## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The African American Experience in Antebellum Cabell County, Virginia/West Virginia, 1810-1865</td>
<td>Cicero M. Fain III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Lethal Language</td>
<td>Leslie Ann Harper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Limited to Errors of Law”</td>
<td>Rape Law and Adjudication in the Nineteenth-Century Kentucky Court of Appeals</td>
<td>Mary R. Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Interpreting the History of the Underground Railroad in Southwest Ohio</td>
<td>Daniel Vivian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Collections Essay</td>
<td>James J. Holmberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Book Reviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Announcements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ON THE COVER:**
Color souvenir postcard of scenes of the Ohio River from Pittsburgh to Cairo, Illinois. From the Postcard Collection.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Contributors

Mary R. Block is associate professor of history at Valdosta State University where she teaches courses in American legal and constitutional history and the early national and antebellum eras. She is completing a book-length manuscript tentatively titled, “’An Accusation Easily to be Made’: Gender, Sex, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century American Rape Law.”

Cicero M. Fain III is assistant professor of history at the College of Southern Maryland. He is the author of “Black Response to the Construction of Colored Huntington, West Virginia, during the Jim Crow Era,” which appeared in the fall 2007 issue of West Virginia History, in addition to two forthcoming articles on African American life in post-bellum West Virginia and the Ohio Valley.

Leslie Ann Harper is a PhD student in humanities at the University of Louisville. Her doctoral research is focused on women and insanity in the nineteenth century.

Daniel Vivian is an assistant professor of history at the University of Louisville. His teaching and research concentrates on the history of the United States since the Civil War. He is currently revising his doctoral dissertation, a study of elite recreation and estate-making in the South Carolina lowcountry, for publication.
Located on the Ohio River in western Virginia, adjacent to southeastern Ohio and eastern Kentucky, antebellum Cabell County lay at the fulcrum of east and west, north and south, freedom and slavery. Possessed of a bountiful countryside—replete with wildlife, timber, pristine streams and creeks, and rich river-bottom soil along the navigable Ohio and Guyandotte rivers—it held great potential for settlers who sought to put down roots. Drawn by its promising location and cheap, arable land, migrants settled in the county in increasing numbers in the early 1800s, and many settlers took their slaves with them. Yet like most counties on Virginia’s western border, antebellum Cabell County was, in historian Ira Berlin’s words, a “society with slaves” rather than a “slave society.” In contrast to the rice and cotton-growing regions of the Deep South where the institution of slavery shaped the political economy and “the master-slave relationship provided the model for all social relations,” slavery never became central to the economy or social structure of Cabell County. Unlike Kanawha County, Virginia, to the northeast (and from which it was formed in 1809), Cabell County lacked industrial slavery. Unlike Jefferson County in the lower Shenandoah Valley, it lacked the numbers to support plantation slavery. Distant from plantation society and the rigid social and cultural norms imposed by the planter elite of eastern Virginia, Cabell County reveals the significance of slavery even within a “society with slaves” like central Appalachia, the impact of western expansion on slavery, and the hardening of racial attitudes in the Ohio Valley. Equally important, the county’s antebellum history helps illuminate the ways in which African Americans living in this border region exercised agency in order to better their condition.¹

By 1810, almost three thousand people resided in Cabell County, including 221 slaves and twenty-five Indians, or as one local historian notes, “about 1 ½ persons to the square mile.” In the county’s early years, it had only two villages of note. Guyandotte, formed in 1810 at the confluence of the Guyandotte and Ohio rivers, featured a number of businesses and a small but growing port.
County Map of Virginia and West Virginia, by S. Augustus Mitchell Jr., 1867, and same map with Cabell County, West Virginia, highlighted.

CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER
By the early 1830s, the town hosted many river travelers and benefitted from the construction of a road that connected it to the James River and Kanawha Turnpike at Barboursville, the county seat. Formed in 1813 and situated south of Guyandotte along the Guyandotte River, Barboursville was surrounded by large expanses of fertile land and plentiful timber. Farming and manufacturing formed the economic foundation of the village in its formative years. Increasing settlement in and near Guyandotte and Barboursville in the eastern part of the county close to the turnpike sparked economic growth throughout the early 1800s.²

The county’s early white residents recognized the value of young slaves. In 1811, Samuel Witcher sued his father Daniel Witcher Sr. for possession of “negro man Harris, girl Patsy, girl Phebey, boy David, and girl Charlotte.” In June 1813, William Dingess arrived in Cabell County accompanied by three enslaved boys, Steven, Simon, and Abram. In May 1814, John Chapman settled in the county with his slaves, seventeen-year-old Jo and fifteen-year-old Frank. In November 1814, an unidentified individual brought Barbary, a five-year-old “malotte” (mulatto) from North Carolina. By 1815, the county’s eighty-nine slaveholders owned 219 slaves, an average of two and a half slaves per household. Through the mid-1800s, the low population density, geographic isolation, and preponderance of small farms worked by yeoman farmers facilitated more personal relationships between masters and slaves than on the larger plantations of eastern Virginia.³

However, masters’ familiarity with their slaves did not necessarily lead to more instances of manumission in Cabell County. In 1806, the state of Virginia required manumitted blacks to leave the state within twelve months or face re-enslavement. The law effectively acted as a deterrent to manumission throughout the state, and none occurred in Cabell County between 1809 and 1817. When manumission did take place, local masters rarely freed more than one or two slaves at a time, and those freed were often older slaves. The first manumission in the county occurred in 1817 when the court recognized the “extraordinary services” of “Pealias Margarett, a woman of color,” and ordered her “emancipated, liberated, and free[d] from all kinds of compulsory and involuntary servitude as a slave.” The court also granted her “liberty to live and reside within this county,” a concession made possible by an 1816 act of the Virginia Assembly that enabled a slave emancipated after 1806 to apply to remain in the state if he or she demonstrated “extraordinary merit.”⁴

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1810</th>
<th>1820</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>1840</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1860</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slave</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>64a</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2717</td>
<td>4388</td>
<td>5263</td>
<td>7532</td>
<td>5881</td>
<td>7691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2963</td>
<td>4789</td>
<td>5884</td>
<td>8163</td>
<td>6299</td>
<td>8020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a) Includes forty-one slaves manumitted by Sampson Sanders.
Table 1.2

Antebellum African American Population: Cabell County, Virginia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1810</th>
<th>1820</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>1840</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1860</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But acts of manumission also came subject to conditions. All former slaves who wanted to remain in Virginia were required to apply to their county court for permission to stay. If successful in their petition, they had to carry their manumission papers with them at all times and renew their request to stay each year. In 1823, the state toughened its restrictions against free blacks by mandating that they could be jailed or “hired out” for non-payment of debts, destitution, and other reasons. Some slaveholders imposed additional hardships on manumitted people. The October 1821 will of Esther Russell granted freedom to Samuel, “a Negro man,” and bequeathed him fifteen acres of land on Four Pole Creek during his life. Russell also gave Samuel “the grey horse and red cow with a white spot in her forehead, this to enable said Samuel to raise his small children until they can become serviceable to mine.” In short, Russell freed Samuel but kept his children bound in the shackles of slavery, with serious consequences for his family. In June 1822, Samuel petitioned the county court to remain in Cabell County, but the court denied his petition after deeming “his testimony as to extraordinary acts of merit” “insufficient.” Despite state restrictions, manumissions occurred in Cabell County in subsequent years. In 1824, William McComas freed Leslie, a man of color. Burwell Spurlock twice freed slave women, manumitting Jane in 1831 and Lucy five years later. In contrast to its 1823 decision ordering the emancipated “Negro” Samuel to leave the state, the Cabell County court in 1836 approved the petition of former slaves Jack and Lewis to remain in the county. What combination of moral, political, or financial reasons prompted slaveholders to free their human property cannot be determined. However, the black people they manumitted left the county within the stipulated year unless they received permission from the county court to remain.6

---

CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER
In part, former slaves sought to remain in the county or in close proximity to it because adjacent states restricted or forbid the settlement of free blacks. Neighboring Kentucky was a slave state and had its own restrictions. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 had prohibited slavery north of the Ohio River, but the antebellum state constitutions of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois contained “black laws” that included provisos against the immigration of free blacks. Moreover, many whites in southern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, especially former residents of the South, harbored racial animosity toward African Americans and worried about economic competition from free blacks and runaway slaves who settled north of the Ohio River. In 1830, white residents in Portsmouth, Ohio, a key station on the Underground Railroad located forty-five miles upriver from Cabell County, forced approximately eighty blacks to leave the town. Though county and state officials did not enforce state black laws uniformly, white citizens invoked them when they felt threatened, harassing and employing violence to remove free blacks.\(^7\)

Whether enslaved or free, black labor played a significant role in Cabell County’s prosperity. Moreover, slaves recognized the value of their labor and used this knowledge to advance their interests and welfare, as the Wilson family history reveals. Born into slavery in 1827 in the eastern part of Virginia, George Wilson was sold to Fredrick Beuhring of Cabell County at the age of eight. At some point, Wilson married slave Dorcas Franklin, a native of the western part of the state, and their union produced twelve children of whom eight, five boys and three girls, were enslaved. Prior to the Civil War, Beuhring agreed to manumit Wilson in exchange for six hundred dollars, consisting of three hundred dollars cash and Wilson’s note promising to pay the remainder. Wilson raised the money in part by working as a mason on the construction of the Guyandotte Bridge, completed in 1852. Listed as a free-man in the 1860 census, Wilson relocated to Lawrence County, Ohio, following the Emancipation Proclamation and after he had paid his entire debt to Beuhring.\(^8\)

The most notable case of manumission in Cabell County occurred in 1849 when wealthy slaveholder Sampson Sanders freed fifty-one slaves, nearly one fourth of the 218 slaves manumitted that year in Virginia. Remarkably, Sanders’s will gave his former slaves fifteen thousand dollars, and encouraged them to take materials they needed from his estate. In all, Sanders spent more than forty-five thousand dollars freeing his slaves. Before their journey to their new home in Cass County, Michigan, Sanders “selected lawyers to go with the group to protect them in their travels, making sure everyone purchased good property, and ensuring they were fairly treated in all the legal dealings.” The party, including seven infants under two years of age and two eighty-year-old grandparents, traveled down the Guyandotte and Ohio rivers on a flotilla of rafts carrying their personal belongings, essential equipment and supplies, and assorted livestock. After reaching Cincinnati, they connected by train to Elkhorn, Indiana, where they
transferred to wagons for the fifteen-mile journey to Calvin Township, Cass County. The journey took three full days. Upon their arrival into the “comparative wilderness of Cass County,” where the free black population totaled around three hundred forty, each family received a tract of eighteen acres of land and a log cabin. The aggregate amount of land totaled nearly seven hundred connected acres.\(^9\)

The censuses between 1820 and 1850 show the center of U.S. population moving west over time across present-day West Virginia, “a slow wagon of popular political weight moving west . . . into the Ohio Valley.” As a result, Ohio and the Old Northwest represented the center of the U.S. population by 1860. Western Virginia shared in this growth and recent studies refute the myth of a subsistent and “culturally and geographically isolated” Appalachia. By the mid-nineteenth century, both Guyandotte and Barboursville were vibrant villages, with the population of Guyandotte reaching one thousand in 1850. Towns like Guyandotte and Barboursville linked the less developed rural backcountry of preindustrial western Virginia to regional and national markets. The two towns exemplified what historical sociologist Wilma Dunaway describes as “periphery” and “semi-periphery,” the first and second of three interdependent tiers of regional development. They served as regional entrepôts and conduits within an expanding web of national commerce, prefiguring the post-Civil War development of the region’s industrial economy. During the early 1850s, dams and locks built on the Guyandotte River allowed navigation southward into the Guyandotte Valley, boosting commerce to and from the town. Guyandotte served as a transshipment point for timber, animal pelts, agricultural products, and slaves, and its future looked bright. The Guyandotte Herald predicted continued growth for the town, arguing that “once the Guyandotte [River] is fairly opened, the increase of business will be beyond conception.” By the early 1850s, the town served as the termination point of a stage line from Staunton that carried “a great many travelers . . . eastward or westward,” as well as “the landing place of a great number of hands in transporting salt down the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers on their return to the Kanawha Salt Works.”\(^10\)

Barboursville was a bustling manufacturing center containing a number of business establishments that produced fan mills, furniture, hats, wagons, buggies, and harnesses. The town had a tannery, cooper, tailors, blacksmiths, shoemakers,
and several livery stables. A large mill cut oak planks up to thirty-six feet in length for steamboat bottoms and forwarded them to Jeffersonville, Indiana, on barges built in Barboursville. Along with timber and grain, hogs played a vital role in the regional economy, with local butchering and packing plants shipping their products to markets in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Cabell County’s expanding economy attracted a growing number of businessmen, lawyers, politicians, and visitors to the region. Many newcomers arrived via stagecoaches that loaded and unloaded on Main Street and they stayed in the hotels that dotted the street.\textsuperscript{11}

Steamboats employing black labor plied the rivers of the region and deposited visitors and freight at Barboursville and Guyandotte. In early 1855, the double-decker steamboat \textit{R. H. Lindsey} docked at Barboursville where “black porters assisted the ladies off the deck and onto the Barboursville landing, as eager boys stood by to carry their luggage to one of the fine hotels.” Steamboats offered African American laborers autonomy they could not find on land. Sometime in the late 1820s or early 1830s, thirteen-year-old fugitive slave Joseph Jones obtained work as a “deck sweep” on a steamboat passing Point Pleasant, Virginia, on its way to Cincinnati. By the end of Jones’s three-year term, during which he visited the small black communities in Ohio towns such as Gallipolis, Point Pleasant, Ripley, and Burlington, he had learned to read and write. He also “advanced far enough
in arithmetic to take care of his accounts[,] that is, he had mastered the four funda-
ments and that was considered a good education in that day.” How far the racial and social dynamics of the steamboat extended to the small ports that dotted the Ohio Valley is unclear. Still, the greater social fluidity and openness associated with commercial port towns, appears to have enabled African Americans to carve out autonomous spaces unavailable in a more closed slave society.12

Such independence was possible in part because slavery never flourished in the region. As one scholar notes, “in the decades between 1840 and 1860, the demand for slave labor in the Gulf States caused the bulk of slaves” to be sold there. Cabell County dentist and slaveholder William F. Dusenberry recorded the decline of slavery in his diary, written between 1855 and 1871. In 1856, for example, he noted both the sale of a “nigger woman” for “only $382” and that “George Kilgore today set free the nigger woman he paid $1600 for last fall.” Overall, the county’s slave population, assisted by sale, manumission, and flight, decreased by 180 (31 percent) between 1840 and 1850. In 1850, only 395 African Americans and six free blacks (five males and one female) resided in Cabell County, comprising just 6.1 percent of the total population of 5,910. That same year, neighboring Wayne County had four thousand five hundred inhabitants and 189 slaves.13

Despite the fall in the county’s black population, Dusenberry’s diary provides evidence of black peoples’ self-advocacy, community, and spirituality. In 1850, Dusenberry attended a service by “Uncle Tom,” a slave and noted local Baptist preacher. An 1855 entry describes “a nigger meeting in the School House this morning,” at which “Nigger Tom preached Morris’ nigger woman’s funeral.” That same year, Judy, “hired for one year for $40,” traveled frequently to “meetings, quilting, to help, [and] to church.” An 1856 entry notes that “Tom” delivered a funeral sermon for a boy accidentally drowned a month earlier to a slave gathering of twenty. Local church records reveal that some enslaved people could read and write and that they sought opportunities for religious observation. As one county authority reports, “Sometimes the slave owners took slaves to preaching as both attended the same service. Other times the slaves borrowed a buggy and drove themselves to the religious meetings.”14

In short, the county’s enslaved people attempted to carve out autonomous spaces. They gathered together, observed their own cultural and religious practices, and traveled unsupervised. Their actions suggest that they recognized the most constructive ways to engage the system and complicates Wilma Dunaway’s characterization of slavery within the Mountain South as harsher than the institution in the Deep South. Nonetheless, enslaved people’s desire to assert their independence and humanity could lead to violence. According to William Dusenberry, in 1856 his wife and cousin “attempted to lick their nigger [and] she licked them.” The family found the altercation so mortifying they sold the
slave woman in Kentucky two days later. Yet despite the dangers of self-assertion, slaves’ mobility, cultural activities, communication, and willingness to engage in physical altercations suggests, as historian John Blassingame has noted, that “however oppressive or dehumanizing” slavery was, “the struggle for survival was not severe enough to crush all of the slave’s creative instincts.”

Enslaved people also participated in more surreptitious forms of agency. By the mid-1800s, Cabell County’s citizens and residents could not avoid the growing debate over slavery and its place within the state’s political economy. The county became a crossroads and a flashpoint, located on the axis of the North and South, slavery and freedom. While the county’s diverse population—black and white, slaves and slaveholders, free and enslaved African Americans, abolitionists and proslavery whites—shared an uneasy dance that reflected the troubled state of the nation, local blacks found ways to exploit the situation. As early as 1827, local residents reported escaped slaves, some assisted by white opponents of slavery. Twenty years later, residents still worried about the issue. William Dusenberry mentioned two separate incidents of attempted runaways in his diary. In the first, he described the Ohio capture and Kentucky jailing of “Charley Morris’s Nigger who ran off last Sunday,” then noted the capture and return of “Isaac, Abraham, Leonard, and Levi,” four additional fugitive slaves belonging to Morris. Dusenberry’s second diary entry describes a group of slaves who “intended to meet with a lot of other niggers about three miles below Guyandotte and there cross the Ohio.” Cabell County’s largest slaveholder, Capt. William A. Jenkins, also had problems with runaway slaves. In 1827, local slave catcher James Shelton sued Jenkins for failing to pay him for the return of one slave, and in 1848 another slave catching dispute compelled Jenkins to appear again before the county court. Fugitive slaves, often pursued by slave hunters, traversed the rolling hills, creek beds, and trails of western Virginia, crossed the Ohio River, and sought assistance from free blacks and abolitionists in Ohio. African Americans William Chavis and James Dicher, for example, helped transport runaways escaping from Greenup County, Kentucky, and Cabell County, Virginia. The large number of runaways belies the claim of one early local historian that there existed “no crisis in the affairs of the people” of antebellum Cabell County.

These escapes, moreover, occurred prior to the arrival in Cabell County of a group of abolitionists led by Massachusetts Congressman Eli Thayer. In 1857, after visiting Ashland and Catlettsburg, Kentucky, and Guyandotte, Thayer started an abolitionist community at Ceredo, Virginia, a few miles south of Barboursville and Guyandotte. Ceredo residents helped fugitive slaves across the river to nearby Quaker Bottom (later Proctorville), Ohio, where some found sanctuary and eventual safe passage on the Underground Railroad to Canada. Regional newspapers, reflecting the growing national controversy over slavery, voiced conflicting attitudes toward Thayer’s settlement. In May 1857, Ashland, Kentucky’s American Union extended “a brother’s hand and brother’s welcome” to the northern migrants. A
month later, however, Charleston’s Kanawha Valley Star pronounced that the goals of Thayer and his associates were “diametrically opposed to the cherished institutions” of Virginia. In August, Cabell County slaveholder and future Confederate general Albert Gallatin Jenkins (son of William Jenkins), visited Ceredo. Like Thayer, Jenkins had recently won a congressional seat, but as a Democrat. Republican Thayer greeted Jenkins politely but the slaveholder remained “a surly, sour and malevolent spectator.” The next day, Thayer recalled, two African Americans posing as runaway slaves en route to Canada, sought assistance from the “Neighbors.” Suspecting that Jenkins had sent the two men to entrap Ceredo residents and provoke local white hostility, Thayer advised the men “to return home,” adding that “an attempted escape would bring hardships upon their own people.” Publicly, Thayer stressed that he liked “engine power better than Negro power” and minimized Ceredo’s antislavery mission. But slaveholders like Jenkins had reason to worry. Thayer sought a free labor colony in Virginia because he believed it would prove detrimental to the continuance of slavery.17

The open and covert resistance of enslaved people kept the controversy over slavery stirring. In 1857, four runaway slaves (perhaps the same four Dunesberry noted in his diary) were returned to Charles Morris after their capture in Lawrence County, Ohio. Fearing further slave escapes, Morris moved his slaves to Wytheville, Virginia, when the Civil War erupted. Fugitive Asbury Parker had more success than Morris’s unfortunate slaves. In 1857, he fled to Ohio, crossing
the river near Guyandotte to escape from his Greenup (now Boyd) County, Kentucky, owner James Rowe. Conductors on the “railroad” advised Parker “to act like a free man” during his journey to Canada, where he joined former slaves from Cabell County. In 1875, a local newspaper reported the return to Cabell County of “a couple of old people,” aged eighty-five and ninety, “formerly slaves belonging to the Holderby estate” who had escaped with their family in 1858. “They say,” the paper added, that “they stole a skiff . . . and floated down to Burlington, O[hio], where they got a wagon and went into the country.”

