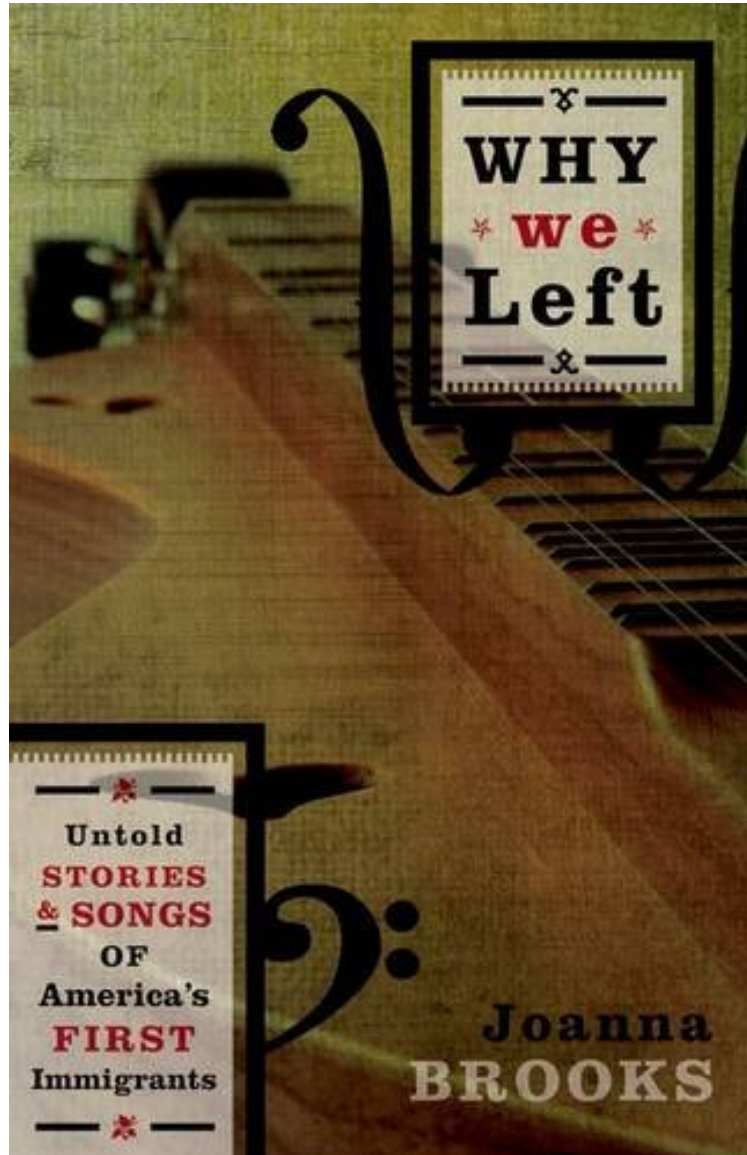


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## Why We Left: Untold Stories and Songs of America's First Immigrants

Joanna Brooks

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**Joanna Brooks : Why We Left: Untold Stories and Songs of America's First Immigrants** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Why We Left: Untold Stories and Songs of America's First Immigrants:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great Book, Writing Style Somewhat InconsistentBy BoscoThis is

an extremely interesting book with a fascinating thesis. Since my background is quite similar to the author's, *Why We Left* really hits home. There's a great deal of this that I hadn't heard before, but it really does change the way I look at history now - especially as it impacts my own family tree. The only criticism I have is the actual writing style. She seems to alternate inconsistently between an academic style and personal reflection. This might work if there were clear breaks in the text (such as blocking or italics) but (at least in the Kindle version) this isn't the case. What's apparent is that she's not attempting to provide personal reflection, but that her writing is simply a bit inconsistent. This doesn't really detract from the reading experience enough to make the book less informative or enjoyable, but it does, imho, prevent it from receiving 5 stars. 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Why we are still abandoned

By martha bertles Fascinating book suggests to me that the dysfunctional attachment strategies plaguing so many Americans today stem from the industrialization of forested lands in Britain in the 17th century and the "spiriting" away of the unwanted poverty stricken on to American shores.

Joanna Brooks's ancestors were among the earliest waves of emigrants to leave England for North America. They lived hardscrabble lives for generations, eking out subsistence in one place after another as they moved forever westward in search of a new life. Why, Brooks wondered, did her people and countless other poor English subjects abandon their homeland to settle for such unremitting hardship? The question leads her on a journey into a largely obscured dimension of American history. With her family's background as a point of departure, Brooks brings to light the harsh realities behind seventeenth- and eighteenth-century working-class English emigration and dismantles the long-cherished idea that these immigrants were drawn to America as a land of opportunity. American folk ballads provide a wealth of clues to the catastrophic contexts that propelled early English emigration to the Americas. Brooks follows these songs back across the Atlantic to find histories of economic displacement, environmental destruction, and social betrayal at the heart of the early Anglo-American migrant experience. The folk ballad *Edward*, for instance, reveals the role of deforestation in the dislocation and emigration of early Anglo-American peasant immigrants. *Two Sisters* discloses the profound social destabilization unleashed by the advent of luxury goods in England. *The Golden Vanity* shows how common men and women viewed their own disposable position in England's imperial project. And *The House Carpenters Wife* offers insights into the impact of economic instability and the colonial enterprise on women. From these ballads, tragic and heartrending, Brooks uncovers an archaeology of the worldviews of America's earliest immigrants, presenting a new and haunting historical perspective on the ancestors we thought we knew.

From Publishers Weekly Brooks (*American Lazarus*) makes an intriguing case that, rather than a land of opportunity, colonial America represented a harsh sanctuary. Drawing upon the archives of colonial ballads, she describes the circumstances that propelled 400,000 English across the Atlantic in pre-Revolutionary times. Like today's country music, lyrics of that era relate tales of murder, rivalry, false promises, and cheating hearts. Brooks also uses her own lineage to illustrate the hardship of life circa 1770. With unprecedented population growth and an economy that shifted from subsistence to exports, 18th century England produced a new class of landless laborers, which included her forefathers. The old songs were kept alive by 20th century folk singers such as Davy Crockett Ward, his wife Lina, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, Attie Crane, and Horton Barker. In the 1930s folklorist Alan Lomax moved his School of the Air radio show to Virginia to collect the traditional tunes now stored at the Library of Congress. That collection includes the ballad of *Two Sisters* and a *Beaver Hat*, which concludes: "Then young men have a care/of painted curled Locks. For such, though faire above, below may have the Pox." These ballads may be the best surviving records of what brought so many here. (May) "*Why We Left* draws creatively on early folk ballads of England and America to make a surprising, bold, and altogether brilliant contribution to our understanding of why people crossed the Atlantic to live in a strange new world. Haunting voices sing to us across the centuries a rich and disturbing history from below." Marcus Rediker, author of *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* "Joanna Brooks compellingly recreates the lives of British peasants who came to the New World. She traces their collective memories through the folk ballads sung by their descendants and collected diligently by scholars and revivalists. Riveting, harrowing, *Why We Left* will forever change the way we listen to folk music." Charles McGovern, William and Mary