

“I look upon the long journey, through the wilderness, with much pleasure”: Experiencing the Early Republic’s Southern Frontier

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Gideon Linsecum’s early life was one of constant movement. By 1815, Gideon was twenty-two years old, recently married, and had inherited his father’s love of “a border life” and “naturally . . .restless disposition.” On the eve of his exploration into the “Alabama country,” Gideon’s young life had already been molded by the practicalities of the do-it-yourself nature of frontier living; he could boast of a pool of talents garnered from a frontier life: surveyor, store clerk, tax collector, farmer and doctor.

Gideon’s 1815 cotton crop was ready for harvest at an estimated 31¢ per pound when he “became restless” and decided to leave the cotton at his Georgia homestead standing in the fields to set out for new lands. Desirous of “a home in the wilderness,” Gideon, his father, and their families settled first on the Ocmulgee River but were on the move again a year later. In explaining this hunger to uproot his family, Gideon surmised: “I had been reared to a belief and faith in the pleasure of frequent change of country, and I look upon the long journey, through the wilderness, with much pleasure.” By the spring of 1818, the Linsecum caravan arrived in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, which by Gideon’s observation was “at that time a small log cabin village; but . . . in the course of that year it grew to be a considerable town.” They would stay only a year before heading to Columbus, Mississippi.¹

Captured within the Linsecums’ story is the mythic character of America’s frontiers that has long fascinated historians as well as everyday Americans. This image of a natural world, untouched by the civilizing, Euro-American presence has been an enduring notion that proved central to both the opening decades of the 19th century and to the first full century of the United States’ nationhood. The taming of both nature and its “savage” inhabitants combined to offer eastern Americans the promise of personal success in easy land acquisitions that had opened with the Revolution and the Louisiana Purchase.²

¹ For excerpts of Linsecum’s travel journal see Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 200-202.

² To begin one’s journey through the “frontier” of American frontier historiography one must start with Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996 reprint). From there, see David S. Brown, *Beyond the Frontier: The Midwestern Voice in American Historical Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Robert E. May, “Multiplying Frontiers.” *Reviews in American History* 37.2. (June 2009), 198-204; Andro Linklater, *The Fabric of America: How Our Borders and Boundaries Shaped the Country and Forged Our National Identity* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007), 250-260; John Mack Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner “The Significance of the Frontier in American History and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Michael Steiner, “From Frontier to Region: Frederick Jackson Turner and the New Western History.” *The Pacific Historical Review* 64.4. (November, 1995), 479-501; Richard White, “Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill” found at <http://www.studythepast.com/his378/turnerandbuffalobill.pdf> (1994); William Cronon, “Revisiting the Vanishing Frontier: The Legacy of Frederick Jackson Turner.” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18.2. (April, 1987), 157-176. For the power of purchasing land in early America see

For historians, the migration of people, no matter the size, has often evoked the classic consideration of change versus continuity. The current essay is concerned primarily with considering the processes and experiences of waves of individuals migrating to small, cross-paths villages like Tuscaloosa, Alabama. In evaluating these individuals' stories of settlement, we are drawn into a measuring the frontier, one that follows individuals' perceptions and fantasies of frontier environments. What I seek to sort out is the personalized, cultural encounter. How did relocating to the frontier South present white settlers with the opportunity to create on the pages of letters and diaries their own frontiers? The mythic construction of a place in Americans' South and consciousness began as early as migrants set out for this "new country"—and, at times, even without leaving home.³