In 1860, Virginia’s slave population totaled 498,887, but only 12,771 lived in the forty-eight counties that would become the state of West Virginia. Just 329 African Americans, representing 4.1 percent of the total county population of 8,020, resided in Cabell County. Fully 305 of the county’s African Americans were enslaved by the county’s eight-four slaveholders, an average of 3.1 slaves per household (see Table 1.3). Guyandotte had the largest number of slaveholders (twenty seven) and slaves (101), for an average of 3.7 slaves per household. With seventeen slaves, Guyandotte resident Susan Holderby was the largest slaveholder in the district. Cabell Court House district contained the second largest totals, with twenty-two slaveholders and eighty-eight slaves, an average of four slaves per household. The district contained the county’s second and third largest slaveholders, William Williams who owned fourteen slaves and John Morris who owned twelve. Of the seven remaining county districts, only Mud Bridge had a comparable number of slaveholders and slaves per household as Guyandotte and Cabell Court House.

Table 1.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Black Female</th>
<th>Mulatto Female</th>
<th>Black Male</th>
<th>Mulatto Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>99.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following a longstanding trend, black female slaves outnumbered black male slaves in Cabell County, an imbalance that still existed after emancipation and when black migrants began arriving in the early 1870s. Slaveholders favored female slaves in part because they (along with male slaves younger than twelve) were not taxed. Four other factors help explain the gender imbalance among
Cabell County’s enslaved population. Female slaves cost less than enslaved men, slave children inherited the status of their mothers, and enslaved men were more able and thus more likely run away. In addition, in a society of slaves where slave ownership was more a status symbol than an economic necessity, many slaveholders employed enslaved women who worked as domestics. In 1860, Cabell County’s enslaved population was also quite young, with 30 percent (ninety three) of the county’s slaves nine or younger. Slaves under the age of twenty constituted 57 percent of the county’s total (ninety-five females and eighty males). Most striking, those under thirty represented 74 percent of the county’s enslaved population, with 121 females and 105 males (226 total) in this category. Cabell County’s black population was also growing lighter in skin color. In 1860, black slaves outnumbered mulattoes 215 to ninety (70.5 percent to 29.5 percent), but the county’s mulatto population was growing faster. Of the 136 males, ninety five (70 percent) were black and forty one (30 percent) mulatto. Of the 169 females, 120 (71 percent) were black and forty nine (29 percent) mulatto. Reflecting broader trends, the county’s mulatto population was concentrated among the young as increasing numbers of mulatto parents produced greater numbers of mulatto children.21

Examining the Greenbottom plantation, at “4,444 acres, the largest . . . plantation in Cabell, Wayne and Mason counties in 1850 and 1860,” provides further insight into the nature of black life in antebellum and immediate postbellum Cabell County. Located in the upper northwestern corner of the county adjacent to the Ohio River, Greenbottom was owned and operated by the influential Jenkins family, most notably businessman William Jenkins and his son Albert Jenkins. In 1850, the Jenkins family owned fifty-eight slaves, twenty-three males and thirty-five females, with 88 percent of the slave population aged thirty-five or younger (including 91 percent of the males and 83 percent of the females). Fully 65 percent of the male slaves and 54 percent of the female slaves were fifteen or younger, ensuring that a significant number of the Jenkins’s slave population entered their prime labor and reproductive periods in the 1850s. The 1850 slave schedule identifies only one mulatto among the Jenkins’s slaves.22

In 1850, Capt. Jenkins valued the plantation at eighty thousand dollars, with fifteen hundred acres out of 2,395 improved. Upon his death in 1859, his three sons (William, Thomas, and Albert) took over. By 1860, they had expanded the total improved acreage to seventeen hundred acres and enjoyed substantial wealth, with Greenbottom’s aggregate land value totaling 195,000 dollars (sixty-five thousand dollars each). The second most valuable estate in the county, owned by John Morris, was valued at 105,000 dollars, followed by Peter Buffington’s two farms valued at fifty thousand dollars. In 1860, the Jenkins brothers possessed the county’s most valuable assortment of farm implements and equipment and produced its most valuable crop yields. The Jenkins brothers’ slaves produced the highest yield of wheat (two thousand two hundred bushels) and Indian corn
(seven thousand bushels), and the second highest yield of potatoes (three hundred bushels) and butter (thirteen hundred pounds). The slaves also produced two hundred dollars worth of fruit and one hundred bushels of oats, tended the largest number of cattle (four hundred twenty-five, compared with the next largest at one hundred fifty), the largest number of swine (three hundred, compared with the next largest at two hundred), the largest number of horses (forty-six, compared with sixteen on the next largest plantation), and the second largest number of milk cows (thirty-four) and oxen (nineteen). Slaves on the plantation tended the county’s most valuable livestock herd worth more than twelve thousand dollars (the next largest plantation had six thousand dollars worth of livestock). In 1850 and 1860, Greenbottom slaves did not make homemade manufactured goods such as wine, maple syrup, beeswax, honey, molasses, and wood that neighboring farms produced. Nor did they raise tobacco, beans and peas, flax, grass seed, hay, produce, or buckwheat as on other plantations in the county. Slave labor on the Jenkins plantation revolved around the myriad tasks associated with field work, tending livestock, and raising horses.  

In 1850, Cabell County’s free blacks faced renewed threats. That year, a Virginia law “required an owner to provide for any freed slave for the rest of the slave’s natural life,” a potentially expensive proposition. The law also stipulated that “any former slave who remained in the state could be returned to servitude for failure to pay taxes, failing to show an acceptable means of support, forgetting to present
himself before the county justices each year, or simply by someone claiming that he was an escaped slave.” Between 1850 and 1860, the county court invariably allowed free blacks who registered to stay, but an 1861 court ruling reaffirmed that free blacks had to petition the court annually to remain in the county.24

By 1860 only a few free blacks lived in the county. As the household head of a family of eight, including her six daughters and her sixty-five-year-old mother Delphia, thirty-eight-year-old Mary Haley was unique. Born a slave in 1822, she felt the impact of her enslaved status early in her life. At the age of six, Haley, her mother, and her five siblings—Nelson, Westly, Louisa, Randle, and America—were loaned out by her owner, Jacob Hite, to William Hite and Benjamin Brown. The following summer, Hite loaned the family out again, this time to Absolom and James Holderby. Haley remained a slave into adulthood, and by 1853, the year of the birth of her sister Georgiana, William Jenkins owned Haley and her mother. Despite the importance of slave labor on the Jenkins plantation, the family acquired their freedom within the decade. In 1860, Mary, now living in Guyandotte, was one of only twenty-four free people residing within the county, one of only two women who headed a household (along with twenty-year-old laundress Nancy Anderson), one of only three black heads of household (along with Isham Sanders and Lewis Fullerton), and head of the largest all-black household and family in the county. Moreover, her forty dollars of personal property made her the wealthiest free woman, and tied with Isham Sanders as the third wealthiest free person in the county (behind farmers Stephen Witcher and Lewis Fullerton).25

While the county’s enslaved mulatto population comprised 29.5 percent of the slave population, the county’s free mulatto population comprised 42 percent (ten of twenty four) of the total free black population. Most lived in the county’s more populated districts. Five resided in Guyandotte Post Office, two each lived in Barboursville and Guyandotte townships, and one lived in Cabell Court House. All six free blacks residing in white households were mulatto. The 1860 census also reveals that more free black females lived in Cabell County than free black males, but the gender imbalance exceeded that within the slave population. While female slaves comprised 55.4 percent of the general slave population in 1860, free black females, assisted by the eight women in the Haley family, comprised 62.5 percent (fifteen of twenty four) of the county’s free black population. These fifteen resided in seven households, just over two per household, though removing the Haley women from the calculation results in an average of slightly more than one black female per household. The county’s free black population was also disproportionally older, with 59 percent aged thirty and above.26

During the Civil War, the divided allegiances of the county’s populace made it a microcosm of the fractious sectional schism that produced the United States’ thirty-fifth state. In contrast to the voters of eastern Virginia,
Cabell County’s citizens opted to remain within the Union. However, voters in the town of Guyandotte supported secession. Families within the county divided, often pitting brother against brother, and cousin against cousin. Historian Joe Geiger Jr., though recognizing the tentative nature of his totals, identifies fifty-five county residents who enlisted in the Union army, along with hundreds more who enlisted in the county but lived elsewhere, and 315 Confederate soldiers who either enlisted or resided in Cabell County. In July 1861, fighting erupted at Barboursville on Fortification Hill. Later that year, Union forces retaliated against a Confederate raid by nearly burning Guyandotte to the ground, “purportedly to prevent Confederates from returning for supplies.” Union forces “completely gutted” Guyandotte’s business district, burned the Buffington Mill and the Forest Hotel, torched the homes of “the town’s most prominent secessionists,” and even set ablaze the Baptist Church. Most county residents did not see slavery as the central issue of the war. Nonetheless, Confederate supporters feared the threat they believed the North posed to their way of life (including slavery), while pro-Union residents wished to free themselves from the social, economic, and political dominance of slaveholders in eastern Virginia.27

Slaves in Cabell County, like those throughout the Ohio Valley, took advantage of the fluid state of affairs during the Civil War. Historian Forrest Talbott notes that the state’s black population declined over 13 percent during the 1860s, while the white population grew 25 percent. In his study of fugitive slaves in Kentucky, historian J. Blaine Hudson concludes that “more fugitives crossed the Ohio River near Owensboro in four months in late 1861 than had done so in the previous fifty years.” Historian Joe Trotter, discussing the flight of Ohio Valley blacks during the war, adds:

In rising numbers, fugitive slaves and free blacks left the Confederate states and moved into Union territory. Under the impact of wartime migration, Louisville’s black population dramatically increased from 6,800 to nearly 15,000, Cincinnati’s rose from 3,730 to 5,900, Pittsburgh’s from less than 2,000 to 3,200, Evansville’s from no more than 100 to 1,400.

Wartime migration also impacted the smaller towns dotting the region. Former slave John L. Jones recalled meeting “thousands of refugees” accompanying Union Gen. Joseph A. Lightburn’s force down the Kanawha Valley in 1862. The slaves, Jones added, were “fleeing to a place of safety,” and when “they landed at the wharf at Gallipolis [Ohio]” they “laughed, cried and shouted for hours. I have never seen people so happy as they were, some of them would get down and kiss the ground.”28
Slaves who fled the region “to make their war-born freedom secure in a free state” explain the drop in the county’s African American population from 329 in 1860 to 123 a decade later. Black flight also complicates local whites’ historical memory that they treated the county’s enslaved population with benevolence and paternalism. “With few exceptions,” one local white resident remembered, “the masters were faithful and kindly protectors of their wards; and for the most part the slaves looked upon their owners as their truest friends and only refuge both during and after slavery days.” But other whites, including Andy Gwinn of Lower Creek, Cabell County, lamented the loss of several of his slaves who fled during the war. Indeed, slaves in West Virginia were not freed by Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation (which freed slaves only in states currently in rebellion), but instead by an act passed by the state legislature in February 1865. Thus, slaves in West Virginia did not gain their freedom until near the end of the Civil War, two years after Lincoln’s Proclamation. For slaves who wanted to “seize the moment,” the legislature’s delay encouraged flight from the county. And though white residents sharply divided over the status of slavery and the question of immediate or gradual emancipation in the 1863 state constitution, they agreed to an exclusion policy that banned slave importation and free black migration into the state. Ultimately, Lincoln’s prerequisite for statehood—the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment—forced the hand of state legislators. Free blacks also left the county. By March 1863, most of the county’s free black residents, including the Wilson and Haley families, had resettled across the Ohio River in Union Township, Lawrence County.

Between 1860 and 1870 the black population of the region also declined because of lingering Confederate sentiment and limited economic opportunities. Some 20 percent of southern West Virginia’s black residents moved out of the state after emancipation. The black population of Kanawha County, home of Charleston, decreased by 5.4 percent, while it fell 18 percent in Monroe, 22 percent in Jefferson, and 36 percent in Greenbrier. In 1860, each of these counties had a black population that exceeded 10 percent. Black out-migration was accompanied by white in-migration to the region. By 1860, the Virginia counties that became West Virginia contained the largest percentage of whites among the southern slave states, while the black population totaled only 5.9 percent of the general population. Cabell County followed this trend; in 1860 it had the largest percentage of whites in its history, a percentage larger than in the rest of the counties that became West Virginia. Many white migrants who settled in the county were, like the northern-born Unionist William Dusenberry, unreformed racists. The “whitening” of the state and county complicated blacks’ quest for suffrage during the West Virginia’s formative years and contributed to the hardening of race relations during the Jim Crow era.
Table 1.4
1860 Slave Population for Select Virginia Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Slave</th>
<th>% of Slaves</th>
<th>Regional Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>14535</td>
<td>3960</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>Ridge and Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanawha</td>
<td>16150</td>
<td>2184</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>Appalachian Plateau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>12525</td>
<td>1650</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>Ridge and Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenbrier</td>
<td>12211</td>
<td>1525</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>Appalachian Plateau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td>10757</td>
<td>1114</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>Cumberland Plateau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putnam</td>
<td>6301</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Ohio Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayette</td>
<td>5997</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Appalachian Plateau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>9173</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Ohio Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabell</td>
<td>8020</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Ohio Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>6747</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Ohio Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDowell</td>
<td>1535</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Cumberland Plateau</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonetheless, a few blacks remained with their former masters or their kin after emancipation. For most slaves, severing established routines, cultural practices, and social links, and contemplation of the real or imagined consequences of migration, required remarkable psychological strength. Moreover, former slaves’ range of options differed markedly, and many concluded that it
was most reasonable to stay put. For example, Mary Lacy decided to remain near her former masters, the Jenkins family, despite the fact that William Jenkins’s 1859 will instructed that she and her son George be sold to the highest bidder among his three sons. In 1870, the thirty-five-year-old “nanny” and her fifteen-year-old son and farm laborer, along with former slaves Christine (age twelve) and John P. (age three), moved into the household of James B. Bowlin, a white man, where she served as caretaker of the deceased Albert Jenkins’s children. African American Anderson Rose, a thirty-five-year-old farm laborer, also joined the household. Later, Mary served as “nanny” for Thomas Jefferson Jenkins, son of William Jenkins, until his death in 1873. Only after Thomas Jenkins’s passing did George and Mary, who stated that “she had seen too much death,” leave the Jenkins family and settle elsewhere in the county. Like tens of thousands of southern freedpeople, Mary Lacy’s social terrain lay among the interwoven contours of labor, family, community, and region. Thus, her decision to stay with her former masters was entirely rational. Most important, when she believed it was time to move on, she possessed the independence to do so.\(^\text{33}\)

The African American experience in antebellum Cabell County embodied and reflected the paradoxes, contradictions, and challenges of life within a “society with slaves” located on the borders of the South. The Cabell County story reveals the complexity, resiliency, and strength of enslaved and free black people who sought to exploit what opportunities existed to improve their welfare. Their responses to the Civil War, and to the divisions and violence within the county, reveal their agency and ingenuity. The war transformed Cabell County, confronting the county’s African American population, former slaves and free blacks alike, and slaveholders with weighty choices. While many emancipated African Americans left the county to seek their future elsewhere, others opted to remain. Their decisions helped define the nature of culture, space, autonomy, and work in southern West Virginia’s embryonic urban-industrial economy in the Jim Crow era.

1 Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 8. When carved out of Kanawha County in 1809, Cabell County encompassed 1,750 square miles and included all of Lincoln and Wayne counties, a large part of Logan, Boone, and Putnam counties, and a small portion of Wyoming County. In 1824, Logan County was carved out Cabell, followed by Wayne County in 1842, Boone County in 1847, Putnam County in 1848, and Lincoln County in 1867, by which year Cabell County consisted of five districts and 282 square miles.

3 Carrier Eldridge, Cabell County (W) Virginia Minute Book 1, 1809-1815: An Abstract of the Combined “First” Minute and Law Order Books of Cabell County, VA/WV (Athens, Ga.: Iberian, c. 1990s); Eldridge, Cabell County (W) Virginia, Abstracts of Deed Book 1, 1808-1814 (Athens, Ga.: Iberian, 1996), 30, 40, 41.

4 Luther P. Jackson, “Manumission in Certain Virginia Cities,” Journal of Negro History 15 (July 1930), 287-90. Jackson argues that the 1806 act demarcated the end of “the liberality and high idealism of the Revolutionary period” in Virginia. The state legislature acted in response to Toussaint L’Ouverture’s revolution in Haiti and Gabriel Prosser’s 1800 insurrection in Richmond, in addition to the development of the cotton gin. Virginia law also required slaveholders to provide for their former slaves to prevent them from becoming a burden to the community. See also Jane Purcell Guild, ed., Black Laws of Virginia: A Summary of the Legislative Acts of Virginia Concerning Negros from Earliest Times to the Present (Richmond, Va.: Whittet and Shepperson, 1936), 72. On Margaret, see R. S. Douthat, comp., “Extracts from the Records of the County Court of Cabell County, West Virginia, from January 2, 1809 to July 6, 1863,” Minute Book no. 2, p. 20, Cabell County Court House, Huntington, W.V. (hereafter CCCH).


9 Eldridge, Cabell County’s Empire for Freedom, xiii, xiv, 51-55; George K. Hesslink, Black Neighbors: Negroes in a Northern Rural Community (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 44. Hesslink notes that with the arrival of the Sanders group, “the number of Negroes in the county rose to 389 with 158 of these clustered in Calvin Township. Thus, by 1850, 25.3 percent of the population of that township was Negro.”


THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE


14 Eldridge, Diaries of William F. Dusenberry, 1, 5, 7, 12, 14, 23, 26, 27, 42, 43; Eldridge, Cabell County’s Empire for Freedom, 43. Eldridge observes that several of Cabell County’s early churches had a balcony for slaves. Karen N. Cartwright Nance, The Significance of the Jenkins Plantation (Barbourville, W.V.: K. N. C. Nance, 1998), 9, notes that Jeannette Jenkins, wife of wealthy businessman and slaveholder Capt. William A. Jenkins, read to her slaves from the Bible.


18 Wilbur Siebert, The Mysteries of Ohio’s Underground Railroads (Columbus, Oh.: Long’s College Book Co., 1951), 56; “Carry Me Back,” Huntington Advertiser, Mar. 4, 1875; Wallace, Cabell County Annals, 43; Nance, Significance of the Jenkins Plantation, 7; Bickley, “Black People,” 130.

19 “Taylor, “Making West Virginia a Free State,” 145. In contrast, 2,184 slaves resided in Kanawha County in 1860, down from 3,140 a decade earlier when the county’s salt industry flourished and the enslaved population reached its historical peak. See John Edmund Stealey III, “Slavery and the Western Virginia Salt Industry,” Journal of Negro History 59 (Apr. 1974), 105-31. Mud Bridge district held the county’s third largest number of slaveholders (nine) and slaves (twenty-nine), an average of 3.2 slaves per household. An average of two slaves per household lived in the district of Thornydale, location of the county’s fourth largest population of slaveholders (eight) and slaves (sixteen). The remaining districts possessed only a smattering of owners and slaves. Green Bottom and Falls Mills each possessed two slaveholders, with six and two slaves respectively. Only one slaveholder resided in each of the districts of Hamlin, Ten Mile, and Paw Paw Bottom. Both Phillip Powell and William McComas held three slaves, while Archibald Reynolds owned five. See Eighth Census of the United States, 1860.


