



Our Common Country : Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest

Susan Sessions Rugh

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Examines the evolution of family farm culture in the 19th-century Midwest.

In the 19th century, agrarian ideology flourished in the Midwest, where countless settler families carved homesteads out of the prairie and nurtured ideals that we consider distinctively American—independence, democracy, community, piety. *Our Common Country* explains the making of the family farm culture in the heartland by telling the story of families in rural Fountain Green, Illinois, from settlement to century's end. It presents both a richly textured social history and a compelling narrative of people the reader will come to know. The book examines three themes: changing cultural identities, the expansion of the market, and the adoption of class-based gender ideologies, featuring a major political conflict in each stage of market expansion—the Mormon troubles, the Civil War, and the Grange protest—to highlight the transformations that took place.

Susan Sessions Rugh claims that, despite the Midwest's reputation of cultural homogeneity, rural society was an amalgamation of culturally distinct groups of white, native-born farm people. She shows how civil society and religious community in small towns like Fountain Green sustained an agrarian patriarchy. As expanding corporate power and gender tensions threatened rural society in the last third of the 19th century, Rugh argues that the out-migration of rural people ironically diffused agrarian values throughout the nation.

Demonstrating the broader implications of this story, Susan Rugh connects events in Fountain Green to larger regional and national developments in politics, the economy, and society. *Our Common Country* convincingly demonstrates that the transformation of the countryside was as important as the rise of the city to the evolution of the Middle West and the making of modern America. By so doing it argues for the vitality of rural history to understanding our past, and to appreciating the meaning of pastoralism to American identity.

Susan Sessions Rugh earned her doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1993, and from 1993 to 1997 she was on the faculty at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. Currently she is Assistant Professor of History at Brigham Young University.

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