The lack of attention paid to the southern frontier by historians in the past fifty years has left an inaccurate view of what the Deep South's early days actually looked like. In lectures and books (usually devoted primarily to the still-dominant Antebellum and Civil War South), as well as within the popular imagination, the frontier South was, in one moment, an unsettled backcountry of the British North American empire and in the blink of a bow weevil's eye it had blossomed into King Cotton's Country circa 1850. Certainly, several recent monographs have aimed at undermining this perception like the works of Edward E. Baptist, James David Miller and Adam Rothman. But, by entering the frontier through the adventures of the Lincecums and their compatriots, the broader implications of Southwestern migration and settlement can be pulled down to a localized scale, where the work of encountering and making the frontier took place. There, we get the benefit of viewing both individuals as well as kin groups bringing a variety of experiences with them to the frontier. Some, like the Lincecums, were quite familiar with the rugged life of backcountry living. While some individuals were taken aback by the strenuous nature of the journey and the challenges that greeted them when making their way to villages that barely existed upon their arrival; others' adventures took them on to various places in the emergent backcountry while even others ended up retracing the journey to head back from whence they came.⁴

Besides travel narratives, letters of correspondence showcase the firm attachments that Tuscaloosa immigrants sustained with family and friends they left behind in places like Fitchburg, Massachusetts, Laco, Maine, Louisburg, North Carolina and Salem, South Carolina. The creases of these letters were folded with the expectations of acquiring the best agricultural lands in the 19th century South as well as keeping a keen watch on commodity prices or, like one of our frontier correspondents, working non-stop in the ever-essential frontier trading firms. Of equal importance to these settlers was good

Andro Linklater, *The Fabric of America: How Our Borders and Boundaries Shaped the Country and Forged our National Identity* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007).

³ Andro Linklater, *Measuring America: How an Untamed Wilderness Shaped the United States and Fulfilled the Promise of Democracy* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2002) and *The Fabric of America: How Our Borders and Boundaries Shaped the Country and Forged our National Identity* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007).

⁴ See Edward E. Baptist *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); James David Miller *South By Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

physical health. Like that discovered in Arkansas and Missouri by historian, Conevery Bolton Valenčius, concerns over frontier health filled these correspondences.⁵

In the shadows of the hundreds of thousands of migrants flowing on to the southern frontier engaging in what one North Carolinian called the “Alabama Fever,” what I hope to do here is direct our gaze at the individualized stories that get lost in the enormity of the migration of thousands upon thousands of persons pushing down the Federal Road out of the Carolinas and Georgia or shipping their lives down the Ohio and then Tennessee or Mississippi Rivers. In so doing, we can catch a glimpse of how the southern frontier as a place and concept developed in the early nineteenth century. Three vignettes will serve as our guides through the wilderness. Collectively, they demonstrate several key points about moving through the southern frontier. First, the environment, filled with rugged terrain, rapid rivers, the possibility of hostile Indians, and thick foliage, presented challenges almost unimaginable; second, despite all the complications of moving through the frontier, individuals remained vigilant to take notice of “good lands” and the region’s future, agricultural potential; and third, that American market activities, as early as the 1810s, had penetrated the not-so-deep corners of the South’s frontier, building on earlier trading routes used by English and French colonials.⁶

The most famous of early visitors to the site of Tuscaloosa was *the* American frontier legend, David Crockett. It was Crockett’s participation with John Coffee’s and Andrew Jackson’s military excursions throughout Alabama that brought him to what they “called the Black Warrior’s town.” Crockett’s description of his 1813 arrival in the “Indian town” is both a rare, and brutal account of pre-white-settlement Tuscaloosa.⁷

⁵ On the private nature of letter writing see Michael Warner *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) as well as his *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005). And on public encounters and community formation see the indispensable Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006, reprint of 1983) and his predecessor Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1989, reprint of 1962 German edition). See also: Carolyn Earle Billingsley *Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Families and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004). Some of the earliest developments of the this business mentalite and its part in the eighteenth-century cultural exchanges between native peoples and Euro-Americans is discussed by Claudio Saunt in his *The New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) as well as in Andrew R.L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute, eds, *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to Mississippi, 1750-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1998). Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2002).