21 Seventh Census of the United States, 1850; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, roll 1387, Virginia Slave Schedule, vol. 1 (Cabell County): Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; Nance, Significance of the Jenkins Plantation, 7. In 1850, 198 females and 190 males resided in Cabell County. Although the total slave population dropped by 1860, the numerical disparity between females and males grew (169 females to 136 males, or 55.4 to 44.6 percent).


24 Eldridge, *Cabell County's Empire for Freedom*, xiii, xiv, 44; Guild, *Black Laws of Virginia*, 118. On Dec. 6, 1858, Edmund and Lilla (no last name in record) along with Samuel Wallace, went before the court to have their status as free persons of color affirmed. The court granted Isham Sanders, formerly Samuel Sanders's slave, the same privilege a year later. See Douthat, “Extracts from the Records of the County Court,” Minute book no. 5, p. 149, and Minute book no. 6, pp. 151, 192 (CCCH).


26 *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860. Possible reasons for the older free black population include the years needed to acquire sufficient capital to purchase one's freedom, and the fact that longer service engendered greater intimacy between slaves and masters, enabling slaves to acquire sufficient interpersonal capital to gain manumission.


30 Talbott, “Some Legislative and Legal Aspects of the Negro Question,” 8-9; Stephen D. Engle, “Mountaineer Reconstruction: Blacks in the Political Reconstruction of West Virginia,” *Journal of Negro History* 78 (Summer 1993), 140, 145; Randy Lawrence and Ken Sullivan, “Black Migration to Southern West Virginia, 1870-1930,” *Goldenrod 23* (Winter 1997), 52; *Ninth Census of the United States*, 1870; Thomas E. Posey, *The Negro Citizen of West Virginia* (Institute, W.V.: The Press of West Virginia State College, 1934), 5. Posey reports that in 1860 the black population totaled 21,144, consisting of 18,371 slave and 2,773 free, while the white population totaled 355,526. The only exception was Mercer County, where the black population increased slightly from 391 to 394 between 1860 and 1870.

31 *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860.


33 Nance, *Significance of the Jenkins Plantation*, 10; Eldridge, *Cabell County’s Empire for Freedom*, 46. Eldridge writes: “Many of the slaves had been born and raised in Cabell County; leaving their home would have been very difficult. Everything familiar, from their favorite berry patch or fishing hole to the church down the lane, was being left behind for something called freedom. Apprehension for the unknown future had to concern all the adults.”
On the morning of August 6, 1855, American Party members took control of the voting booths in the city of Louisville, refusing entrance to naturalized citizens. Many immigrants who attempted to cast their votes were attacked and chased through the streets. As he watched from his office window, James Speed “saw many men, Irish and German, beaten in the courthouse yard. . . . It was not fighting man to man, but as many as could fall upon a single Irish or German and beat him with sticks or short clubs.” In the German part of town, mobs set houses on fire and looted immigrant businesses, “beating and shooting any German unlucky enough to be caught.” After raiding Ambruster’s brewery, the mob set it afame, killing ten. In the city’s eighth ward, the mob set the Irish tenements on Quinn’s Row ablaze and shot any residents who tried to escape, murdering an estimated twelve people. The mob rejected Francis Quinn’s offer to pay the rioters to leave; instead he was brutally murdered and his body thrown atop the flames. “As night fell, the Louisville skies glowed red,” and pools of blood stained the city streets.

Bloody Monday, as it came to be called, not only targeted immigrants but became one of the three worst anti-Catholic riots in nineteenth-century America. An estimated five hundred rioters left the city in shambles. The
number of people killed during the riots remains unknown, but estimates range from twenty two to a hundred. One of the victims was a Catholic priest, stoned to death by the mob as he rushed to the bedside of a dying parishioner. Though rioters set out to burn down the Cathedral of the Assumption and St. Martin’s—they believed the churches contained armed men and ammunitions—they spared them after a search by the mayor and two councilmen proved their fears unfounded. After the riot, hundreds of Catholic immigrants fled the city, and others were doubtlessly deterred from settling in Louisville.²

After the events of Bloody Monday, George D. Prentice, the editor of the Louisville Daily Journal, faced serious criticism for instigating the riots. In the months preceding the August 1855 election, Prentice filled his paper with hate speech against Catholics and immigrants. But how much can Prentice be blamed for voicing popular sentiments? In order to understand the events in Louisville that day—and Prentice’s role as an instigator—scholars must place them in a broader context. By 1855, debates over slavery, immigration, and religion had ratcheted up tensions nationwide. In addition to spurring violence, these debates also led to the demise of the Whig Party and the rise of the Know Nothings. While these issues fomented agitation around the country, disputes in Louisville became particularly intense. Louisville lay on the border that separated North and South, and also had a significant immigrant population, much of which was Catholic and politically active. Moreover, a shortage of polling places in the city meant that many voters could not cast their ballots. While all of these issues were kindling for the fire that erupted on Bloody Monday, many of Prentice’s contemporaries accused him of inciting the riots, and most historians have agreed.
LETHAL LANGUAGE

Analyzing the rhetoric of the articles in the *Journal*, as well as the circumstances surrounding the riot, reveals how “hate speech” helped to agitate his already inflamed readers.

Mob violence occurred frequently in nineteenth-century America. One study enumerated 403 riots against white targets in the southern United States between 1828 and 1861. Of these, sixty-eight mobs attacked criminals, thirty-five attacked insurrectionists, and 162 attacked abolitionists (a number of which took place in Kentucky). Proslavery activists claimed that emancipationists incited slaves to commit violence against whites, and such claims “encouraged acts of condemnation and violence against antislavery supporters.” In 1851, a mob burned down the building of the abolitionist *Newport News*. Throughout the 1850s, abolitionist John G. Fee and his followers “experienced serious incidents of mob violence.” Mobs burned down schoolhouses and private residences, beating, shaving, tarring, and threatening their victims. By 1860, nearly a hundred of Fee’s followers had been driven out of the state. The violence against abolitionists throughout Kentucky and the South reflected national tensions surrounding the debate over slavery.3

Antebellum Kentucky elites and state authorities had no tolerance for abolitionists. Although some Kentuckians questioned the morality of slavery, a majority of white residents considered it the best means to control a potentially dangerous black population. Even the few white residents who publicly criticized slavery often came to its defense whenever “events promised to upset the allegedly tranquil disposition of the slave population or when northern criticism offended Kentuckians’ southern sensibilities.” Emancipationists like Fee met with violence because proslavery activists claimed they incited slaves to revolt. Various acts of violence against abolitionists reveal the strong proslavery sentiment in the state, as does the ratification of a proslavery constitution in 1849 by a vote of 71,635 to 20,302.4

Neither the Whig nor Democratic parties wanted to take a national stand on the issue of slavery, fearing it would alienate one or another section of the electorate. Still, many voters hesitated to support a national party that aligned them with their enemies in the sectional debate, and both parties suffered defections. While scholars have traditionally attributed the demise of the Whigs to the party’s noncommittal stance on slavery, ethnocultural historians have highlighted other factors, such as its failure to take a firm stance on temperance. To make up for these losses, some Whigs thought the party should court the votes of immigrants, who “decisively favored the Democratic party.” This strategy proved disastrous for the Whigs. In the 1852 presidential campaign, Winfield Scott’s alleged attempts to pander to the immigrant vote alienated much of the party’s conservative base, contributing to its dissolution.5

Political nativism emerged with the fall of the Whigs. Though the Protestant nation had always looked upon Catholicism with distrust, misgivings increased around mid-century, as the number of immigrants arriving from Ireland and Germany rose. After a potato famine struck in 1845,
Irish immigration to America soared. German immigration increased during the same years, spurred by political upheaval in central Europe. In a predominantly Protestant nation, the sudden influx of Catholics inspired suspicion and fear of the Other among many native-born Americans. A proliferation of anti-Catholic literature that told horror stories about kidnapping, rape, and murder by maniacal Catholic priests fueled Protestant prejudices. Concern over the immigrants’ religion fueled nativism throughout the county, but in the South immigrants’ stance on slavery also became grounds for resentment. Many Germans opposed slavery and southerners worried that immigrants would add strength and numbers to the abolitionist movement. In a time of social and economic uncertainty, Catholics provided the American people with someone to blame for the problems of the nation.6

The nativist movement in America fixated on the Catholic immigrant as the scapegoat for societal ills. In the 1840s this movement gave birth to the American Party, commonly called the Know Nothings. The party’s “nationwide rise was spectacular, feeding on prejudice and the fear that the constant influx of Catholic immigrants would lead to control of the United States by the Pope and the Catholic hierarchy.” Several events in the 1850s, including Scott’s pandering to the Catholic vote in the 1852 election, seemed to add credence to nativist accusations of a Catholic conspiracy to rule America. Soon after the election, nativists accused President Franklin Pierce of buying the Catholic vote when he appointed a Catholic to the position of postmaster general. Perhaps most inflammatory of all, however, was “a concerted campaign” in 1853, led by Catholic bishops, to remove religion from the public school system. “Eventually despairing of any hope of reforming the public schools, Catholics shifted their efforts to securing tax monies for parochial schools.” Matters grew worse that same year when Archbishop Gaetano Bedini embarked on a goodwill tour of America “as a personal emissary of the Pope.” As mistrust of Catholic immigrants grew, so did the Know Nothing Party.7

The Know Nothings’ primary concern was immigration, but they also sought to preserve the Union. The party’s platform called for sectional peace under the motto of Senator Daniel Webster’s famous speech: “Liberty and Union now and forever, one and inseparable.” Many former Whigs found this pro-Union stance attractive, while the prospect of keeping slavery out of politics appealed to many
southern voters, particularly in Kentucky and other border states. When the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act intensified the sectional conflict over slavery by repealing the Missouri Compromise, many Americans concluded that the Know Nothings offered the only alternative to sectional strife. In order to distract people from the sectional quarrel, the Know Nothings directed attention toward a perceived immigrant enemy. Know Nothings capitalized on the fear of Catholic immigrants, and in the South they “argued that abolitionists and Catholics used immigrants as pawns to undermine the liberty and living standards of slave owners and white workers alike.”

For years, concerns over immigration, Catholicism, and slavery fueled the Know Nothing movement in the South and tensions in Louisville. In the 1840s, the Protestant Reformation Society founded a branch in Louisville, contributing “greatly to the tensions between Protestants and ‘foreign’ Catholics,” as ministers
lected on the evils of the Catholic faith and its foreign leader. Moreover, German immigrants, sustained by the *Anzeiger*, refused to shed their language and customs. When rumors spread in 1844 that nativists intended to prevent immigrants from voting, the *Beobachter am Ohio* advised readers “to arm themselves and go to the polls to force recognition of their rights.” George Prentice had the message translated, reprinted it in his paper, and disseminated it as a pamphlet, causing widespread panic and resentment among native citizens. Whig bullies prevented immigrants from voting and a mob gathered outside of the *Beobachter* offices, forcing the editor to flee. When Henry Clay lost the national election to James Polk, many Kentuckians blamed the foreign vote. The following year, Walter Haldemann, the editor of the *Louisville Morning Courier* served as vice president of the Native American Party at its national convention. By July 1845, Louisville had its own chapter of the Know Nothing Party.

Nativist sentiment continued to escalate in Louisville for a variety of reasons. By 1850, Irish and German immigrants comprised 36 percent of the city’s population. The rising number of Catholics prompted the bishop to relocate to Louisville from Bardstown in 1841, and the new Cathedral of the Assumption was erected in 1852. Such developments appeared menacing to many native-born Protestants. Many also resented Catholic criticisms of the public school system. In 1853, Bishop Martin John Spalding wrote the Louisville Board of Education complaining about the use of a Protestant Bible in public schools supported by all citizens. He also argued that the independently organized and funded Catholic schools should get public money because Catholics paid taxes to “support a system from which they received no benefit.” Besides anxiety over religion, tension over slavery compounded nativist suspicions of immigrants. In 1854, Louisville became the headquarters of Bund
Freier Manner—the League of Free Men—a radical German group whose platform called for the emancipation of slaves. Moreover, all three German language newspapers in Louisville gave voice to the abolitionist cause. Although these rebels probably constituted only a small portion of the German community, they were a highly visible segment of it. As a result of their activities, nativists stereotyped Germans in Louisville as abolitionist troublemakers. These
immigrants, nativists added, threatened to rob the native-born slaveholders of their labor, while driving down wages by taking low-paying jobs. This rhetoric strengthened Know Nothing sentiment in Louisville and heightened the possibility of conflict.  

Anti-immigrant activities in Louisville became more frequent in the months leading up to Bloody Monday. On April 24, 1853, nativists attacked a group of Germans “because they were in traditional costumes, and beat them with sticks.” While George Prentice had not yet joined the Know Nothing Party, thousands of native-born Kentuckians had. As many as ten thousand attended a Know Nothing rally in Louisville in November 1854. Five months later, Germans in Louisville started to form Sag Nicht, or “Say Nothing,” societies in response to the Know Nothings, antagonizing the nativists and fueling their suspicions. In response, the party reorganized, giving the head of each local “clan” authority to appoint committees “to attend the polls and to challenge illegal votes.” Know Nothing poll watchers prevented Germans from voting in the elections of May 5, and at least one act of violence against immigrants took place that day. Know Nothings chased three Germans from the polls, and when the victims sought protection in a tavern, their pursuers ransacked it and beat the owner. Then on May 12, a mob attacked the German Firefighting Company as it responded to a false alarm. The assailants destroyed the wagon and threw it in the Ohio River. At the August election, Know Nothings reportedly imported “hundreds of armed bullies” to ensure victory at the polls.  

A shortage of polling places made it more likely that tensions over slavery, immigration, and religion would turn violent. The new state constitution of 1850 reduced the amount of time voters had to cast their ballots from three days to one, but the city opened no new polling places. A growing population and an increased number of elective offices compounded the problem. As a result, voters could wait in line for a considerable length of time and never have the chance to cast their ballots. Less than half of the voters in the predominantly immigrant first and eighth wards were able to vote in 1855. Tempers often became short, especially when those who opposed the immigrant vote could not cast their ballots. As the election of August 6 approached, Louisvillians expected that the full vote of the city would not be counted.  

Although historians now remember Prentice for instigating violence against Catholics and immigrants on Bloody Monday, he did not lend his voice to the Know Nothing cause until a few months prior to the election. He played no role in fanning earlier nativist concerns and had actually appealed to the Irish vote in the 1852 election, even going so far as to berate English “scoundrels” for trampling on the rights of Irish Catholics. Just a year prior to Bloody Monday, Prentice stated his opposition to the Know Nothing goal of excluding immigrants and Catholics from office, and as late as April 1855 he still advocated the
lost cause of the Whig Party. The April elections could have convinced Prentice of the strength and popularity of the Know Nothing Party, thus inspiring him to espouse their beliefs as a business move. While economics may have contributed to Prentice’s sudden adoption of Know Nothing ideology, a stronger motivator was most likely his devotion to the Union. In July, Prentice wrote: “Probably the most ominous and momentous question now agitating is that of slavery. This question, infinitely more than any other or all others, threatens to dissolve the Union. The crisis is perilous, and, in this crisis, the American party is the only one that can be relied on to save the country.” In an attempt “to save the country,” Prentice threw his support behind the American Party. However, the party’s main tactic for uniting the nation was blaming its woes on immigrants.13

Many readers of the *Louisville Journal* probably held nativist sentiments when George Prentice took up the Know Nothing cause. Prentice did not help found the Louisville branch of the Know Nothing Party, and it already controlled both the county and state governments by the time he joined in May 1855. Nevertheless, Prentice’s constant propagation of stereotypes reinforced native-born prejudices and made them more credible. His rhetoric of hate amplified the xenophobic attitudes of his readers and may have moved many of them to act on their feelings. Although Prentice frequently accompanied his nativist rhetoric with denunciations of violence, his intensely violent language contradicted his protests. Furthermore, Prentice’s depiction of Catholic immigrants as an imminent threat provided the justification that his readers needed to excuse their atrocious acts of aggression as necessary steps of self-defense. Readers of Prentice’s paper ultimately understood his hateful rhetoric in the months leading up to Bloody Monday as a call for violence against the Catholic immigrant community.14

Anti-Catholic literature of the nineteenth century frequently interpreted the influx of Catholic immigrants as evidence of a papal conspiracy to infiltrate America, and Prentice repeatedly referred to this threat in the month before the August election. On July 26, he wrote:

> The indefatigable perseverance, with which Rome works out her dark schemes in furtherance of Papal supremacy, indicates, with almost unquestionable certainty, that to the secret influence of that mysterious power that sits enthroned in Rome, from whence it sends its mandates to willing subjects scattered all over the world, we must refer this unity of political action by foreigners in this country.

Prentice’s references to “dark schemes,” “secret influence,” and “mysterious power” followed popular depictions of a Catholic conspiracy to invade America and subjugate the American people. Prentice claimed that during the presidential
election of 1852, “a negotiation was subsequently effected between certain high
Roman Catholic dignitaries on the one part and Gen'l Pierce or persons repre-
senting him on the other, by which the Church was to support him for the
Presidency and he was to call a Roman Catholic to his Cabinet.” Prentice told his
readers that the Catholic did not vote as an American citizen, but “AS a mem-
ber of the Catholic church, AS a servant and agent of the Pope of Rome, AS
an employee of the Roman church and its head to see the maintenance of their
interests and their power in the administration of the government of the United
States.” By portraying the Catholic voter as a “servant and agent” and “employee
of the Roman church,” Prentice labeled him an enemy of the American people
actively working to destroy the nation’s freedom. “Hand in hand, and, in their
secret Sag Nicht and Anti-American assemblies, swearing mutual fidelity and
assistance,” Prentice averred, “these dangerous factions are colloqued against us.”
The description of Catholic immigrants as spies “colloqued against us” (empha-
sis added) suggested an imminent danger to readers and roused feelings of fear.15

Prentice not only convinced his readers that Catholics were dangerous spies,
he called upon them to act on their fears: “Rally to put down an organization
of Jesuit Bishops, Priests, and other Papists, who aim by secret oath and horrid
perjuries, and midnight plotings, to sap the foundation of all our political edi-
fices—State and national.” Prentice did not spell out how he wanted his readers
to “put down” Catholics, but he identified members of the Catholic faith as ene-
mies in a war against foreign domination. On several occasions, Prentice com-
pared the war against Catholics to the Revolutionary War. He ended one of these
articles by calling upon “every freeman, every true lover of his country, to aid [the
American Party] in this resistance against foreign aggression.” In fact, Prentice
suggested that the current opponent was more dangerous and “resistance” more
imperative than during the War of Independence. On July 4, 1855, Prentice
wrote: “Our noble ancestors of three generations ago fought for seven long years
to deliver our country from foreign domination, and now we are engaged in a
mighty struggle to deliver it from the fearful peril of a foreign domination more
insidious, more formidable, and infinitely more degrading.” To describe this war
of “foreign domination,” Prentice employed the language of violence and danger,
warning his readers of the “fearful peril” of the current “struggle.”16

According to Prentice, failure to win the struggle against the Catholics would
lead to the destruction of American democracy and liberty. He warned his read-
ers that foreign immigrants would “trample upon the political rights and liberties
of the people.” Immigrants, moreover, would “trample upon all laws, human and
divine, to substitute lustful licentiousness for constitutional liberty, and mob-
violece for peace and order.” Prentice called Catholics “the most dangerous foes
of religious liberty,” “bound to crush it” because they were “obliged by their
creed to annihilate religious liberty wherever they find it.” Words like “trample,”
“crush,” and “annihilate” threatened the reader with violence. Prentice repeatedly described Catholicism as “altogether antagonistic to the ideas of civil and religious freedom upon which the future of our republican government is based,” and he warned that “the safety of our free institutions, thus openly despised, requires that we should guard against its wily machinations.” He also used words like “our” and “we” to personalize the threat his readers faced, and he suggested that their position was one of defense, designed to “guard” against the “wily machinations” of the foe. Similarly, Prentice told readers that “to defend [republican] principles against the machinations of foreign enemies and the practices of domestic traitors is the particular duty of every American.” Such speech encouraged fear and indignation among native-born Americans, while the allusion to “duty” placed responsibility on readers “to defend” the country from the “machinations” of both “enemies” and “traitors.”

