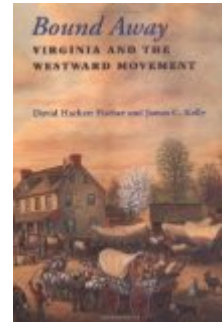


David Hackett Fischer, James C. Kelly. *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000. xvi + 366 \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8139-1774-0.



Reviewed by Mark R. Cheatham

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The Turner Thesis at the End of the Twentieth Century

When Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his famous 1893 address to members of the American Historical Association during the World's Columbian Exposition, he likely had no idea that historians would still be debating his ideas at the end of the twentieth century. His argument that the American frontier shaped the character of the American people and their democratic institutions has dominated historiographical discussions at certain times during the last 107 years. While most, if not all, historians are reluctant to accept Turner's contentions as a whole, the frontier thesis still maintains a hold on the profession. To a great degree, the average American also subscribes to the ideals of the frontier thesis, absorbing the numerous books and films that have glorified the Old West and the rugged frontiersman.

David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly take the Turnerian thesis as a starting point in their efforts to define the history of Virginia. Fischer is an historian at Brandeis University, well known for his controversial works on historical fallacies and

cultural persistence in colonial America, while Kelly is Assistant Director for Museums at the Virginia Historical Society. The stated goal of *Bound Away*, according to the authors, is to examine migration into, within, and out of Virginia during the first three centuries of its existence as a colony and a state. Fischer and Kelly claim that the book's title, a line from an old folk song entitled "Shenandoah," encompasses two themes. The first theme is that of cultural persistence in Virginia's history. The second theme consists of the reality that, for African slaves, they truly were "bound away" to become part of Virginia society. The authors unfortunately did not include the lyrics to the entire song, but their use of this phrase fits neatly with the book's purpose.

The study is divided up into six chapters. The first three examine the migration of peoples into, within, and out of Virginia. The fourth chapter looks at the reasons for the decline of Virginia's power as a state and the migration of its people westward. The fifth chapter considers the separate experience of African migration, from enslavement in Africa to forced departure from Vir-

ginia. Lastly, Fischer and Kelly conclude by determining the cultural legacy of Virginia in instances of land use, political institutions, systems of labor, and other ways. Most of this final chapter focuses on architecture to the detriment of other examples.

After examining the evidence, Fischer and Kelly conclude that Virginia does not fit the Turner model, but they also find that it does not fit perfectly with the germ theory of migration and settlement. Instead, they discover "evidence of persistent but dynamic hegemonic cultures formed mainly by processes of migration, dominated by elites, changing in response to historical events and conditions, and preserving their power and influence for many generations" (298). This argument appears too broad at first glance. What Fischer and Kelly are stressing, however, is that both the frontier thesis and the germ theory are too static to explain a society in change. The first settlers in Virginia did not maintain control over the colony, as new members of the elite took the reins of power. At the same time, the authors argue, the frontier thesis does not ring true because of the introduction of slavery and the often-undemocratic nature of Virginia politics. Cultural persistence was certainly a key element in the development of a Virginia culture, but it adapted and evolved as new groups moved in and out of the colony and state.

Bound Away is a good resource for those interested in Virginia history or cultural persistence. The format of the book makes it easy to read. The authors have included numerous photographs and illustrations that draw in the reader. The argument, while not new, allows one to reconsider once again the importance of Frederick Jackson Turner's idea and the changes that historians have wrought upon our view of American history, government, and society.

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