⁶ James Graham to Thomas Ruffin, Nov 9, 1817, in *The Papers of Thomas Ruffin*, ed J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton (4 volumes, Raleigh: 1918-20), I: 198. Cited in Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 196. One of the most enlightening historiographical discussions of the evolution and confirming the importance of southern backcountry studies can be found in “Editor’s Welcome” *Journal of Backcountry Studies* 1.1. (Spring, 2006), <http://library.uncg.edu/ejournals/backcountry/Vol1No1/Editor.pdf>.

⁷ For biographies of Crockett see John S.C. Abbott, *David Crockett: His Life and Adventures* (London: Echo Library, 2006); Buddy Levy, *American Legend: The Real-Life Adventures of David Crockett* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 2005); James Atkins Shckford, John B. Shackford and Michael Lofaro, *David Crockett: The Man and the Legend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986 reprint); Michael A. Lofaro, *Davy Crockett: The Man, the Legend, the Legacy, 1786-1986* (Knoxville: University of

Size and utility mattered little to Crockett's contemporaries; an Indian village no matter how bountiful could be reduced to ashes with little compunction. Crossing the Tennessee River, in 1816, Crockett returned to "Creek Country" where one member of his party fell victim to a "very poisonous snake" after which Crockett, with little recorded remorse, "left him and went on." While camping the night north of Tuscaloosa, "as there were no inhabitants," his group awoke to the sounds of their horses reversing the path they had taken to Tuscaloosa. Hoping to recover the horses, Crockett traveled fifty miles—perhaps a generous embellishment given Crockett's proclivity for exaggeration—"wading creek and swamps, and climbing mountains" but was unable to catch up to the animals. Once he gave up the hunt, Crockett was so "sore, and fatigued" that he could barely walk. Discovered by "some Indians" in a "perfect wilderness," Crockett would be impressed both by the Natives' attempts to revive him with their "ripe melons" and the abilities of his Indian escort. Although Crockett felt at one point that the "jig was mighty nigh up with me," he recovered and returned home to the "utter astonishment" of his wife who had believed rumors of his death.

Evidenced throughout his autobiography, Crockett considered himself the successor to Andrew Jackson—both had made careers in Tennessee, neither were intellectual men, and both had proven their manly prowess fighting southern Natives. His writings can awaken readers to the test of wills that the frontier necessitated. Assuredly, much of its hyperbolic writing succeeded in guaranteeing him a place in Americans' imagining of frontier life; however, his realities of life in early Tennessee and his escapades in frontier Alabama solidly illustrate the dense nature of the physical environment as well as the keen personal survival techniques necessitated by backcountry living. In the mid-1810s, friendly persons were thinly disbursed in the backcountry of the southwest and if one was able to locate a settler's homestead as Crockett did with Indian guidance, medical assistance would have been primitive at best. Even more significant for us were Crockett's first encounters with the Indian village at the headwaters of the Black Warrior River, for in them he made sure to note soil fertility and possible city planting. These points of emphasis did not fade with intensified white exploration of Tuscaloosa.

Crockett and others' exploration narratives tell us of the overwhelming importance of land in the evolution of southern history. Not only were individuals willing to risk life and limb to push southwestward in their desire to see and "settle" new places but they were economically inspired to acquire new lands for cheaper prices than they might back east. Of equal importance, they evoke an awareness to the fact that there existed a large cadre of peoples already in the frontier South prior to the American shift westward; readers observe the far deeper knowledge of the physical layout of the frontier's rivers and valleys and, intriguingly, where the first settler's homes could be located in relation to local Natives. They do *not* show the earliest migrations as part of religious missions or as oriented for large groups. In fact, the earliest of America's backcountry peoples' experiences were highly individualized. Sometimes they appeared in groups of three or four. Larger assemblages were often a part of military expeditions

Tennessee Press, 1985). David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee* (Philadelphia: E.L. Carey and A. Hart, 1834), 83-84. Although the validity of Crockett's authorship has been called into serious question since its first publication, it still offers useful and relevant details from his encounters with frontier Tuscaloosa.