The daily onslaught of Catholic stereotypes reinforced readers’ nativism, and convinced many that the defense of American liberties required action:

It behooves the American party to be ever active and vigilant. The enemies of the country have combined against it. Foreignism, Romanism, Abolitionism, and all the other dangerous isms, imported from the monarchical atmosphere and soil of Europe, have seized upon the old Democratic party and driven nearly all good true men from its ranks; and now they seek, under such a ‘mask,’ to possess themselves of the Government, to riot upon the nation’s wealth, and bring ruin upon the country. . . . [A]t the ballot-box we shall overwhelm this ‘combination of factions,’ which, as if ‘stealing the livery of Heaven to serve the Devil in,’ has assumed the name of the Democratic party for purposes hostile to the best interests of the country and dangerous to its most cherished institutions.

Prentice’s description relied on his readers’ fears of “Romanism” and “Abolitionism.” He portrayed the immigrant as the “combined” embodiment of these dangers, making the “enemies” seem all that more menacing. Indeed, immigrants no longer served the Pope, but the Devil himself. Thus, to defend their nation native-born Americans must “overwhelm” the enemy. At least one reader took Prentice’s words to heart. “Protestant” expressed satisfaction with the July firing of Roman Catholic teachers in the Louisville public school system: “I ask whether there is any station from which a Roman Catholic, if the teachings of his church are intolerant and at war with the genius of our Republican institutions, should be more carefully excluded than from that of teacher of our children.” Blatant discrimination and the violation of religious freedom became acceptable as preventative measures taken to protect “our Republican institutions’ and “our children.”
As Alexander Tsesis argues, “A violation of ethical norms is easier to explain away if the victims belong to an outgroup and are widely portrayed as demonic adversaries who are purportedly menacing to the population.” Prentice’s rhetoric followed this pattern, identifying Catholic immigrants both as abstract threats to democratic institutions and physical threats to the population. “In this conflict,” Prentice wrote, “the feelings and passions of the foreigners are roused almost to fury. Their hate knows no bounds. Their revenge exhibits the rage of a wild beast. Their insolence is unbearable. If they had the requisite courage and strength, they would drive forth into the wilderness every native that refuses to let them set their feet upon his neck.” Words like “fury,” “hate,” and “rage of a wild beast” were calculated to inspire fear in readers. When the Louisville Democrat criticized such inflammatory rhetoric, Prentice acknowledged the “strong” language, but asserted that he “did not by any means overstate the excitement and the exasperation of the foreigners in Louisville against the native-born citizens.” He denied that his editorial was “a plea for violence, an invocation of the mob spirit.” Prentice “insist[ed] upon the protection of the polls and of all who wish to go to them from the danger of mob violence” but, he added, “we need not and we will not hesitate to speak of the hatred and the insane rage . . . in the minds of the mass of the Germans and Irish in this city against the American party.” Prentice’s reaffirmation of language that some readers considered “a plea for violence, an invocation of the mob spirit” undermined his call for peaceful voting. Indeed, his emphasis on “the hatred and the insane rage” of the “mass” of immigrants seems calculated to induce panic.

As the election neared, the articles in the Journal seemed increasingly designed to heighten the fear and paranoia of readers. Prentice republished an article from a Mississippi newspaper in which the Irish-Protestant editor warned against invading Catholics: “There is danger—for God’s sake protect yourselves while you can. I knew them, where they burned Bibles, they murdered heretics, they set the law of the land at defiance, and would obey no law but the law of the Church.” With its personal testimony, invocation of God, and calls for readers to “protect yourselves while you can,” the article aimed to inspire terror. Prentice himself emphasized Catholics’ “threats and preparations for obtaining success even by violence and bloodshed,” and warned of “the presence in our midst of a large body of foreign-born and Roman Catholic voters.” The Friday before the election, he predicted that if the American Party lost the election:

The bitterness of the foreign element would burst forth in double volume, and the Catholics, now crouching with subdued but rankling venom, awaiting our subjugation by their political allies, would spring upon us with the fury of the tiger. Their breasts are now swelling with the hope of revenge, and our defeat would end in our political destruction, and probably our religious ruin.
Prentice’s animalistic portrayal of immigrants who threatened to “spring upon us with the fury of the tiger” (emphasis added) frightened readers and dehumanized Catholics. Such rhetoric motivated readers to take preventative steps to protect themselves while reducing any reservations they might have about harming an enemy portrayed as a vicious animal seeking “revenge.”

As the election drew near, Prentice supplemented these depictions of immigrant violence with specific examples, though he was often inaccurate. On July 23, Prentice reported that William O’Brien, “said to be a very violent Sag Nicht bully,” and his brother attacked a man and accidentally shot a passerby. Prentice called their behavior “a sample of the violence contemplated by the bullies of the Sag Nicht party.” While the story made the front page, a subsequent retraction only warranted three lines hidden on the second. “We were misinformed in regard to the difficulty,” Prentice explained, for the man he had originally depicted as a victim had “first attacked O’Brien.” In another article, Prentice reported that “two respectable gentlemen” heard a James Meriwether “say either that he had subscribed or he would subscribe fifty dollars to arm the Germans and Irish in Louisville with knives and pistols on election day.” Prentice ended the article by warning of the consequences if “every foreigner on the day of the election should stagger under the weight of his deadly weapons.” Meriwether responded that “the statement and the foundation of the article . . . is false, entirely without foundation.” Prentice conceded that either his informant or Meriwether was “mistaken,” but then provided a more elaborate account of the alleged incident: “on the day of the election in Madison, there was there a band of two-hundred armed foreign-born citizens; that [Merieuter] had given $50 toward arming them; and that he would do the same thing in Louisville in this election if there should be any need of it.” Prentice hoped that Louisville’s immigrant voters would “by all means leave their deadly weapons home” on election day, but then described one anti-American who “talked with very great excitement about pistols and bowie-knives and about men’s wading in blood,” and another who proclaimed “that the German and Irish shall vote, ‘even at the cost of a fight half a mile long.”’ Prentice did not, however, name the candidates whom he quoted.

Murmured threats of immigrant violence, many coming from readers, littered the pages of the Journal. In one instance, “a man distinguished for his strength and for his skill in using it, states that he was offered by agents of the Anti-American party a large sum to take his stand at the First Ward polls on the day of the election.” Another correspondent informed Prentice “that one gang of thirty foreigners at work [on] . . . High street have been directed to arm themselves with pistols and knives and go to the polls in a body on Monday.” A week before the election, Prentice published a letter from a “gentleman” who claimed to hear the following anti-American speech:
Arm yourselves with swords, pistols, bowie knives, guns, bludgeons, revolvers, clubs, hoes, rakes, chisels, pitchforks, spades, picks, shovels, mallets, stone-hammers, crow-bars, currycombs, brickbats, ramrods, saws, cutting-knives, broomsticks, corn-cutters, dungforks, mauls, and tomahawks, and search every dwelling, smoke-house, church, corn-crib, school-house, barn, meeting-house, stable, cutting-room, cow-shed, sink-hole, backhouse, goosepen, cider-barrel, and bake-oven in the land, and murder, bite, kill, maim, slay, gouge, tear, chew, pinch, kick, beat, and destroy every proscriptive, oath-bound, d–d abolition Know-Nothing in the land. Leave not one trace of them behind nor a sink-hole in which they can hide.

The witness to this remarkable speech miraculously escaped the crowd to report every word of it faithfully to the Journal. Two days before the election, Prentice predicted almost certain immigrant violence: “From all quarters we hear of preparations made on the Anti-American side for a resort to violence at the polls . . . [and] organized bands of bullies.” As the editor of the Anzeiger observed, Prentice “was inflaming the situation by printing such lies.”

Prentice’s repeated accounts of the dangers posed by immigrants encouraged nativist readers to act violently while simultaneously shifting responsibility for their actions on to the victims. According to Prentice, nativists had to fight the enemy or risk “annihilation.” “[The immigrant] has chosen his position as their enemy,” proclaimed Prentice, “and he swears to give them no quarter until they are subdued. Every blow he strikes is aimed for their prostration and annihilation.” But if native-born Americans “have pride, if they have patriotism, if they have self-respect, if they have even the instincts of self-preservation, let them give him blow for blow.” In Prentice’s rhetoric, attacks on immigrants became necessary acts of “self-preservation,” and any native-born Americans who failed to act lacked “pride,” “patriotism,” or “self-respect.” Prentice even warned readers not to be tricked by the apparent innocence of the opponent:

Guilt may stand irresolute for a moment ere it strikes, appalled by the prospect of danger; but, so surely as danger is removed, the blow will come. We appeal to all lovers of the Government then to appreciate their rights and the danger of an attack upon them. . . . We see the chain drawing round us. If in this struggle we fail to break it, the tyrant will be tempted to double and tighten it.

Nativist readers, Prentice counseled, should “break” the immigrant before he attacked, even if he appeared harmless. Otherwise, the “blow will come.”

Just as powerful as Prentice’s reiteration of hateful stereotypes and threats of danger was his characterization of the election as war. He frequently employed violent metaphors to describe the defeat of his political opponents. He told his
readers to “buckle on your armor” and “strike a glorious blow for our glorious Republic.” Prentice repeatedly called on readers to “Rally to crush a faction of foreigners, political Papists, and Anti-American native demagogues.” He labeled the Know Nothings “soldiers of American liberty,” and alternately commanded them to “give the enemy a Waterloo defeat” or “whip the foreigners as Washington did at Yorktown.” He saw himself as a “sentinel in the great American army” whose purpose was to “sound the alarm.” The day of the election, the editor wrote, “Americans, are you ready? We think we hear you shout ‘Ready!’ Well, fire! and may heaven have mercy on the foe.” Though Prentice often professed his opposition to violence, his words suggested otherwise. Metaphors of warfare provided readers with clues to understanding the gaps in the text, invoking meanings different from Prentice’s declared intentions.

Although Prentice declared that he wanted no physical harm to come to Catholic immigrants, his violent language suggested otherwise. Metaphors of war, hateful stereotypes, and descriptions of the Catholic immigrant as an imminent threat outweighed his claims for peace. Moreover, Prentice employed this language in a city where nativist sentiment had been mounting for years and where anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant election rioting had taken place the previous April (during which Prentice had endorsed no party or candidate). As historian Thomas Baldwin suggests, “the previous violence at the polls and the high degree of anti-foreign prejudice already existing in Louisville” made Prentice’s hate mongering all the more irresponsible. His hate speech against immigrants and Catholics helped trigger the violence against those he identified as enemies. Nevertheless, Prentice was feeding off the preexisting discriminatory beliefs of native-born Louisvillians. Indeed, the readers of the Journal fueled Prentice’s language of violence just as he fueled their acts of violence, each an equal participant in a vicious circle of hate.

The bigoted rhetoric in the Louisville Journal did not die along with the victims of Bloody Monday. After the riots, Prentice and public officials maintained that “every act of bloodshed was begun by foreigners.” The committee appointed to investigate the riots—dominated by Know Nothings—blamed immigrants “in every instance.” They called Quinn’s Row a “Jesuit resort” and labeled the dead “priest ridden foreign hirelings.” The committee ultimately compensated forty-one people, but they received only small sums, not reparation for damages. Some prominent citizens, including James Speed and William Preston, petitioned the city council to repay victims for damages suffered, but it refused, stating that “neither favor nor encouragement should be given to those whose conduct tends to create mobs.”

Scholars of the riot have dismissed such claims and view the Know Nothings as its perpetrators, noting that the casualties were overwhelmingly Irish and German immigrants. Some immigrants certainly responded violently in self defense. As the Know Nothing mob ransacked and set fire to German establishments, some
Germans fired at them from their windows, injuring several nativists. Likewise, a few Know Nothings died at the hands of Irishmen. One nativist “was shot chasing an Irishman from the polls,” and two others were killed in a gunfight. The few Know Nothings who died on Bloody Monday, however, were participants in the bloodshed, while immigrants were the primary victims. Most scholars also agree that George Prentice helped instigate the riot, but they have not provided a thorough examination of his inflammatory language.²⁷

Prentice’s editorials were particularly potent, but nineteenth-century journalists often employed vitriolic language. In his study of southern newspaper editors, Carl Ostaus notes that “the nineteenth century was an age of personal journalism, when strong, colorful personalities dominated ‘viewpapers’ devoted to politics and quarrels, not necessarily in that order.” According to Ostaus, these political editors “rallied the shock troops of party conflict.” To attract readers, editors filled their columns with “fire and brimstone.” They did not want to present an unbiased summary of the facts; rather, they wanted to sell newspapers and promote their own or their political party’s interests. “It was common,” Ostaus writes, “for papers to mystify the truth and inflame the feelings of the readers.” Know Nothing politicians were infamous for their use of “oratory hyperbole,” and Ostaus describes the style of the era as “intolerant, bigoted, and fanatical.” The more venomous an editor’s attacks on his political enemies, the more his allies praised him. “Some editors,” Ostaus adds, “were celebrated for their rich vocabularies of invective.” Prentice was such an editor. In the end, however, his talent for tirades led to tragedy. Prentice seems to have realized this, even as he attempted to defend himself. “If our shouts were more stirring and thrilling than those of our opponents,” he wrote, “the only reason was that we knew how to make them so.”²⁸
Among Prentice’s most effective rhetorical tactics was his use of military metaphors to create “stirring and thrilling” editorials. After others had accused him of instigating the riots, Prentice defended himself by claiming, “we all know that political papers, from time immemorial, have fallen into the adoption of military phraseology in rallying their friends to the ballot box.” While Prentice may have exaggerated, he correctly noted that journalists “commonly used” such metaphors “in the nineteenth century.” However, he urged readers to arm themselves and mount an attack. And unlike evangelicals and others who used similar military terminology, Prentice encouraged readers to attack a specific, tangible enemy: Catholic immigrants.29

While the scale of violence on Bloody Monday was unusual, assaults against immigrants and Catholics occurred frequently in nineteenth-century America. Know Nothings, in particular, had a reputation for mobbing. In the years before the Civil War, twenty-two political riots that killed an estimated seventy-seven people involved Know Nothings. Although riots in Philadelphia and Boston have drawn greater attention, nativist riots occurred more frequently in the southern states, where seventy-two of the deaths and nineteen of the Know Nothing riots took place.30 Tension over slavery provides a partial explanation for the disproportionate amount of violence directed against Catholics and immigrants in the slave states. Southerners regularly employed mob violence to deal with menacing populations, including criminals, insurrectionists, and abolitionists. Southern Know Nothings portrayed immigrants as all three. Located in a border state and home to a large and politically active immigrant population, Louisville was particularly susceptible to violent nativism. Germans in Louisville formed Sag Nicht societies in opposition to the Know Nothings, published multiple newspapers that supported the abolitionist cause, and made the city the headquarters of the League of Free Men, a radical German group that promoted emancipation. A shortage of polling places meant that not everyone in Louisville could vote and increased tensions on election day. Finally, Louisville became the adopted home of George D. Prentice, a political poet whose pen seeped poison.
TO THE

NATIVE AMERICANS

Of the Fayette Congressional District.

FELLOW CITIZENS:

We beg leave to address you through this medium, the only one left to us in all the political Journals of the Union, except the Glaze-

town Herald, being either inspired by the fear of the consequences to

their parties, or venturing in that misapplication and error which, due to

characteristic Independent Journals, have disregarded our request to

publish the proceedings of our meeting, held some weeks ago. Thus

the object of that meeting has been in part defeated, and the resolutions

of that meeting have not had that extended circulation we desired.

Fellow Citizens:
The integrity and perpetuity of our free institutions are in imminent

peril. The moral and physical energies of our beloved country are

threatened with a fatal paralysis, and the notice of self-preservation

should impel every true American to rally around the standard of his

country, and make a bold and determined resistance to the evils which

threaten its destruction.

All the states of Europe are engraving upon our shores the contents of

their poor houses and jails, thousands of souls are being landed weekly

at one single port, and it is estimated, that during the present year, no

less than FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND, THE REFUSE POPULA-

TION OF THE OLD WORLD, will be landed upon our soil. An

immense number of ships are engaged in transporting foreign parasites

into this country.

Already our Northern, Eastern and Southern cities are filled to over-

flowing, with poor, diseased and degraded immigrants.

The Canadas have petitioned the mother country, with loud and bitter

complaints, to put a stop to the evil, or furnish them with some remedy

for so many ill growing out of the rapid influx of foreign beggars—the

whole Continent is overgrown with this social and physical pestilence—

A remedy, fellow citizens is badly and imperiously called for. Let

us begin to do something now. Delay is dangerous. Perfidious evils

surround us. Let us resolve to act now and act efficaciously, to reme-

dy present evils and secure immediate and desirable results.

We can expect nothing from our old parties, as much, "They are join-

ted to their old friends, let them alone!" They have refused to aid us, or even to

notice our existence as a party, they will cling to party even in the

practice of principles; let us cling to principles—such is the only way

we can rescue the evils growing out of foreign immigration.

You, fellow citizen, and unless the remedy be speedily applied, the

scourge which has been manifested in the states of Alabama, where in

worst of our brave and patriotic volunteers, under the patronage Col. CHILDS,

was turned to the occasion of that Catholic profession and HUMILI-

ATELY BEND THEIR KNEES, REMOVE THEIR HAT AND

HUMILIATELY BEND THEIR ARMS, in procession—tho the idea of submis-

sion—a failure, was evident from the very first... The

Division of the streets of this Union, and we shall witness men high in

authority, doing homage to Roman Catholicism, by bearing the holy

candle in procession through our streets, and feed American children,

as well as soldiers, compelled to bend the knee and defile the heart, in

this consecrated work—that remnant of superstition—is borne by. This

failure, we shall face, unless, while the pressure is yet with us, we

use to avert the threatened danger. Such base trickling to the re-

ligious views or prejudices of any sect or denomination, cannot fail to meet

with the hearty scorn and contempt of every true and honest American—

his political principles what they may.

The present is not the time or place to discuss the details of Native

American principles; we are called upon to put in motion the great

Native American Bill which is destined to roll over the whole Union.

Our talented and indefatigable candidate for Congress, Mr. TRAVIS,

acted by a voice which our principles inspire—love of country.—by

request, for the urgent solicitations of free, industrious friends of Native

American principles, has spent his time and money lavishly in our cause

and shall we not return our gratitude by bestowing our most energetic

efforts to secure his election? This we can do. Let us try it. It

is said by his enemies, that Mr. Travis will resign just prior to the

election, for the benefit of his friend, Mr. Murchland, we assure, Mr. T.

has no friend politically, who is not an advocate and supporter of Native

American principles. No, he is not the man to desert a glorious cause.

Request to this address, in a friend in this plains five days ago.

"Request the Editor of the Herald to say that death alone will pre-

vent me from this here through, and having, in the last few days, trav-

ered the whole district, I know I shall succeed." Not assured, there is no lack out in him, nor will his friends turn their

backs upon him. We expect to give him a majority in this town; and

believe, from the public manifestations in all parts of this country, that

old Scott will gain a majority of his legal voters—unless the old

party is driven by the leaders, and the yellow whipped into flames.

From all parts of the district, the most cheering notes of emotion

have been heard; and now, in behalf of the Native American party of the 5th

Congressional district, we appeal to every free born citizen—every pat-

iotic Kentuckian—every true hearted American, to come up to the polls

and vote their sentiments, irrespective of old party lines; if this be done, the success of our cause in this district, will be ensured, and the gallant

TRAVIS elected by a triumphant majority; thus a new impetus will be

given to the cause of our country; the principles of the Native American

canparty spread like an avalanche over the length and breadth of the

land and the Institutions of our beloved country be thereby redeemed

from the contaminating influence exerted at the ballot box by parvenus

and apostates, for the benefit of their Lords and Masters—the Friends

and Patrons of Europe.


8 Levine, “Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery,” 487; Charles E. Deusner, “The Know Nothing Riots in Louisville,” Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 61 (Apr. 1963), 134, 137 (hereafter Register); Betty Carolyn Congleton, “George D. Prentice and Bloody Monday: A Reappraisal,” Register 63 (July 1965), 221; Frank Towers, The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 101. A minority of antislavery Know Nothings called for the party to take a stand on the issue at the national council in June 1855. The party endorsed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, although most northern delegates opposed the platform. Soon after, the party split; the fall of the Know Nothings facilitated the rise of the Republican Party. See Gienapp, Origins of the Republican Party, 185-86.


