicate the notion of the inevitable march of Manifest Destiny across the country. Ross and the Cherokee Nation saw Jacksonland as an existential threat that had to be stopped, and they attempted to do so within the law.

Using the trope of competing maps, "The White Man's Map" and "The Indian Map," Inskeep sets up the struggle for land in interesting terms. The Cherokees sought to preserve what was; Jackson and other whites sought to create something that, at the time, could only be imagined. It was this imagining, of bringing a map into being, that allowed for the creative destruction of Indian land, the "lever they could use to dislodge the native population" (116). The rest of the book, then, is an account of how Jackson went about using his power to bring the white map to fruition, and how John Ross and the Cherokees attempted to thwart him to preserve the Cherokee map. This interesting take on a rather familiar story gets to the heart of what caused Cherokee Removal. The use of the map theme allows Inskeep's narrative to separate itself from a number of popular histories that have appeared in recent years that have brought attention to the tragedy of Cherokee Removal. At times, the focus on competing maps wanes, but Inskeep does enough to remind readers that this is the interpretative glue holding his work together.

That isn't to say that Inskeep's book is problem-free. Extraneous details, like where Jackson stayed on various trips and the names of hotel proprietors, though it makes for a lively account, add very little to Inskeep's overall argument or our collective understanding of what led to Cherokee Removal. By focusing on the politics and Supreme Court decisions, Inskeep misses the opportunity to explore the violent nature of existence faced by Cherokees every day, especially the actions of the notorious Georgia Guard. In fact, the actions of the Guard went against the oft-cited (by Georgia, at least) Compact of 1802, which stipulated that Cherokee land had to be acquired peacefully. Moreover, his characterization of John Ross, the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, lacks complexity. Because he was mixed-race, Inskeep only grants Ross an identity that was either white or Cherokee and not something that was more fluid or even politically pragmatic. Throughout the book, Ross could don a façade of whiteness when it suited his purposes, and could adopt a more Cherokee-centric identity when the time called for it. By ignoring the complexity of race along the frontier, Inskeep missed a chance to explore its meaning in a society bent on white male equality.

These complaints aside, Inskeep's *Jacksonland* is a great read. He has surpassed other accounts of the lead up to Removal in terms of how he presents meaningful anecdotes in clear prose. Although perhaps the focus shifts away from the Cherokees and towards Washington, Inskeep has written a fine book worth reading.

Adam Pratt is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Scranton. He can be reached at adam.pratt@scranton.edu.