designed to clear the way for larger family groups that filled vacuous spaces on the frontier, virtually unhindered by displaced Indian populations. Finally, these documents produce an image of the frontier as a place of wilderness needing to be tamed by white settlement. Although it was treacherous, Crockett's escapades demonstrated that with enough determination and insensitivity, whites could expand the new Republic south and westward.⁸

What this expansion meant for family connections and their "competing agendas" has, of course, been examined by historian Joan Cashin and, as she so affectively articulated, these connections tell us much about the migratory and settling experience. Migration to the frontier, as Cashin described in her now classic work, *A Family Venture* involved whole American families "in the sense that men and women both took part in it." Although, this essays describes only men journeying and journaling singularly through the frontier South, Cashin's much broader point, I believe, remains. I would offer only a slight alteration: the surprisingly strong elasticity of connection bound families together whether they migrated as a unit or spatially distanced themselves from their loved ones, placing hundreds of miles in between. Not only were these connections strong, but they involved men *and* women and highlighted both the intimate dynamics that structured family life in the early American republic and the extreme emotionality that male adventurers displayed in their letters home. As individuals migrated, they cherished the knowledge they received concerning upcoming weddings, financial successes and failures, unforeseen reunions, divorces, and, quite consistently, the health of their loved ones.⁹

Despite the frontier setting, family life and connections with those individuals left behind could prove annoying and even frightfully close. Such was the case in our second vignette which highlights two important points demonstrated by personal letters: one, family networks did not cease to function when individuals migrated south and west—in fact, they functioned ably via an almost constant torrent of deeply personal messages; two, these community and family networks actually buoyed the migratory spirit as information flowed back to migrants' associates.

Writing to her son, John Bird in Tuscaloosa in May of 1822, Winifred Bird of Salem, South Carolina illustrates the emotive power and weight contained within the art of letter writing for nineteenth-century contemporaries as well as the fact that guilt could and was wielded to press children into action, no matter their age or distance from home. Bird offered her thankfulness for her son's "expectations of making out well," having "taking a companion," she prayed, would prove to be "a comfort" for her son's "advance through life."

Bird bemoaned, however, an earlier insinuation that her son would never "visit this quarter of the world again;" for even he must have realized, Bird sentimentalized, "I

⁸ On the importance of land in frontier southern history see Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of A Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990); J. Mills Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Mary E. Young, *Redskins, Ruffleshirts and Rednecks: Indian Land Allotments in Alabama and Mississippi, 1830-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002 reprint).

⁹ Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4-7.

should be happy to see you once again.” Regardless of the “certainly long distance,” Bird felt her offspring could “spare that much time as to come and see your aged mother.” Her next lines are as revealing today as they were when she first scrawled them, stretching out from Salem to Tuscaloosa binding, distraught mother to reluctant son:

My circumstances are such that if you would come, I most undoubtedly would return with you, as I cannot make out here, everything, for the sustenance of life is very scarce and dear , and I am afraid many families this year will suffer... if it is possible for you to leave home, I should think it would be paying part of the great debt, that a child owes its parents...to assist its parent in their decline of life, and try and smooth the thorny and riggid [sic] path that leads to the common end of all mankind...”¹⁰

Family ties, as often as they were stretched by resettlement, could equally serve to reunite family members on the frontier. Such was the case with the Snow brothers of vignette three. It was a brotherly connection that brought Charles Snow to Tuscaloosa in 1826. Born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts around 1803, Charles followed elder brothers Henry Adams Snow and Zabdial Boylston Snow to the village at the Falls of the Black Warrior. Shortly after his arrival in Tuscaloosa, Charles took up his pen to begin correspondence with his mother, Elizabeth Snow who resided in the family’s second home in Laco, Maine.¹¹