10 Deusner, “Know Nothing Riots in Louisville,” 127-28. The population of the city was forty-three thousand in 1850 according to Yater, Two Hundred Years, 61, 63-65. In 1850, Louisville was home to 12,500 Germans and 3,100 Irish, according to Crews, American Holy Land, 138-39. Bennett, Party of Fear, 143; Harrison and Klotter, New History of Kentucky, 123.


14 In Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performance (New York: Routledge, 1997), 27, Judith Butler writes: “The one who utters hate speech is responsible for the manner in which such speech is repeated, for reinvigorating such speech, for reestablishing contexts of hate and injury.” In Literary Theory: An Anthology (1998; Malden, Ma.: Blackwell, 2004), 128, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan note that “reception, response, and interpretation are in a sense pre-ordained by the rhetoric of the literary work, but the audience also plays a role in shaping how the work will be understood and what meanings it will have.” See also Yater, Two Hundred Years, 66-67; and Tsesis, Destructive Messages, 108.


16 Ibid., July 4, 25, Aug. 6, 1855.

17 Ibid., July 9, 13, 24, 25, 1855.

18 Ibid., July 7, 13, 1855.
Tsesis, *Destructive Messages*, 91; *Louisville Daily Journal*, July 9, 11, 1855. In 1855, four daily journals were published in Louisville. While both the *Louisville Daily Journal* and the *Louisville Daily Courier* supported the Know Nothing Party, the *Louisville Democrat* and the *Louisville Times* were anti-Know Nothing papers. Two German publications, *Louisville Anzeiger* and the *Herold des Westens*, also circulated at the time. See Yater, *Two Hundred Years*, 62-66.

Ibid., July 13, 14, 23, 24, 1855.


*Louisville Daily Journal*, July 4, Aug. 3, 1855. As Tsesis, *Destructive Messages*, 116, writes: “Ingroups begin to fear the social pariah they have imagined into existence, and then justify brutal acts by characterizing them as defensive measures.”

*Louisville Daily Journal*, July 17, Aug. 3, 6, 1855. Prentice’s violent metaphors were not merely figures of speech. As literary scholar Edward Corbett notes, figures of speech “provide one of the best ways to strike that happy balance between ‘the obvious and the obscure,’” enabling readers to “grasp . . . ideas promptly and thereby . . . accept” a writer’s “arguments”; see “Classical Rhetoric,” in *Literary Theory*, 142.

Baldwin, “George D. Prentice,” 484. As Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 34, notes: “Racist speech works through the invocation of convention; it circulates, and though it requires the subject for its speaking, it neither begins nor ends with the subject who speaks.” Although Prentice and the *Journal* did not instigate violence in the April riots, Walter Haldemann of the *Louisville Courier* certainly fueled the flames; see Yater, *Two Hundred Years*, 66-67.
In June 1858, a circuit court jury in Fayette County, Kentucky, convicted Robert H. Champ of the rape of twenty-eight-year-old Sally Champ, his brother’s widow, and sentenced him to fifteen years in prison. The statute in force when the Commonwealth indicted Robert Champ decreed that “Whoever shall unlawfully and carnally know any white woman, against her will or consent, or by force, or whilst she is insensible, shall be guilty of rape, and shall be confined in the penitentiary from ten to twenty years.” The jurors felt that Robert Champ’s assault against his widowed sister-in-law was serious enough to call for more prison time than the minimum, but not so serious as to warrant the full punishment. Believing the jury had wrongly convicted him, Robert Champ petitioned the Kentucky Court of Appeals, the Commonwealth’s highest court in the nineteenth century, to reverse the guilty verdict on grounds the trial judge should have allowed certain expert testimony that Champ felt was exculpatory. He lost. Throughout the nineteenth century the Kentucky Court of Appeals practiced what legal historians call “legal formalism,” tending to adhere to well-established common law precedents and doctrines in cases involving felony convictions for the rape of adult women. Whereas several state supreme courts Americanized some common law principles controlling rape adjudication, the Kentucky court continued to rely on the tenets that renowned legal authority Sir William Blackstone laid out in his highly influential work, Commentaries on the Laws of England. The Kentucky court showed an especially strong tendency to legal formalism in rape cases involving questions of character evidence, the want of evidence to warrant a verdict, and a defendants’ right to the compulsory process to get his witnesses to court.

At trial, Sally Champ testified that Robert Champ came to her home early one morning when only her youngest daughter and two of her slaves were present. He said he wanted to see the new blinds that Sally had just put up because his wife wanted some like them. Sally testified that when she showed Robert the blinds he told her they were not as pretty as she and then he grabbed her and put a vial to her nose. She passed out briefly, but regained consciousness before he had completed “the act of violence” against her. Though unsteady, she managed to get to her feet and flee. Without delay, Sally sent her slave girl to get Sally's parents and,
while the slave was running that errand, Sally’s nephew and the manager of her plantation, Thomas Brand, entered and she immediately told him what Robert had done. Robert Champ came into the room as Sally was relating the story and promptly accused the woman of being insane. Three reputable women from the community examined Sally a short time after the incident and two of them testified that her body showed marks of violence and that she was swollen and bruised in her private parts. She complained of being in great pain. The women concurred with the defendant that Sally seemed “crazy” immediately after the assault, but said that ordinarily she was not that way. During the trial, Robert did not employ the usual defense tactic in rape cases of attacking the complainant’s character because Sally Champ’s unimpeachable reputation made it untenable.2

The Champ case represents a textbook example of how contemporaries believed a woman should behave and what she had to do to achieve a conviction for felony rape. In Commentaries on the Laws of England, Blackstone set forth the vital ingredients essential to believe a woman’s claim of forcible rape. Relying on common law principles dating back to the mid-thirteenth century, Blackstone wrote that “in order to prevent malicious accusations, it was the law . . . that the woman should immediately after, go to the next town, and there make discovery to some credible persons of the injury she has suffered.” Sally Champ immediately dispatched her slave girl to get Sally’s parents and she told her nephew of the incident as soon as she saw him. Blackstone stated that while authorities could believe a “woman of good fame” who claimed to have been raped, they
should not give credence to an unchaste woman’s accusation. Sally Champ was a woman of impeccable character, one whose testimony any juror could readily believe, and so unimpeachable that the defendant did not try to assail her reputation in court. Blackstone further noted that supporting evidence and reputable witnesses were necessary to corroborate the woman’s complaint. Shortly after the assault, Sally Champ allowed respected women of the community to inspect her body and they determined that it did indeed exhibit marks of violence, especially in her genital region. Two of these women testified to that effect on her behalf. In addition, the women observed that Sally seemed a bit crazy following the outrage, a response that male authorities believed a respectable woman would “naturally” have under the circumstance. Sally Champ did not cry out for help, another of Blackstone’s criteria for conviction, but in her testimony she convincingly explained that Robert Champ held a vial to her nose, the contents of which rendered her temporarily unconscious and thus unable to call for assistance. Both the trial and appellate courts would have required the outcry because the other people in the house could have come to her rescue and perhaps prevented the assault. Nearly everything that transpired met the conditions that common law doctrine deemed essential to ascertain the veracity of a woman’s rape complaint and also conformed to what legal authorities understood as the “natural” behaviors of a woman who truly had been raped.³

Robert Champ did not accept his fate meekly and challenged his conviction in a formal petition to the Commonwealth’s highest court. He asked the Kentucky Court of Appeals to overturn the verdict on grounds that the trial judge had improperly excluded the testimony of some of his medical experts. At trial, Robert Champ’s defense was that Sally Champ was laboring under a sudden
attack of hysteria or some other form of mental delusion as a consequence “of a
diseased condition of the genital organs.” Nineteenth-century physicians com-
monly asserted that problems with women’s reproductive organs resulted in their
developing mental diseases, an assumption rooted in the widespread belief that
women’s reproductive capacity controlled every aspect of their being. The origins
of this assertion lay in the folkloric beliefs of the common people. Medical prac-
titioners adopted many of these popular notions, dressed them up in medical lan-
guage, and passed them off as medical science. Robert Champ produced doctors
who could testify to the belief that a woman with diseased reproductive organs
might become delusional as a result, but he could not demonstrate that Sally
Champ had such an ailment. In fact, Sally Champ produced witnesses refuting Robert Champ’s claim that she had any kind of female malady at all and the trial judge had disallowed the medical testimony for that reason. Champ asserted on appeal that the judge should have allowed the doctor to testify about the consequences of female diseases, but the appellate court judges agreed with the trial judge that the information was pointless because Sally Champ had no such illness. That part of Robert Champ’s appeal failed.4

As for the second ground of his appeal, Robert Champ claimed that the trial judge erred when he excluded the expert testimony of a dentist in regard to the hallucinogenic effects of chloroform. Contemporary medical experts knew that chloroform could cause dental patients to have delusions, and cases from the nineteenth century exist in which dentists were tried for rape and asserted as their defense that the drug caused fantasies. Three doctors had already testified for Robert as to the hallucinogenic effects of chloroform, and the appellate judges agreed with the trial judge that the fourth witness had nothing new to offer and ruled the exclusion of his testimony proper. The second part of Robert Champ’s appeal also failed.5

There was probably nothing Robert Champ could have said or done to convince the judges and jurors that he had not raped Sally Champ. Her behavior in the wake of the assault indicated to officials and to her community that she had in fact been raped. Sally Champ’s conduct conformed to the legal expectations of how a woman would “naturally” behave if she had been dishonored and outraged. The physical marks of violence on her person, including in and around her genitals, bolstered her allegation. In upholding Robert Champ’s conviction, Appellate Judge Alvin Duvall concluded that the state had decisively “proved that Mrs. Champ did suffer from an act of violence and witnesses testified to swelling and bruising.” Sally Champ’s complaint to her nephew as soon as she saw him, coupled with her impeccable reputation, effectively sealed Robert Champ’s fate and negated any chance he may have had to escape conviction. Taken together, the circumstances in the case met almost all of the common law’s vital standards as articulated in Blackstone’s *Commentaries*, and the judges of the Kentucky Court of Appeals adhered to those standards when it rejected Robert Champ’s petition to have his conviction overturned.6

Contrast the Kentucky Court of Appeals ruling in Robert Champ’s case in which most of the vital elements of common law were present and the complainant enjoyed an unimpeachable reputation with that of William Neace’s case in which much of the common law criteria was not met and the court deemed the woman’s character deeply flawed. In the Champ case, the appellate judges readily agreed with the jury’s finding; in Neace the appellate court went out of its way to find a reason to reverse the conviction, citing violations of common law doctrine to justify its decision. The difference in the outcomes of these two cases centered primarily on the question of the character of the two complaining witnesses and in both instances the appellate court used Blackstone’s articulation of the
common law to guide its decision. In 1901, Mary Sexton accused William Neace and Andy Gent of rape. A Letcher Circuit Court jury found both men guilty of the crime and sentenced each of them to ten years in state prison. According to the appellate court reporter, two masked men forced their way into the home where Sexton lived, pulled her out, and “hit her several times with a switch.” The men then dragged Sexton away from the house where they each raped her. The home belonged to Mrs. Gent, mother to defendant Andy Gent and mother-in-law to appellant William Neace. Mrs. Gent did not identify either of the assailants at trial.7

The appellate judges focused the opinion of the court almost exclusively on the complainant’s suspect character, which they determined from the trial record. Invoking common law principles set forth by Blackstone regarding the character of complainants in rape trials, the appellate judges presumed the falsity of a rape allegation from a woman of sullied reputation, an assumption that led them to disregard almost entirely other evidence presented at the trial. In the opinion of the court, the appellate jurists described the complainant, Mary Sexton, as “a woman of very bad character.” They came to this conclusion based on her testimony that while “Neace was in the act of carnally knowing her two men she knew passed by a few feet from her” and that “she recognized their voices, but did not call out because she was afraid.” Mary Sexton could have cried out for help but she did not, and unlike Sally Champ, Sexton could not claim that her assailants had rendered her unconscious. In the eyes of the appellate jurists she had no reason for failing to cry for help. Sexton testified that she did not put up much resistance to the men because she was “afraid they would shoot her if she did not comply with their wishes.” The appellate court completely ignored the fact that a woman held captive by two armed men who had already beaten her and threatened to murder her might choose not to endanger her safety further by yelling out to passersby. Instead, the judges focused narrowly on Sexton’s character. Legal and conventional wisdom held that a respectable woman would surrender her life before yielding her virtue; Sexton had chosen her life over her chastity. The judges of the Kentucky Court of Appeals deemed this the wrong choice and concluded that Sexton was not a virtuous woman and thus unworthy of the law’s protection. The court’s suspicious attitude toward the complainant’s accusation in this scenario accorded with common law doctrine.8

The Neace case serves as a textbook example of how a complainant should not behave and what she should not do if she wanted to prosecute a rape accusation successfully. The appeals court judges deemed Sexton a woman of bad character because her overall behavior subsequent to the alleged assault did not conform to the common law’s expectations. Sexton’s case failed because she did not make an outcry to passersby who might have come to her aid, she did not report the assault immediately to officials, and she had a husband who
was “on bad terms” with the defendant Neace. Sexton testified that she swore out the warrant for the men’s arrest only after her husband told her to do so. “From the character of the woman, her own testimony as to the occurrence and her subsequent conduct,” the appellate court concluded, “the jury might well have inferred that she consented to what was done up the branch.” The jurors could have arrived at this conclusion, but they did not. After hearing all the evidence and seeing Sexton testify they found both defendants guilty of rape. The appellate judges, however, believed that the jurors would have arrived at a different conclusion had they heard more evidence about the complainant’s bad reputation. In vacating the conviction, the appellate court ruled that the trial judge erred on two vital points. First, he should have allowed Neace to question Sexton about a conversation she allegedly had with him earlier that night. Second, he erred in refusing to permit the appellant to show the extent of Sexton’s bad character. The language of the opinion suggests that the appellate judges suspected the complainant had falsely accused the men or perhaps tried to implicate them in a felony at the behest of her husband. Based on their assessment of the complainant’s character rather than the totality of the evidence presented in the lower court, the court of appeals reversed the judgment and remanded the case for a new trial.

The appellate court’s ruling in Neace was exceptional not because it overturned the conviction, but because it went out of its way to do so. The judges ignored the fact that the two masked assailants confronted the complainant while she was alone, that her attackers had violently dragged her from her home into a secluded area, and that both of her attackers were armed and threatened to kill her. The judges employed legal technicalities to reverse the verdict, but the details on which the appellate court’s opinion single-mindedly focused and the language it used to depict Sexton’s character differed markedly from the Champ case. The earlier case involved a woman that the court believed of unquestioned good character while Neace involved a woman it deemed of ill repute. In the former case, the appellate judges looked for reasons to uphold the verdict and in the latter they sought a way to reverse the jury’s finding. In both cases, the appellate court’s decision rested on its perceptions of the character of the women who brought the charge and the ways in which they conformed or failed to conform to common law tenets as articulated in Blackstone. A woman of good reputation deserved the protection of the law while one of sullied character did not. In both Champ and Neace, the Kentucky Court of Appeals applied longstanding principles established in the common law, revealing a strong tendency of the Commonwealth’s court of last resort. An analysis of the court’s published opinions of appellate decisions involving convictions for the sexual coercion of adult women rendered over the course of the nineteenth century shows its penchant for adhering to Blackstone and common law doctrines and precedents.
Legal scholars debate the extent to which nineteenth-century state appellate courts implemented or abandoned English law. In his influential study, *The Transformation of American Law*, legal scholar Morton Horowitz argues that eighteenth-century jurists viewed the common law as a static set of rules that led them to treat precedents as immutable principles, a doctrine known as formalism that resulted in a strict adherence to its principles and doctrines. “During this period,” Horowitz asserts, “the common law was conceived of as a body of essentially fixed doctrine to be applied in order to achieve a fair result between private litigants in individual cases.” Early in the nineteenth century, Horowitz argues, American judges began to move away from formalism toward the idea that the law could be used as an instrument of social change, a doctrine known as instrumentalism, leading them to abandon many common law traditions. Echoing Horowitz, legal historian Timothy Huebner observes that early nineteenth-century southern state appellate judges, like their northern counterparts, came to view the law as a means to effect change in social policy and thus to prefer instrumentalism over formalism. A willingness to overturn outmoded or useless doctrines and to fashion new ones, Huebner cautions, did not mean appellate judges felt free to ignore or alter legislation or discard purposeful common law principles. It did mean that southern appellate judges were willing to accommodate social, political, and economic change when they deemed such change necessary. Historian Peter Bardaglio disagrees with Horowitz and Huebner. In his study of nineteenth-century southern laws regulating families and sex, Bardaglio finds that appellate judges tended to reject the idea of the law as a mechanism of social change and instead adhered closely to Blackstone and common law precedents and principles. The appellate jurists in Bardaglio’s study generally viewed the law in a more formalistic than instrumentalist sense.10

The explanation for these contrasting interpretations of nineteenth-century adjudication may lie in where scholars look for their evidence. Concerned almost exclusively with the common law of commerce, Horowitz’s analysis entails an examination of changes in economic law during the early period of American commercial development and he draws his evidence primarily from northern courts. Huebner’s analysis covers a broader array of subject matter than Horowitz’s, ranging from appellate cases that dealt with the crime of homicide involving the issue of self defense, to southern economic development, to federalism versus southern states’ rights, to the legal status of African Americans. Bardaglio, on the other hand, focuses almost exclusively on criminal law and procedure and narrowly on laws regulating sex and sexual behavior. His analysis correctly concludes that in the area of criminal law and procedure, southern appellate judges tended to engage in legal formalism; that is, they showed an inclination to adhere to Blackstone and common law precedents. Even Huebner finds that judges tended to rely on Blackstone and the common law when adjudicating
homicide cases. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the judges of the Kentucky Court of Appeals also fell into a pattern of formalism when ruling on sexual coercion cases in which the complainant was an adult woman. Still, the Kentucky court’s proclivity for legal formalism in adjudicating rape cases represented a tendency rather than an absolute. The Kentucky court, like most southern appellate courts, could make instrumentalist decisions when it deemed precedents outmoded or not conducive to justice and could stray from common law principles in matters of criminal law and procedure if it believed legal conventions wrong or unnecessary. For the most part, however, Kentucky appellate judges believed that following English principles and precedents pertaining to felony rape would yield justice and needed little or no change. As a result, they tended to rely on Blackstone’s articulation of common law doctrine when they adjudicated appeals in these types of cases.  

On questions of character and the admissibility of character evidence in rape cases the nineteenth-century Kentucky Court of Appeals tended strongly to adhere to Blackstone and common law precedent. According to English common law doctrine, defendants or prosecutors could only attack the character of a witness on general grounds and only for the purpose of calling into question the witness’s reputation for telling the truth. Lawyers and defendants assailed a person’s character to suggest to the jurors that the witness would lie, even under oath, and therefore to call into question the veracity of the person’s testimony. Neither defendants nor prosecutors could ask a witness about specific acts of untruthfulness or about previous misconduct or allegations. In 1838, in the case of *People v. Abbot*, the New York Supreme Court Americanized the common law rule for character evidence in rape trials when it held that a defendant could attack his accuser’s character by showing specific acts of prior unchastity and do so not only for the purpose of impeaching her reputation for honesty, but also to suggest that she likely had consented to the act in question. This represented a significant departure from the common law rule and many appellate jurisdictions, including some in the South, adopted it. The Kentucky Court of Appeals, however, refused to implement the newer doctrine in the nineteenth century.  

