Public Abstract

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This dissertation reconsiders the historical vision of the lone pioneer on the prairie as a rugged individual by examining how government affected the direction of white settlement in the old Northwest Territory, especially in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois from the 1780s until 1840. Using newspapers, government records, and public and private statements, it argues that federal, territorial, and state governments had a profound impact on the lives of settlers during this time period. From the military removing Indian and foreign threats to the land offices helping to reorient American views of the land, this dissertation shows that government engaged and encouraged those Western pioneers at nearly every turn. By the 1820s and 1830s, a new kind of politics emerged in the region that embraced government, too, and it shows in the conclusion focusing on Abraham Lincoln that many of these later Westerners supported government intervention in economic development, Indian affairs, and a slew of other matters.