Throughout his letters, Snow presented a wide-ranging commentary on early society, health, weather, the state of southern slavery, his brothers’ “Old Bachelor habits” as well as his own prospects among the female population in Alabama. In 1826, Snow conveyed his apologies to his mother for the delay in his writing her as most of his time was “taken up with business.” Although he was “pleasantly situated and think when I get acquainted I shall like living here as well as in Fitchburg. In addition to the weather, Charles had found a pair of “real Yankees” to befriend while having a difficult time avoiding the numerous hogs as “we can hardly step into the street without running over one.” This overabundance of mobile pork, nonetheless, did not fully turn Charles off on Tuscaloosa for he admitted to loving “sweet potatoes” as well as the “superb peaches” even as there were “no Irish potatoes...and no apples” to be had. By the end of his first year in residence, he was “satisfied with the living” in Tuscaloosa.¹²

In one letter in 1828, Charles pinned Tuscaloosa’s progress to that of his brothers’ success. Men on the make, Boylston had been chosen a city alderman and Henry had been re-elected to the State Bank’s Board of Directors who had just overseen the completion of a State banking house. Always inclined to confirm for his mother that he was adjusting to life in Tuscaloosa, Charles bragged of his good health. He had not “a sick day since I left home” and “The people are very hospitable to us.” It was perhaps during one of those hospitable visits that Charles sought information on the women of

¹⁰ Winifred Bird letter to John Goodson, May 5, 1822. W.S. Hoole Special Collections, University of Alabama.

¹¹ *Pioneers of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama Prior to 1830* (Tuscaloosa Genealogical Society, 1981), 453-454.

¹² Charles Snow letter to Elizabeth Snow, November 6, 1826 in the Richard James Hook Papers. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Tuscaloosa to pass along to his mother. A topic he took “much pleasure in,” Snow relayed in November 1826 that the society of men at Tuscaloosa seemed as “good or better than at home,” but that he knew little about the female population “having yet but little acquaintance” with them. Indeed, Snow felt adamant about his marital status. He would either remain in “single blessedness” or “go home for a wife.”¹³

Given Snow’s increasing familiarity with life in the frontier South, much of his writing also granted his mother a chance to compare their native New England with the evolving slave society of Tuscaloosa. On the topic of slavery, Snow drew stark differences between “free & slave-holding states” presenting his mother with southern slavery in the following manner:

The kind of lives the planters lead I am yet unacquainted not having visited any of them. The appearance of the planters in Virginia however struck me forcibly. The rich live in fine houses. They are generally at some considerable distance from the road from a quarter of a mile to 8 or 10 times that distance surrounded with ancient trees, with small house back for the negroes, and around them... an appearance... that made me think of the old feudal times of which we read. They live like Lords that...but too often lead dissipated lives. There is not magnificence here [in Alabama]. The country is new and the great mass of planters live in log houses.¹⁴

Offering a multilayered representation of what the rising slave South looked like, he described for his mother southern slavery as a well-ordered system with a strict spatial dimension that reflected class order as well as division. The classic mental portrait no doubt remains seared in the minds of most historians of the nineteenth-century South. And so it should, or would had Charles not set early Tuscaloosa against the backdrop of slave Virginia. For it was concerning Virginia that Snow observed a world of slavery that reminded him of “the old feudal times” of Europe; whereas, frontier Tuscaloosa was a “new” country where planters, great and small, lived in log houses.

If there was a direct correlation with joining the ranks of frontier slaveholders and loss of reputation back home that relationship did not seem to dissuade the Snows. Knowing the details would “excite...interest,” Charles described he and his brothers’ slave as a fifteen year old of a similar size as himself. Bob’s work included “brush[ing] our boots & cloathes, mak[ing] our beds, clean[ing] our rooms, besides our store work.” Tellingly, Charles uncomfortably revealed his new mantle as slaveholder: “I have as conscientious scruples in becoming a slave holder... I believe I should make a tolerably good master/ and I suppose every one believes that of himself/ I believe I do a good deed as I think I may benefit the condition of the slave.” Furthermore, for a mother who had