The Kentucky court best articulated its rejection of the Americanized rule for character evidence in an 1890 case out of western Kentucky. The appellate court overturned Frank Cargill’s first conviction in Graves Circuit Court for the unlawful detainment of his niece against her will for the purpose of coercing her to have sexual intercourse. Kentucky officials used this particular statute, which was derived from the common law, fairly often in the last quarter of the nineteenth century because prosecutors found it easier to prove an unlawful detainment than to prove a rape or an attempt to rape and it carried a lesser penalty. The statute decreed that “Whosoever shall unlawfully take or detain any woman against her will . . . with intent to have carnal knowledge with her himself, or
that another shall have such knowledge, shall be confined in the penitentiary not less than two or more than seven years.” Though the statute had been part of the penal code since 1801, the Commonwealth did not begin using it as a prosecutorial tool until the 1880s.13

In Cargill’s case, the appellate court ruled that the trial judge had improperly allowed the Commonwealth’s attorney to introduce specific evidence of the appellant’s prior bad acts when he let the complainant testify that Cargill had previously been indicted for committing the same crime against another woman. The complaining witness did not immediately bring a charge against her uncle, something that common law tenets cautioned authorities to look upon with suspicion. The complainant testified that she did not press charges sooner because her uncle had previously fled Graves County for “having done something to other women.” This statement provided the basis of Cargill’s first appeal. The complainant said she did not wish to trouble her aunt further on account of her husband’s aberrant behavior with women and so delayed making the accusation to authorities. The appellate court accepted her reason for the delay and focused its ruling on the trial judge’s violation of the basic common law tenet controlling the admissibility of character evidence. The common law rule, observed the Kentucky high court, strictly prohibited the introduction of a defendant’s prior bad acts, especially evidence of specific acts or allegations, because the accused came to court prepared only to defend himself against the crime for which he was on trial. Any claims leveled against him in the past were off limits. Had Cargill actually been convicted of the crime, evidence of his prior conviction would have been permissible, but evidence of a mere accusation was not. The appellate court reversed the verdict because the complainant’s statements proved highly prejudicial to the defendant. In addition to the trial judge’s improper admission of evidence, the appellate court cited the prosecuting attorney’s closing argument, describing it as “of the most extraordinary and reprehensible character.” The prosecutor had employed “blasphemous language” that unnerved judge and jury and rendered the entire trial a “travesty in the administration of justice.” This tactic, the appellate court concluded, was equally prejudicial to the defendant.14

The appellate court remanded Cargill’s case for a new trial, and the Graves Circuit Court jury again convicted him of the crime of unlawful detainment against his niece’s will. Once more, Cargill appealed the verdict, this time on grounds the trial judge should have permitted him to introduce specific acts of unchastity on the part of the prosecuting witness. In the second trial, then, the complainant’s rather than Cargill’s character was called into question, giving the Kentucky appellate court the opportunity to adopt the Americanized doctrine as articulated in Abbot. Instead, the court rejected the Americanized doctrine and upheld Blackstone and the common law principle that the same rule that controlled the admissibility of character evidence in the first trial governed its
admissibility in the second. Employing formalistic legal reasoning, the Kentucky jurists ruled that a defendant had the right to impeach the character of his accuser, “but it must be done by evidence of her general reputation, and not by proof of particular instances of unchastity.” This assertion accorded with traditional common law guidelines regarding the admissibility of both character evidence and prior bad acts and it affirmed not only the common law rule but also the court’s previous ruling in Cargill. The trial judge committed no error in prohibiting the testimony in the second instance and Cargill’s second conviction stood. These cases demonstrate the Kentucky Court of Appeals’ commitment to formalism. The court privileged traditional English legal precedent controlling the admissibility of character evidence and rejected the American doctrine. The jurists did not believe that the common law standard needed alteration and allowed it to stand as the legal precedent for the lower courts in the Commonwealth.

The Kentucky Court of Appeals also demonstrated a tendency to formalism in its deference to jury verdicts in cases appealed for a want of evidence. American courts’ commitment to the common law institution of the ordinary or petit jury stems from a dedication to the more protective, due process aspects of the common law heritage. State constitutions, like the federal constitution, guaranteed persons the right to trial by jury in criminal proceedings. Morton Horowitz asserts that one of the most important consequences arising out of the shift from formalism to instrumentalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was an alteration in the relationship between judge and jury. Horowitz deals exclusively with civil and commercial law cases, but his conclusions also apply to criminal procedure. Traditionally, the common law vested juries with the power to determine both law and fact. In the eighteenth century when, according to Horowitz, formalism prevailed, judges rarely gave jurors instructions and rarely set aside verdicts as contrary to the law or the evidence. According to Blackstone, the common law granted appellate courts the authority to set aside verdicts as contrary to the evidence, but colonial and later American judges proved reluctant to use it. In the early nineteenth century, when judges more readily employed instrumentalist legal reasoning, both trial and appellate judges became more concerned with controlling the jury’s prerogatives and started instructing them as to the law, a practice that grew more formal over the course of the nineteenth century. The new system reduced the jury to fact finders, or at least attempted to do so. At the time, Horowitz argues, instrumentalist appellate jurists increasingly reversed jury findings on grounds that a verdict was contrary to law or evidence. If a court’s willingness to reverse jury findings because the evidence did not warrant conviction demonstrates instrumentalism, then the Kentucky appellate court employed formalism in its adjudication of cases involving the sexual coercion of adult females. The court seldom reversed verdicts as contrary to the evidence in these appeals.
The Kentucky Court of Appeals admitted that it did not have broad license to interfere with a jury's findings and most of the judges who sat on the appellate bench did not believe they could disturb trial verdicts arbitrarily. When a man identified only as Weatherford appealed his 1873 conviction for rape, the appellate court acknowledged that the general assembly had placed limits on the court's authority. A Hickman Circuit Court jury found Weatherford and four other men guilty of the rape of Fannie Shelton. Weatherford argued that the indictment under which he was tried did not constitute a public offense under Kentucky law. On appeal, he claimed the wording of the Commonwealth's rape statute barred more than one person from being charged for the crime and thus his indictment, which identified him as a principle in the second degree, was defective. In upholding Weatherford's conviction, the appellate court ruled that it had no authority to answer that question. The court stated that its appellate power “to reverse in cases of felony is by express statute limited to errors of law committed by the lower court” and restricted to instances where a trial judge improperly admitted or excluded evidence, refused to give a proper jury charge or gave an erroneous one, failed to arrest a judgment when an indictment charged no public wrong, or improperly allowed or disallowed a preemptory challenge. Weatherford's indictment did charge him with a crime under Kentucky law, and thus the trial judge correctly refused to arrest the judgment. 17

Asking an appellate court to overturn a conviction because of insufficient evidence to sustain the verdict was equivalent to asking it to interfere with the traditional fact-finding mission of the jury. Mandated by statute to address only matters of law and tending to formalism, the judges of the Kentucky Court of Appeals rarely altered trial judgments on grounds that the evidence did not warrant the verdict. The appeal of John Porter exemplified the Kentucky court's formalism and its reluctance to interfere with the fact-finding duties of the jury. Following his 1885 felony conviction in the Elliot Circuit Court for the unlawful detainment of Amanda Porter, John Porter argued the trial judge erred when he refused to give a directed verdict of not guilty on grounds the state did not prove its case against him. The appellate court held that when “there is any testimony in criminal prosecutions conducing to sustain the verdict and judgment” it could not reverse a lower court's decision. The appellate court could intervene only if there was “an entire absence of proof constituting the offense.” The judges thus acknowledged that they would reverse a conviction if absolutely no evidence existed to show an appellant had committed a crime, but even the slightest proof meant the court would not interfere with the jury's findings. In affirming Porter's conviction, the appellate court concluded that the “details of the transaction as given by the female witness were the impress of truth, and the jury no doubt had but little trouble in arriving at the verdict.” The jury saw proof of the appellant's guilt and the appellate court, in the formalist tradition, refused to disturb the trial jury's judgment when asked to do so on grounds of insufficient evidence to sustain the conviction.18
Likewise, when the appellant in *Couch v. Commonwealth* asked the Kentucky Court of Appeals to set aside the trial jury’s finding on grounds the evidence did not warrant the verdict, the court refused. In 1895, a farm laborer identified only as Couch challenged his conviction in the Clay Circuit Court for the unlawful taking and detainment of a female against her will because his actions did not constitute a taking. Couch had crawled into the girl’s bed and placed his hand under the bed clothes of Myrtle Stubblefield, his employer’s daughter, as she slept. He admitted he touched her body but swore he had done nothing more than that. Couch complained that mere touching did not amount to a taking as specified in his indictment and because the commonwealth never showed any kind of taking, the appellate court should vacate the guilty verdict. The court ruled that touching the body of a sleeping female was equivalent to a taking against her will and the jurors and appellate judges concluded that the defendant intended to go farther. Couch had admitted as much himself when he took the stand in his own behalf. The court ruled that “the jury had all the facts before it, found him guilty and the court will not disturb the finding.” The appellate court could have defined the word “taking” narrowly in which case Couch might have won on appeal and gotten a new trial. Instead, it opted to defer to the jurors and affirmed the judgment.19

The Kentucky Court of Appeals’ reticence to interfere with trial verdicts on grounds of a lack of evidence extended even to cases in which a complainant’s unseemly conduct became an issue at trial. In 1883, a Davies Circuit Court jury convicted Edward Davis for the unlawful detainment of a female against her will for the purpose of coercing her to have sexual intercourse. Davis appealed his conviction on grounds the evidence did not warrant a conviction. The appellate court rejected the assertion out of hand. Where “a man assaults a woman, throws her down and then attempts to hold her that he may have carnal knowledge of her, he is guilty of detaining a woman against her will within the provisions of the statute.” The court concluded that if the conviction in Davis’s case was “construed as not within the statute it in effect repeals the law.” Davis insisted that the woman’s highly indecorous behavior should exculpate him. The jurists agreed that the facts conduced “to show improper conduct on the part of the female,” but explained that “the jury have given credence to her statements and thus the court cannot disturb the finding.” The court’s ruling in this case reveals its tendency to formalism, though the decision did have elements of instrumentalism in that the court opted to accept the veracity of the testimony of a woman with questionable behavior. It appears not to have equated improper conduct with a bad reputation. The appellant, however, asked the court to overturn the conviction because the evidence did not sustain the verdict, which the court refused to do. He raised the issue of the woman’s behavior to support the primary claim
of an absence of facts, but the appellate court opted to focus narrowly on the main question asked in the appeal and did not challenge the jury’s finding.20

The Kentucky Court of Appeals’ reluctance to interfere with trial verdicts on grounds of insufficient evidence to sustain the conviction even extended to a case involving an African American woman. A jury of the Laurel Circuit Court convicted “a negro man” identified only as Huff of the unlawful detainment of Diana Robinson against her will for the purpose of having carnal relations with her. Huff and an unnamed accomplice tricked Robinson’s children into letting them into her house by identifying themselves as relatives. Huff then convinced Robinson that her brother-in-law had sent them because her daughter was ill. She willingly went with them, but along the way Huff “made an insulting proposal to her, which she rejected.” He tried to stop her from returning to her house, but she fled and immediately pressed charges against him. The record states only that Huff contrived the story about the sick daughter as a ruse to get Robinson out of her home so that he might “accomplish his desires.” Huff appealed the conviction on the ground that his actions did not amount to a detainment, but Judge Thomas H. Paynter disagreed and held that the facts of the case were sufficient to sustain the verdict and affirmed the judgment. The race of Robinson’s attacker influenced the decision, and the judges likely would have shown more favor to a white appellant. Nonetheless, the Huff decision indicates that Kentucky Court of Appeals judges willingly extended refuge from an attempt at sexual depredation to a black female who had asserted the right to it. They did so under a particular circumstance: her assailant was a black man and she behaved like a respectable white woman. The jury believed that the facts presented at trial warranted the verdict and the appellate court refused to interfere. As a respected woman in her community who made an immediate accusation against her attacker, Robinson conformed to enough of Blackstone’s and the common law’s criteria that the Kentucky appellate judges granted her the law’s protection even though she was African American.21

The Kentucky Court of Appeals also demonstrated a penchant for formalism in sexual coercion cases that concerned a defendant’s right to call witnesses in his own behalf. Originally, English common law skewed criminal trials in favor of the prosecution in two important ways. First, the prosecution had the privilege of the compulsory process, meaning it could compel its witnesses to
testify while the defendant had no such authority. Second, the prosecution’s wit-
nesses testified under oath, which resulted in the jury giving them greater cre-
dence than the defendant’s witnesses whom the law forbade to give sworn tes-
timony. Several prominent English legal authorities, most notably Sir Edward
Coke, raged against these rules. In 1702, the British Parliament enacted a law
that allowed witnesses for the defense to testify under oath in trials for felony
offenses, but not for the purpose of giving their statements greater credence.
Instead, legislators passed the new law to enable the state to prosecute defense
witnesses more effectively for perjury. The 1702 act also implicitly granted
defendants the right to compel witnesses to come to court to give their state-
ments, and in so doing gained Blackstone’s hearty approval in his *Commentaries.*
Common law doctrine continued to disqualify defendants from testifying in
their own behalf, theoretically to spare them from the mortal consequences of
the sin of perjury, and this disqualification continued in the states after indepen-
dence and into the nineteenth century. State by state, lawmakers in the second
half of the nineteenth century gradually chipped away at this common law dis-
ability. Kentucky granted defendants the right to give sworn testimony in their
own defense in 1886.22

The judges of the Kentucky Court of Appeals, like Blackstone, approved of
a defendant’s right to compel witnesses to testify for him and they employed
formalist reasoning when lower court judges denied the accused this vital
common law prerogative. This constituted an essential entitlement for defen-
dants before the Commonwealth allowed them to take the stand themselves.
An 1883 case in which the appellant, Marion Gillam, asked a Knox Circuit
Court judge to set aside the guilty verdict for the unlawful detainment of his
own daughter illustrates the appellate court’s predilection for adhering to this
important common law doctrine. Gillam asserted that the trial judge should
have granted him a continuance until his primary witness could get to court.
The judge denied the request and proceeded with the trial whereupon the jury
convicted Gillam. At trial, the daughter testified that her father attempted to
have sex with her as she tried to sleep. The alleged incident took place in a
room where her mother, Gillam’s wife, and grandmother, Gillam’s mother-in-
law, slept in nearby, perhaps touching, beds. The daughter said she “kicked
him out of bed” and he then went to the fireplace and lit a fire. On cross exam-
ination, Gillam’s attorney got the young woman to admit she had been angry
with her father. Only the daughter testified because her grandmother, present
at the time of the alleged incident, was too ill to get to court on the day of the
trial, and another of the defendant’s witnesses was out of the county. In 1883,
when the commonwealth tried Gillam, Kentucky law denied defendants the
right to testify in their own defense; such individuals thus needed to call per-
sons who could assist them.23
Gillam asked the commonwealth’s highest court to vacate the conviction and the court obliged, ruling that the trial judge erred in not granting the continuance, at least until the grandmother could testify. In awarding Gillam a new trial, the appellate judges stressed that “while this court can not reverse a judgment based on the testimony authorizing a conviction if the witness is to be believed,” they nonetheless could not “refrain from saying that a jury should be well satisfied of the guilt of the accused before convicting him of such a heinous offense as the attempt to carnally know his own daughter.” The appellate judges thought the complainant’s story implausible, making it all the more important that court give the defendant time to gather witnesses. The appellate court strongly suggested that the circumstances of the allegation may have incited the passions of the jurors, leading them to convict Gillam without having heard all the facts, but the legal reason for its reversal was the trial judge’s denial of the continuance. The defendant’s witness did not attend court to avoid giving testimony, but because illness prevented her from being there. The jury needed to hear the grandmother’s testimony and Gillam, silenced by the prohibition against defendants testifying, needed for her to speak in his behalf. The Knox circuit judge deprived the defendant of his fundamental right to have sworn witnesses speak for him. In holding that the trial judge should have given the defendant reasonable time to gather his own witnesses, the appellate jurists employed formalistic reasoning. They also relied on the common law doctrine that granted defendants the right to have witnesses give sworn testimony, a rule that Blackstone strongly supported in his *Commentaries.*
When the Kentucky Court of Appeals made its ruling in *Gillam*, the general assembly had yet to enact the law that revoked the bar to defendants testifying in their own defense. It did so in 1886, theoretically mitigating the vital need for the compulsory process. Defendants in the Commonwealth’s criminal courts could simply take the stand and give their side of the story under oath to the jury. No longer silenced, defendants did not need to call upon others to state what they could say for themselves. Nonetheless, the Kentucky Court of Appeals continued to insist that lower tribunals grant defendants time to gather witnesses for their defense. The appellate court showed its commitment to maintaining defendants’ rights to the compulsory process in an 1895 case out of the Nelson Circuit Court. George Beaven appealed his conviction after the jury found him guilty of unlawfully detaining Mary Ann Shadburn against her will at the county fair. Beaven asked the trial judge for a continuance so he could summon the local marshal to testify that a number of prostitutes had plied their trade at the fair that night. Beaven claimed that he thought Shadburn was a prostitute to explain why he detained her and asked her to have sex with him. The appellate court vacated the guilty verdict because they thought the trial judge should have waited until the marshal could testify. The court held that the marshal’s testimony could have “together with other facts, in proof, explain the intent of the accused, and tend to exculpate him from the charge that he was detaining her against her will.” The Commonwealth’s attorney countered Beaven’s appeal by describing the complainant as “feeble-minded” and thus unable to consent to sex regardless of whether prostitutes plied their trade the evening of the alleged assault.25
The Commonwealth’s attorney correctly asserted that Shadburn’s feeble-mindedness rendered her unable to give lawful consent to sex under common law standards. In fact, valid consent in practically all instances required the person assenting to be informed, of sound mind, and able to comprehend what he or she consented to. The one exception to this rule involved sex acts between adult men and women, in which case common law doctrine did not require informed consent. A woman duped into consenting had nonetheless assented and thus could not bring a rape charge. With regard to mental incompetence, the law required proof that the accused knew of the female’s insanity or “feeble-mindedness” and thus that she could not give a lawful consent. The complainant’s inability to consent was a matter for the Commonwealth to prove and the jury to decide. The appellate judges reversed the judgment and granted Beaven a new trial not because his accuser might have been a prostitute, though it appears they believed his accusation, but because the trial judge had violated a fundamental common law principle that allowed a defendant the right to call witnesses in his own behalf.

In short, the Kentucky Court of Appeals demonstrated a tendency toward legal formalism, revealing its reliance on Blackstone and the common law when adjudicating sexual coercion cases involving adult women. “This highly conservative approach to the law,” writes Peter Bardaglio, “with its stress on strict adherence to precedent-bound rules and procedures, characterized the judicial style of most” southern jurists. The judges of the Kentucky appellate court did not view themselves as reformers and they did not comprehend criminal law as an instrument of social change, at least not in cases of felony rape involving adult women. An analysis of rape law adjudication in the Kentucky appellate court confirms Bardaglio’s conclusion that southern jurists showed an unwillingness “to adopt a more dynamic understanding of the law,” which became apparent when defendants asked judges to address issues of criminal law or procedure. Still, tendencies reveal themselves as reasonably consistent patterns not as immutable absolutes. The claim of formalistic legal reasoning applies only to the nineteenth-century Kentucky Court of Appeals and its rulings in appeals of convictions for the sexual coercion of adult females. The appeals court showed tendencies toward formalist legal reasoning when adjudicating appeals in sexual coercion cases in which petitioners asked the court to address issues of character evidence, insufficiency of evidence, and the compulsory process to get a defendant’s witnesses to court. When asked to decide on the admissibility of character evidence, the Kentucky appellate court expressly rejected the Americanized rule and perpetuated the common law standard. When appellants asked the court to reverse convictions on grounds that trial prosecutors presented insufficient evidence to warrant a guilty verdict, it demonstrated a reluctance to interfere with the fact-finding mission of the jury. The Kentucky appellate court upheld the common law rule granting defendants the right to get their witnesses to court even after
the general assembly removed the disqualification that barred defendants from testifying under oath on their own behalf. The Kentucky legislature placed statutory restrictions on the appellate court that limited its authority to errors of law, but the court also placed limits on itself through the deployment of formalistic legal reasoning. As a result, the court adopted an unchanging perception of criminal law and procedure in cases dealing with the sexual coercion of adult women.27

The author thanks Dr. Thomas Aiello, assistant professor of history and African American studies at Valdosta State University, for reading an earlier version of the article and extends her gratitude to the journal’s anonymous reviewers who offered useful and insightful comments.


2 Champ v. Commonwealth, 59 Ky. 17, 2 Met (1859), 18-22. See also, Lowry v. Commonwealth, 23 Ky. 1554, 63 S. W. 977 (1901), where the court held that the complainant, Cordelia Million, did not have to “detail the entire acts of” appellant Doc Lowry, “using the vulgar language necessary to show all the necessary elements of rape at common law.” Million stated that Lowry had ravished her and refused to go into the sordid details of how he did it. It would be, held the court, “vulgar folly to require such a person to define rape, or ravish, or to detail the minute acts done constituting the crime.” By “such a person,” the judge meant a woman of good character because such a woman would naturally shy away from discussing publicly the vulgarities of sexual intercourse.


5 Champ v. Commonwealth, 59 Ky. 17, 2 Met (1859), 25-27. “Chloroform in Rape Cases,” Central Law Journal 1 (Nov. 1874), 592. This unsigned article lamented that so many dentists were prosecuted for rape after they put their female patients to sleep using the anesthetic. The authors observed that the “case of respectable and creditable women accusing dentists and other surgeons of having attempted to violate their chastity while under the influence of chloroform, is one of frequent occurrence, and obliges such professional men to have a witness present during such operations, to insure their own reputation and safety.” See also Henry A. Riley, “A Crime Peculiar to a Physician,” The Medical Record, vol. 27, Jan. 10, 1885, pp. 34-35.

6 Champ v. Commonwealth, 59 Ky. 17, 2 Met (1859), 27-28. Alvin Duvall became an appellate judge in 1856, but when he stood for re-election in 1864, the federal government charged him with disloyalty because of his Confederate sympathies and struck his name from the ballot. Duvall fled to Canada to avoid arrest. He returned to Kentucky after the war and established a private law practice at Georgetown, but moved to Frankfort in 1866 upon his appointment as the reporter for the Court of Appeals. Determined to redeem their state, Democrats ran Duvall for the appellate court in 1866 when he won and served another stint. He retired when his second term expired and returned to private practice in Frankfort where he remained until his death in 1898 at the age of eighty-five. John C. Doolan, “The Court of Appeals of Kentucky,” pt. 2, The Green Bag 12 (Jan. 1900), 416-17.

7 Neace v. Commonwealth, 23 Ky.,125, 62 S. W. 733 (1901), 126.


11 Horowitz, Transformation of American Law, 16-30; Hubner, Southern Judicial Tradition, 15-23, 45-50; Bardaglio, Reconstructing the Household, 64-78.


24 Ibid., 329.


Interpreting the History of the Underground Railroad in Southwest Ohio:

*The John P. Parker House*

Daniel Vivian

In the decades before the Civil War, Ripley, Ohio, stood at the center of the growing conflict between slavery and freedom. Strategically located downriver from Maysville, Kentucky, Ripley became a destination for thousands of runaway slaves. A large and active antislavery society lent assistance to fugitives, and the intrepid leadership of militant abolitionist John C. Rankin supplied connections to operatives elsewhere. Between the 1820s and the Civil War, hundreds of runaways passed through Ripley. Residents of the town lived amid growing strife. Contemporaries referred to the Ohio River Valley as a “borderland”—a term that aptly characterized its role in the developing struggle. With the Ohio River demarcating the physical boundary between slaveholding territory and the free states of Ohio and Indiana, the valley became a primary site of conflict. As runaways streamed northward, communities along the river became deeply divided. Especially after passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, many experienced near-constant turmoil.1

The John P. Parker House at 330 Front Street in Ripley, Ohio. Once the residence of antislavery activist John P. Parker, it now interprets his life, activism, and the history of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio River Valley.

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR
Today, the tensions of the late antebellum era have long since passed, and few reminders of the Civil War era remain. Time, however, has done little to dull the region’s rich history. In recent years, the valley has assumed a leading role in public interpretation of slavery, antislavery, and their associated conflicts. In particular, the region arguably leads the nation in interpreting the history of the “Underground Railroad,” as the clandestine network of operatives, safe houses, and routes that shepherded runaway slaves to freedom in the decades before the Civil War is commonly known. A large and well-established network of historic sites and museums offers informative and compelling insights into fugitive slaves’ flight to freedom. Anchored by sites such as the John Rankin House in Ripley and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, the Parker House attracts visitors from across the nation. The John P. Parker House stands among the most recent additions to this burgeoning network of heritage sites. The residence of a former slave who purchased his freedom and became a successful entrepreneur, the Parker House commemorates the life of its namesake, a lesser-known hero of the antislavery crusade. Parker arrived in Ripley in 1845. A skilled iron molder, he found work in a local foundry. He also became involved in efforts to rescue runaway slaves. Parker quickly gained renown as a near-fearless rescuer of fugitives. Working in close connection with Rankin, Levi Coffin, and other operatives, Parker assisted large numbers of runaways.

A visit to the Parker House is a rewarding experience, rich in insights into Parker’s life, the antislavery struggle, and nineteenth-century Ripley. Interpretive exhibits supply copious information about Parker and his exploits. Docents provide further details about Parker’s path from slavery to freedom, his family, and his postbellum career. The house itself is a remarkable artifact. By demonstrating the material comfort in which Parker and his family lived, it stands as clear testimony to his success. Yet for all that the Parker House offers, its interpretive program is not without limitations. None detract seriously from the visitor experience, and most people will leave thoroughly satisfied. But persons familiar with recent scholarship will question some of the choices made and wonder about select points of emphasis. The Parker House delivers an informative portrait of Parker’s life and antislavery activism and succeeds in highlighting the importance of a long-overlooked figure. At the same time, it falls short on several counts. Ultimately, these prevent it from telling as incisive and compelling a story as it might.

The origins of the Parker House museum date to the early 1990s. With Parker all but forgotten and the house that he and his family once occupied in disrepair, it seemed certain that he would remain a marginal historical figure, known only to a few specialists in the field. That changed when Charles Nuckolls, an educational administrator, began studying him and retracing his steps in Ripley. Nuckolls identified the decaying building at 330 Front Street as Parker’s former residence—a previously unknown tidbit of local history. He immediately made
a bid to purchase it, but as word of its historical import spread the price rose skyward. Unable to meet the seller’s demands, Nuckolls began searching for collaborators. Nuckolls soon began working with Robert Newman, a Cincinnati attorney who knew of Parker through his own research. The pair quickly seized upon the idea of publishing Parker’s autobiography and using the proceeds to fund acquisition. In the 1880s, Parker told his life story to Frank Moody Gregg, a Ripley native and Chattanooga News reporter. The manuscript that Gregg prepared became part of an archival collection at Duke University’s Perkins Library. Although known to scholars, no one had attempted to make it available to broader audiences.²

Nuckolls and Newman’s efforts soon led to publication of His Promised Land, a volume composed of Gregg’s manuscript, a brief but insightful introduction, and a short afterward. Edited by Stuart Seeley Sprague, it gives Parker’s story its rightful place among ex-slave narratives and accounts by Underground Railroad operatives. When published in 1996, it also moved Nuckolls and Newman’s dream a step closer to reality. With royalties flowing to the newly organized John P. Parker Historical Society, arrangements for acquiring the house quickly took shape. The society purchased it in 1996 and immediately began restoring it to its nineteenth-century form. Between 1998 and 2003, 2.2 million dollars went toward stabilization and necessary repairs. Outside funding and support came from organizations such as the National Park Service, the Ohio Humanities Council, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Meanwhile, attention began to accrue. The United States Department of the Interior designated the Parker House a National Historic Landmark in 1997, and new histories of the Underground Railroad gave Parker and Ripley’s abolitionist enclave greater attention than ever before. Amid the upsurge of attention, the then partially restored structure became something of a cause célèbre.³

In the years since, the Parker House has hosted thousands of visitors and received broad attention. Parker has become well known to scholars. Histories written for popular consumption have introduced him to larger audiences. Other forms of recognition have brought further attention. The naming of an elementary school for Parker in Cincinnati, for example, has made him a source of inspiration for thousands of school-age children. These and other accomplishments constitute a remarkable record of success. As evidence of the power of history to inspire, to prompt inquiry, and to compel reevaluation of the familiar, they demonstrate enduring interest in the Underground Railroad and its role in the most divisive chapter of the nation’s past. By almost any measure, then, the Parker House ranks as a tremendous achievement. Perhaps more impressive still is the organization behind it. With a membership of around two dozen, the John P. Parker Historical Society can hardly be credited with having extensive resources.
Yet in transforming the Parker House, it has accomplished far more than many larger, better-funded organizations would have considered taking on. Even so, there remains considerable room for improvement. Interpretation is a case in point. Although the program presented at the Parker House is by no means inadequate, neither does it come close to realizing its full potential. By failing to seize upon opportunities provided by Parker's story and the historical drama of slavery, it meets basic expectations but leaves much of its promise unfulfilled.

A visit to the Parker House begins with entry through a door on the side of the building. Docents greet visitors in a small room lined with brochures for other area attractions and a collection of books and items available for purchase. In effect, visitors find themselves in what is simultaneously a greeting chamber and gift shop. Tours of the house begin in the parlor, where a docent delivers a brief presentation on Parker's life and major activities. Docents tailor the information presented to their audiences. Persons interested in hearing about Parker in depth are given longer, more detailed presentations than school groups and those who express less interest. I received an informative and engaging presentation. Based largely on Parker's autobiography, it chronicled his years as a slave, his path to freedom, and the conflicts stirred by slave runaways in the Ohio Valley.⁴
The parlor not only serves as a venue for docent presentations; it also contains artifacts and interpretive panels. Display cases set on each side of the fireplace contain items from Parker’s foundry. In 1865, Parker and a partner, William Hood, purchased a foundry and blacksmith shop. Parker continued to operate this enterprise until his death in 1900. As the source of most extant Parker-related artifacts, the foundry is well-represented throughout the house. In addition to the artifact-based displays, wall-mounted exhibit panels provide information about Parker’s business endeavors, his family, and his participation in industrial expositions. These make good use of historical images and are handsomely styled and well produced. They are also informative. In combination with the artifacts displayed, they do a good job of supplementing the docent-supplied presentation.

The remainder of the tour is self-directed. Visitors are invited to explore the house at their own pace, in a sequence of their choosing. Most will begin by moving to the large room located immediately behind the parlor. Here, a combination of large artifacts, visual art, and textual information is presented. The largest artifact is a skiff similar to the one Parker likely used in crossing the Ohio River. Set against an interior wall at a forty-five degree angle, it rests awkwardly in a location that neither evokes its use nor suggests the difficulty of piloting such a small craft across a major river. Better placement would increase its interpretive value. On the opposite side of the room, copies of newspaper clippings about Parker are presented in binders for visitors to peruse. These contain valuable information. How many readers will take the time to examine them carefully, however, is uncertain.
The most questionable items exhibited on the ground floor are paintings by artists from the Ohio Valley region. These depict scenes described in Parker’s autobiography and others associated with slave runaways. Although visually appealing and of high quality, their interpretive value is less certain. Conjectural imagery can play a useful role when historical images and artifacts are unavailable. Numerous sites make use of similar visuals to interpret events for which other possibilities are impractical or simply unavailable. In the case of the Parker House, the paintings displayed appear to take considerable license with the scenes and events they depict. A few show images of Parker’s foundry. Emphasizing labor and the scale of nineteenth-century iron production, they appear reasonably accurate. Most, however, depict scenes associated with fugitive slaves. These range from images of African Americans traveling in small boats to fugitives being attacked by dog-wielding slave catchers. Some are relatively straightforward, while others take imaginative liberties. Ultimately, their interpretive utility is questionable. Conventional text panels, like those displayed in the parlor, would deliver stronger content.

The second floor contains the most detailed interpretive displays. At the top of the main stair, a small bedroom is interpreted as a period room. On the day of my visit, a rope strung across the doorway prevented visitors from entering. Although text panels could be seen on select pieces of furniture, reading them from a distance proved impossible. Without a panel at the doorway to explain the interpretive purpose of the room and the provenance of artifacts and furnishings, visitors must draw their own conclusions. It is unclear, for example, if the curators intended the room to be the bedroom that Parker and his wife occupied or one of their children’s
rooms. The room is modestly furnished but includes several items that someone of Parker’s means likely did not own. A large and handsomely appointed clothes dresser, for example, not only appears to date from the end of his lifetime, but may well be a more costly piece than he would have owned. More than any other in the house, this room suggests the need for careful study of probate inventories and other relevant sources as a basis for determining appropriate use of artifacts.

A large room in the rear of the house contains an exhibit entitled “Freedom Forged by Fire: The Life and Legacy of John P. Parker.” This is the highlight of the tour. Handsomely produced and well illustrated, it delves deeply into Parker’s life and the major historical movements in which he played a role. The curators have organized the exhibit around four themes. “Bondage to Freedom” traces Parker’s life from his beginnings in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1827 through to his arrival in Ripley. “Resistance, Rebellion, Reform” engages questions about the social and political conflicts of the antebellum era. This panel is especially important, for it presents information central to understanding the antislavery struggle and the conflicts it stirred on the Ohio-Kentucky border. It is also the only place where the interpretive focus moves beyond Parker’s life to deal directly with the social and political landscape of his time. “Industry and Invention” considers Parker’s role as an industrialist, inventor, and entrepreneur. As one of a relatively small number of African Americans who received patents during the nineteenth century, Parker occupies an important place in the history of invention and industrial production. Although this is mentioned elsewhere, only here does the museum examine it in any detail. Finally, “The Parker Legacy” considers Parker’s role in the struggle for racial equality and how he is
An exhibit entitled “Freedom Forged by Fire: The Life and Legacy of John P. Parker” is the highlight of the tour, situating Parker’s activism in relation to the larger struggle for racial equality in nineteenth-century America.

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Artifacts and models of machines designed by Parker are housed in display cases.

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

remembered today. All of the exhibit panels enjoy handsome production values, with attractive graphics and effective use of historical quotations and images. The tour concludes where it began—in the room that serves as the entrance and gift shop. I moved through the house slowly, taking time to study artifacts and exhibits in detail. Most visitors will be able to complete the tour in about twenty-five minutes. Touring the Parker House and Ripley’s other major Underground Railroad attraction, the John Rankin House, can easily be accomplished in under two hours or less.

With its incisive portrayal of Parker’s life and activism, the Parker House makes important contributions to public understanding of antislavery and white southerners’ response to the northward flight of runaways. In focusing on a lesser-known hero of the antislavery cause, the Parker House brings important perspectives to bear on an especially contentious era in American history. Parker is an instructive figure. As a slave who gained his freedom and then committed himself to helping others, he presents an important contrast to persons usually seen as the rank-and-file of the antislavery vanguard. Although popular views of the Underground Railroad tend to regard white reformers as its primary agents, African Americans actually led in assisting fugitives. Throughout the antebellum era, African American communities supplied stalwart aid to runaways. Although figures such as Rankin and Coffin are revered in popular memory and given a disproportionate share of attention in a great deal of historical writing, African Americans in fact supplied the Underground Railroad with its motive force. Parker’s importance thus stems in part from the personal image he gives to what has traditionally been an anonymous movement. As a recognizable figure with a compelling story, he supplies the African American side of the equation with an identifiable persona.5

Parker’s life is instructive in other ways. His business activities, for example, illustrate the opportunities that existed for African Americans in at least some parts of the Ohio Valley before and after the Civil War. Although the valley proved more
It was hardly free of race prejudice. Race riots in Cincinnati in 1829 and 1841 made clear whites’ antipathy toward African Americans. Agitation over fugitive slaves left communities along the river deeply divided. As sectional tensions escalated, many whites blamed free blacks for the conflicts that beset their communities as strongly as slaveholders. After the war, tensions ebbed but did not fully die away. That Parker managed to thrive amid these circumstances suggests a tolerance of black achievement that warrants further investigation. Ripley may have been unusual in this case; its reputation as an abolitionist enclave suggests greater acceptance than existed elsewhere. Yet Parker’s social status remains inadequately understood, as is the degree to which Ripley differed from other Ohio Valley towns. These questions deserve mention. Even if answers prove elusive, posing them would have interpretive value.

Shortcomings with interpretation of Parker’s life and activism fall into two broad categories. One is organizational. Like many sites, the Parker House shows clear signs of having evolved incrementally, as opportunities allowed. Basic information is repeated in different rooms, and placement of exhibits and artifacts raises questions about overall strategy and intent. The second-floor exhibit would have greater impact if located on the ground level, for example. Its placement at the end of the tour is limiting. The textual materials shown in the large exhibit gallery downstairs pose similar problems. These contain valuable information, but they are buried in binders—an uninviting form of display. How many visitors will take the time to page through them? Relatively few, one suspects. Some visitors will pay little attention to these problems. For those seeking a cursory introduction to Parker and a glimpse of his house, they will likely go unnoticed. Others, however, will recognize them immediately. People with strong
interest in Parker and his activism will likely find them frustrating, for they dull the strength of interpretation and close off opportunities for engaging important topics. Ultimately, they undermine the coherence of the information presented.

The second category of difficulty stems from the general focus of interpretation and the sources used. Three tendencies stand out: strong reliance on Parker’s autobiography, failure to engage important historical questions, and a somewhat nostalgic view of the Underground Railroad. These problems are not unique to the Parker House. The latter two exist at many sites, while the first afflicts every site that focuses on the history of a single figure. Yet if fairly common, these problems remain lamentable. They detract from the quality of interpretation and limit its informational content.

Like any site of its kind, the Parker House tries to draw a balance between a personal story and larger histories. In the case of the Parker House, emphasis on Parker tends to overshadow his relationship to larger historical themes. His aid to fugitive slaves receives strong attention and his success as an inventor does also. Yet what he reveals about the struggle for black freedom needs clarification. Visitors learn that Parker worked vigorously at continual risk to his own life to help runaways reach safety. But what does he tell us about the Underground Railroad or how his activities affected the debate over slavery? The Parker House leaves these questions unaddressed. Indeed, they are not even posed. This highlights the single most debilitating aspect of the interpretive program. Because the focus of interpretation never steps away from Parker long enough to view him critically, his significance never comes into full view. Visitors learn about Parker’s antislavery activism but little about the Underground Railroad as a historical phenomenon. The same holds true for Parker’s entrepreneurship and his inventions. The exhibits treat these subjects in isolation, without sufficient context to understand the importance of Parker’s achievements.

The sole exception to this rule comes in the “Freedom Forged by Fire” exhibit. Here, visitors can see the beginnings of a more meaningful line of inquiry. An incisive discussion of race relations in antebellum Ohio casts light on difficulties that African Americans faced in the supposedly “free” North. The panel on Parker’s patents provides comparative information on black inventors, thereby allowing visitors to see Parker in relation to other men who, by virtue of their initiative and abilities, succeeded despite the era’s record of racial oppression. Information supplied in the exhibit takes important steps toward viewing Parker in a critical perspective. Yet coming where it does, it is too little and too late. Not only does it fail to shift the focus from Parker to the circumstances amid which he lived, but its location at the end of the tour mutes its impact. The result is a tantalizing glimpse of what a stronger interpretive program might yield.

Cumulatively, the consistently narrow focus results in a perspective that lacks critical edge and at times hints at glorification. Without sufficient context to see Parker as a historical figure—as someone who lived amid complexity and
ambiguity—Parker’s accomplishments assume a heroic guise. To be sure, Parker qualifies as a hero; anyone who aided hundreds of people fleeing the tyranny of slavery deserves the title. Yet Parker also lived in a world where the certitude of his convictions clashed with beliefs held by others—most members of society, in fact. The violence directed toward blacks in Cincinnati and elsewhere in the Ohio Valley left little doubt about the racial sentiments of northern whites. Parker’s heroism found its polar opposite in the actions of neighbors who, rather than lending assistance or simply turning a blind eye, opted for the pecuniary rewards earned by revealing fugitives’ location. Visitors cannot derive an adequate grasp of Parker’s importance without understanding his relationship to the major conflicts of his time. With this missing, the Parker House effectively celebrates Parker’s achievements without explaining what was at stake.