¹³ Charles Snow letter to Elizabeth Snow, August 25, 1829 in the Charles Snow Letters. Special Collections Library, Duke University Library. Charles Snow letter to Elizabeth Snow, November 6, 1826 in the Richard James Hook Papers. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

¹⁴ Charles Snow letter to Elizabeth Snow, November 6, 1826 in the Richard James Hook Papers. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

not seen southern slavery, Charles wished to convey the impossibility of finding a “faithful servant” in a “slave country” without “own[ing] one.”¹⁵

From as early as 1828, new southerners like the Snows were unable to resist the influences of their frontier environment and thus, they participated in the development of the rhetorical apparition of a beneficent slaveholder who only reluctantly purchased human laborers as they could not manage without them. Such difficult decisions were made easier, they consoled themselves, by the fact that *their* ownership, unlike that of native southern whites’, was a charitable act for slaves who could not advance in a civilized world outside slavery. Sadly, no letter of response remains from Charles’s mother to relay her reactions to her sons’ transmutation into slaveholders after only six years of life in the slave South.¹⁶

From traversing through the “new country” to settlement-driven migration, when pulled together, these experiences produce the image of a physically expanding U.S. that permitted the rapid development of a newer, deeper South. For migrants caught up in the general territorial movements west that occurred throughout the backwaters of what was previously British North America—from Maine to Ohio to Kentucky and Alabama—frontier life was a complex blend of both newness and similarity. Certainly, as historical geographer D.W. Meinig has argued, the largess of the this geographic movement of people was not a “broad sweep westward” but rather an “uneven advance along several pathways, the direction and volume responding to Indian cessions, land qualities and accessibilities, speculative promotions and popular fervors, resulting in a continuous reshaping of the outer edge of the frontier.” Regionally, however, the southern version of this national story of expansion has remained a narrative or collection of narratives clouded by the enormity of migration and a plethora of historians’ distractions.¹⁷

For sure, the numerics of social history have been quite enlightening and foundational to the pursuits of cultural history; however, the individual and cultural dynamics at work in this movement of peoples remain tragically undervalued. A few questions demonstrate this essay’s call to action. How does one come to grips with the perceived newness confronted when arriving at a place where virtually no similar migrants had settled, or perhaps, even seen before? What of the cultural norms and traits that were shed, sustained, or altered to fit the project of recreating social order on a frontier? Indeed, what arises from the letters and documents of the earliest migrants to Tuscaloosa, Alabama is the sense that they coped with the difficulties and stresses of migration and distance from loved ones by creating the mantle of the frontier. Through vivid detail they commented on soil types, water provisions, and the ever-present notion that one day the wild and rugged frontier they were taming would be conquered. Consciously, they wrote of their journeys and almost never second-guessed their abilities to survive and, in fact, thrive in this new country of the Old Southwest.

¹⁵ Charles Snow letter, February 10, 1828 in the Charles Snow Letters. Special Collections Library, Duke University Library.

¹⁶ For the construction of this grand benevolence embraced and espoused by southern slaveholders and pro-slavery ideologues as the nineteenth century wore on see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese’s *The Mind of the Master Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and *Slavery in White and Black* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, Volume 2: Continental America, 1800-1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 224 and 235.

Indeed, for travelers like Gideon Lincecum and Davy Crockett and settlers like the Birds and the Snows, frontier Tuscaloosa was a place of adventure, opportunity, and imagination. Simultaneously, it offered intrigue, violence, and chance. Nowhere could any migrant find a guarantee of personal success and in an America that faced economic panics around every corner, migrating to a new place must have been exciting and terrifying for many of the same reasons. It is exactly that enthusiasm and anticipation that has survived in many of the letters and narratives that infused the cultural production of the frontier that makes Tuscaloosa's story so important. Coming to grips with how these productions relied on processes of rewriting within the diaries, journals, and correspondences of migrants and settlers presses us deep into the forests of the Deep South's unexplored mythic frontier—with all its intensity and risk, the expedition is long overdue.