These shortcomings result in large part from the curators’ heavy reliance on Parker’s autobiography and concomitant failure to draw information from other sources. A rich and valuable source, Parker’s autobiography begs for extensive use, and the Parker House succeeds in exploiting it to good effect. The paucity of other perspectives is understandable. With few exceptions, historians have not yet written the social history of the Ohio Valley after the Civil War. Since the basic material for a more challenging interpretive program remains elusive, the Parker House has little choice but to fall back on the best resources available. Yet room for improvement certainly exists, and in the coming years targeted research might well make possible opportunities that currently lie out of reach. Probing the changing status of African Americans in Ripley and the surrounding area, for example, may provide insight into what the black community gained and lost as a result of the war and emancipation. If black freedom had obvious dividends, it also came with costs. Exploring the bittersweet returns of the struggle to end slavery might well yield insights into the shifting conditions of the postwar era. Another set of questions hinges on the memory of Ripley’s role as a center of Underground Railroad activity. In recent years, scholars such as David Blight have examined remembrance of aid to fugitives. Blight has shown that nostalgia, self-interest, and racist stereotypes played crucial roles in forging a white-centered memory of a predominantly African American movement in the 1890s and beyond. Investigating local varieties of remembrance might well yield insight into changing views of race and class relations in Ripley. It might also suggest why Parker slipped away into history while Rankin, his cohort, became revered. That Ripley’s best-known white activist won praise while his African American counterpart slowly faded into anonymity presents a striking historical question. Investigating national and regional patterns of remembrance may help explain why.

In a more immediate sense, simply taking advantage of recent scholarship would place Parker’s activism in context. Like most sites of its kind, the Parker House presents the Underground Railroad uncritically, as a straightforward set of transactions between runaway slaves and sympathetic activists. While not inaccurate, this
view misses valuable interpretive possibilities. Moreover, it increasingly stands at odds with the findings of recent research. Studies by Keith P. Griffler and J. Blaine Hudson have uncovered valuable information about the strife associated with fugitive slaves in the Ohio Valley and the political and social consequences of fugitives’ flight northward. Hudson’s research, based largely on newspaper advertisements for runaway slaves, has made available a large volume of information about runaways, the major routes they followed northward, and the sharp increase in their numbers during the 1850s. By charting the contours of fugitives’ activities throughout the region, Hudson brings localized variations into view and suggests important directions for future research. Griffler’s *Front Line of Freedom* represents the most comprehensive study of the railroad in the Ohio Valley to date. By illuminating the social context in which aid to fugitives took place and bringing the voices of activists, opponents, and observers into view, Griffler delivers an incisive portrait of racial strife in the era of rising sectional tensions. Above all, he shows the profound political consequences of assistance to runaways. Griffler convincingly argues that the significance of the Underground Railroad lies not only in helping runaways attain freedom, but in the strength it gave to African American communities in port cities along the Ohio. Through their activism, these communities challenged free states’ complicity in slavery. By revealing the role they played in the developing struggle, Griffler demonstrates the important consequences of aid to fugitives in realms beyond those previously recognized.9

For the Parker House, these studies offer a basis for placing Parker amid the complicated circumstances in which he lived. The danger in celebrating his activism without adequate grounding lies in the lessons that visitors might take away. Seen from a vantage point far removed in time, the Underground Railroad readily appears as the morally just precursor to emancipation and greater freedom for African Americans. Yet few people of Parker’s time saw it in these terms. As much as many northerners hated slavery, their commitment to racial equality proved less than resolute. Thus arose the paradox of a people who fought vigorously to destroy human bondage but quickly turned their backs on the full promise of emancipation. If men such as Parker had enjoyed broad support, subsequent struggles for racial equality would likely have proven less difficult, perhaps unnecessary. Parker’s story and the history of the Underground Railroad in general forces consideration of the social and racial hierarches that structured life in nineteenth-century America. These arose from deep anxieties about class and racial conflict. Rather than declining after Appomattox, they took on new life. Recognizing this does nothing to diminish Parker’s accomplishments, but it helps explain why the activities remembered today as the Underground Railroad did not have greater influence. Although crucially important, they never represented the views of more than the small minority who committed themselves earnestly to black equality.
The Parker House has a vital role to play in interpreting the history of the Underground Railroad and its legacy. Parker remains a fascinating figure. His story commands close attention and rewards careful study. His house, painstakingly restored to its nineteenth-century form, offers a valuable lens into another time. As an African American hero whose exploits equal those of many better-known figures, Parker symbolizes the main currents of opposition to slavery in the Ohio-Kentucky borderland. The criticisms offered here should not dissuade readers from visiting at the first available opportunity. Although room for improvement remains, the Parker House delivers an informative portrait of its namesake and the tumultuous times in which he lived. All who see it will better understand the Underground Railroad and its role in bringing the nation closer to a final showdown over slavery.

The John P. Parker House is located at 330 Front Street in Ripley, Ohio. Tours are available from ten a.m. to five p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and from one to five p.m. on Sundays from May through the first weekend in October. Admission is four dollars for adults and two dollars for students. Children under twelve are free. For more information, call (937) 392-4188 or visit the John P. Parker Museum and Historical Society website, http://johnparkerhouse.org/visitor-information (accessed Aug. 3, 2011).


4. This discussion is based on an anonymous visit that the author made on May 14, 2011. A virtual tour of the Parker House is available at http://johnparkerhouse.org/2009/05/03/images-from-the-parker-house-and-grounds/ (accessed July 7, 2011).


6. Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom*, 51-57, 61-64. For Parker’s view of Ripley, see Sprague, *His Promised Land*, 87-89. Parker’s racial background also suggests questions about social status. Parker was a mulatto, the son of a white slaveholder and female slave. There are no extant photographs of him, but his children appear to have been light complexioned. Parker’s family also had access to greater economic resources than most blacks (and many whites) by virtue of his business activities. These circumstances raise questions about race and class in postbellum Ripley. Did Parker and his family enjoy a social status superior to dark-skinned residents? How did their economic assets and educational attainment serve to differentiate them from other African Americans and working-class whites? These questions invite inquiry.

7. See Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom*, chap. 5, for descriptions of episodes of this kind.


Collections Essay

“The Engine is Working Away Like Mad”:
Documenting the Steamboat Era in The Filson’s Collection

The successful transit of the steamboat New Orleans down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers from Pittsburgh to New Orleans in the fall and early winter of 1811 signaled a new era in American history—the age of the steamboat. The changes that steam-propelled river craft brought to America’s interior waterways were as seismic as the tremors experienced by the New Orleans during the New Madrid earthquake. Virtually every part of society felt those changes in some way. The advent of steamboats on western waters impacted transportation, industry, business, communication, and culture. Ohio Valley residents quickly embraced and exploited its advantages and accepted and bore its dangers. The steamboat era was off and paddling and did not flag until the coming of the railroad and automobile combined to bring about its demise. As with other periods in American history, the collection of The Filson Historical Society helps document this significant and romantic era. The letters, diaries, business records, books, maps, photographs, prints, paintings, and artifacts in The Filson’s

The City of Jeffersonville, captained by Madison Dugan, at Jeffersonville, Indiana, c. 1900.
From the Madison Dugan Collection.
THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
collection provides a record of the steamboat era in the Ohio Valley, from the famous voyage of the *New Orleans* to the period’s sunset when the few remaining paddle wheelers were used for entertainment and leisure travel.

One can imagine the sensation and suspicion the strange-looking river craft *New Orleans* sparked as it made its way down the Ohio in the fall of 1811. Many if not most people doubted its ability to supplant the flatboats and keelboats used to navigate the interior rivers. But when its crew demonstrated that it could travel effectively upstream against the current as well as downstream, the steamboat won over most doubters, many of whom resided in Louisville. A river town at the Falls of the Ohio that owed its existence to the only major obstacle to navigation on the entire length of the river, the coming of the steamboat transformed Louisville into a major city with a thriving economy firmly linked to the river. Steamboats also spurred the growth of the other “Falls Cities” of Jeffersonville, New Albany, and Portland. Upstream, Cincinnati experienced a similar rise in population, industry, and prosperity due in part to the steamboat. Jonathan Clark took a ride on the *New Orleans* while it waited in Louisville for the river to rise and enable it to pass through the Falls. He likely thought his short trip a novelty, but he provided no indication that he realized the historic nature of his experience. His simple diary entry, “Sailed in the Steam Vessel New Orleans as far as the Diamond [Eighteen Mile] Island,” certainly leaves the reader wishing for more details.¹

Within a decade, Ohio Valley residents had fully embraced this “novelty.” By 1830 the number of steamboats plying western waters had increased at an almost exponential rate. Steam engines “working like mad” not only drove the boats up and down the rivers but also drove the development of the country. Better engines and boilers, improved designs for boats, and navigational improvements all facilitated the boom. In late 1830, the Louisville and Portland Canal opened. It represented a major accomplishment, allowing a more regular and reliable route around the Falls of the Ohio. Area boosters had proposed a canal to bypass the Falls in the early 1800s but its cost and regional rivalries...
prevented its completion for over twenty-five years. Government and private publications document the steamboat’s growth and consequent impact. In the year after the canal’s opening, 406 steamboats passed through it. By 1837, just six years later, the number had grown to 1,501 steamboats (with a number making multiple trips). In its 1838-1839 edition, the *Louisville Directory* listed 374 steamboats by name operating on western waters.²
Business and industry took advantage of the opportunities provided by the steamboat. Entrepreneurs established new companies or adapted existing ones to fill the needs created by the boats. Records of the Jefferson Foundry and Steam Engine Manufactory, Buckner and Hughes, Robert Buckner, Thomas Bohannon, and others highlight this aspect of the industry. Newspapers ran regular listings of boat schedules and news. Entire publications, including *Conclin's New River Guide*, *The Western Pilot*, and *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory and Disasters on the Western Waters*, documented steamboats and river travel. Some steamboats, such as the *Richmond*, even published their own onboard newspapers. Printers regularly accepted orders from the boats, producing broadside advertisements, menus, tickets, and more.

Artwork visually chronicled the first decades of the steamboat era. Ranging from works in oil and watercolor to pencil sketches and prints, boats were popular subjects for artists and the public. Some artists, such as Harlan Hubbard and Glen Tracy, focused their talents on this genre. The advent of photography enabled contemporaries to document more readily and accurately the many boats plying the river. The Filson has a large collection of steamboat photographs dating from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century. The Judge Arthur Hopkins Collection contains over one thousand photographs and includes glass plate negatives and lantern slides. The Filson even holds snippets of a home movie of the Louisville wharf and steamboats on the Ohio, circa 1930. Images of such renowned boats as the *City of Louisville*, *City of Cincinnati*, *J. M. White*, *Fleetwood* (in two of its numerous incarnations), *General Pike*, *Robert E. Lee*, and many others are preserved in the general collection. Music also became a popular medium to memorialize the steamboat era. Two of the most famous composers of their day, Stephen Foster and Will S. Hays, as well as many others, wrote songs about steamboats.
and river travel. In addition to the songs themselves, the covers of the sheet music serve as interesting and revealing illustrations for researchers. *Roustabout Songs: A Collection of Ohio River Valley Songs* documents the involvement and musical influence of African Americans in the steamboat era.

Letters serve as an excellent source to learn about the experience of steamboat travel. Jonathan Clark fails to enlighten readers of his diary about his 1811 ride on the *New Orleans*, but others traveling on boats often did. In a February 1819 letter to his uncle, written while traveling through the western country, Samuel Sevey Jr. of Maine reported from Louisville that the “trade of this town is supposed to be greater than that of any other in this Country as it is a port of entry and discharge for all the Steam Boats, many of which are owned here[.] [T]hese boats are increasing rapidly[;] no less than 10 have been on the stocks at one time in the vicinity of this place[,] some of 400 and some of 700 tons.” Sevey also detailed the disasters and tragedy associated with early steamboats, noting that “Old Captain Clough formerly our Towns man died on board the S. B. Buffaloe, which he commanded on his passage up the River.” Sevey wrote that Clough’s “usual bad fortune attended him through the voyage[,] the engineers child by accident fell overboard[,] the father followed but was not able to save it[,] [T]he mother soon died of grief and the father followed her.”

Title page, Mary Wheeler and William J. Reddick, *Roustabout Songs: A Collection of Ohio River Valley Songs* (New York: Remick, 1939). African Americans who worked on board boats and as roustabouts (loading and unloading cargo) also composed and served as inspiration for songs about river life. From the Sheet Music Collection, THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Many disasters marked the steamboat era, and letters in the collection describe a variety of them from the perspective of survivor and observer. Those whiling away the hours and sometimes days when boats ran aground also composed letters. In December 1838, W. B. Carroll wrote to his mother from the Campte (?) that he was “on flint l[and] hard and fast aground and no chance to get off until the river raises and lets me off. I have now been here one week and I cant say how much longer I will be compelled to stay. . . . I console myself by looking all around me and Seeing plenty of Boats in the Same fix as there is Some 6 or 8 of us here all together . . . all fast and hard aground.” Carroll might have been the captain or mate of the boat. Madison “Big Matt” Dugan commanded his vessel. Dugan came from a steamboating family and grew up on the river. He was the captain of the ferries City of Jeffersonville and Gen. George Rogers Clark that operated between Louisville and Jeffersonville. He kept a diary for thirty-one years, between 1886 and 1917. It provides an excellent record of the life of a riverman, one tragically ended when robbers murdered him onboard his boat.

A particularly delightful “aground” letter was written by Samuel Wigglesworth while stranded on the Elk in July 1839. Making a western tour from his home in Boston, Wigglesworth departed Louisville on July 15 and quickly encountered delays due to the low state of the river. Two days later the Elk was “fast stuck in the mud about a hundred miles below Louisville, and here we have been for the last five hours steaming and lighting all in vain.” The day, reported Wigglesworth, was hot enough to “roast a salamander” and
being “near no town or settlement, there is no attraction on shore and nothing to do on board, so in pure despair I sit down to write, though certainly the noise and bustle and the jarring of the boat in her efforts to get off are no great auxiliaries to my task—not to mention the three or four passengers who instigated by a laudable spirit of inquiry, are looking over my shoulder to see what in the world I can be writing.” Despite the onlookers, Wigglesworth provided an account of the delays, the crew’s efforts to get unstuck, and some of his fellow passengers, including the rather shocking sight of a “very respectable looking old lady, with cap and spectacles on reading a newspaper and smoking a cigar!” and a “nicely dressed little boy about six years old [who] came out of the Ladies cabin to the ‘bar’ and requested the barkeeper to make a ‘julip for mother.’” He concluded that westerners’ “manners differ a little from those of our country.”

The advent of the steamboat on western waters proved a transformative event in American history. Certainly, the steamboat played a significant role in shaping the development of the nineteenth-century Ohio Valley, giving rise to a particularly exciting as well as dangerous era. Researchers interested in all aspects of steamboat history can learn much through The Filson’s collections.

James J. Holmberg
Curator, The Filson Historical Society

1 Jonathan Clark Diary, Nov. 9, 1811, The Filson Historical Society (hereafter FHS). Clark, elder brother of his famous siblings George Rogers and William, kept a diary for over forty years. His generally brief entries mention the weather and where he spent the night. Only events of particular note, like riding the first steamboat on western waters, earned special remark. The location of most of the towns at the Falls of the Ohio positioned them for greater prosperity upon the 1830 completion of the Louisville and Portland Canal, but not Shippingport and Clarksville. Their location at the foot of the Falls made them important ports in the early days of settlement. However, the founding of New Albany and Portland a little farther downstream in more advantageous locations and the completion of the canal doomed the two towns. Clarksville found other ways to survive; Shippingport did not. It slowly declined and was destroyed by the 1937 flood.


3 Samuel Sevey Jr. to Joseph Smith, Feb. 2, 1819, Samuel Sevey Jr. Miscellaneous Papers, FHS. A note with the letter states that Sevey was a merchant from Wiscasset, Maine, who died of yellow fever on June 10, 1825, while on a trip to Mexico City.

4 W. B. Carroll to Jane Carrell, Dec. 9, 1838, W. B. Carroll Miscellaneous Papers, FHS. The 1838-1839 Louisville Directory, 20, lists a William B. Carrell as a steamboat captain living at Jane Carrell’s boarding house on the north side of Main Street near Third Street. In the letter he appears to sign his name Carroll but addresses the letter to Jane Carrell. Most likely, he spelled his name Carrell but either through hurry or carelessness wrote Carroll instead. An Edward Carrell and Dempsey Carrell, also steamboat captains living at the same address, are listed in the directory. No listing for the Campie or a boat with a similar name could be found. Flint Island is located approximately at mile 676 of the Ohio River, near Dexter, Indiana.

5 Samuel Wiggleworth to Thomas Wiggleworth, July 17, 1839, Samuel Wiggleworth Miscellaneous Papers, FHS. The Wiggleworths were a prominent Boston family. The Elk on which Samuel traveled from Louisville to St. Louis was the second craft to bear that name according to Louisville Directory, 120. Frederick Way, Way’s Packet Directory, 1848-1994: Passenger Steamboats of the Mississippi River System since the Advent of Photography in Mid-Continent America (1983; Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), 145, lists four Elks, the first built in 1844.
Diane Mutti Burke’s *On Slavery’s Border* appears at a time when the border slave states are finally getting their scholarly due. While southern historians have long contended that there are many Souths, only recently have they rigorously studied how distinctions between them have shaped southern historical institutions and events. Unlike plantation regions further south, Missouri was, from its inception through the Civil War, a state dominated politically and economically by slave owners, the vast majority of whom owned ten or fewer slaves. This produced a brand of the peculiar institution that differed greatly from the Deep South version. Burke reveals, for example, how Missouri’s small-scale, mixed agriculture led to the pervasive practice of slave renting. Because slaveholders often owned more slaves than they needed to meet their labor needs during much of the year, they commonly rented them out to non-owners. This practice ensured that slavery remained a flexible and profitable labor form despite its small scale, and meant that many more white Missourians experienced mastery than rates of slave ownership suggest. Beyond institutional differences, Burke succeeds in writing a compelling study in the way human relationships functioned within border South slavery. Previous historians, she argues, “simply have not opened the doors of small slaveholders’ homes and examined the relationships and the lives of the individuals found within: How owners and slaves lived and worked with one another each day; how the circumstances of small-scale slavery affected their family lives; and how they socialized with their neighbors” (4). In her consideration of these associations, Burke fittingly focuses on the slaveholding household as a unit of study, examining the relationship between husbands and wives, adults and children, masters and slaves. As such, *On Slavery’s Border* is not only a thoroughly revealing study of slavery in Missouri but also a fascinating social history of the state in the antebellum era. The intimacy suggested by the questions Burke asks speaks directly to the physical nearness of masters and slaves. As
she asserts, “working and living so closely together fostered personal interactions between owners and slaves and allowed them the extraordinary power to influence one another’s lives. It was in these homes and fields that black and white Missourians stridently contested the terms of their relations and labor and ultimately determined their experience of life on slavery’s border” (141).

For slaves, the intimate nature of small slaveholding had mixed consequences. Although proximity to their slaves sometimes led white owners to treat them better physically and materially, it also enabled them to scrutinize slave labor more closely and interfere in their slaves’ personal matters. It also increased the chances that male owners might coerce slave women into sexual relationships. By the same token, close living arrangements sometimes made it possible for white women to pursue sexual relationships with enslaved men. Small slaveholding also compelled whites and African Americans to cross other intimate boundaries. Burke cites three fascinating cases in which white slaveholding women briefly nursed the babies of their slaves. Though it violated convention, she argues that in small slaveholdings with few lactating women, a practice that would have been unlikely, even unfathomable, within larger slaveholding households became a measure of economic efficacy. Small slaveholdings and the practice of renting also affected marriage and family patterns among border slaves. Based on her evidence, Burke estimates that 57 percent of Missouri’s slave marriages existed between husbands and wives who lived on different plantations, forming abroad unions at rates almost twice as high as those historians have found in other parts of the South. Burke also argues that Missouri’s small slaveholdings made the impact of slave resistance greater. Owners often submitted to their slaves’ demands to keep their small farms functioning, while the practice of hiring out could also undermine slaveholders’ authority by diffusing it among multiple masters. Importantly, Burke asserts: “although Missouri slavery was small in scale, slaves’ resentment of their exploitation, and often their owners, was as intense as anyplace” (145).

One of the most impressive aspects of On Slavery’s Border is Burke’s exhaustive research and resourceful use of historical sources. She has scoured scores of diaries, letters, and farm journals authored by white Missourians, and makes careful and effective use of WPA narratives and Civil War pension claims of formerly enslaved soldiers and their dependents to gain insight into black families and community life. With its focus on the small and intimate, On Slavery’s Border bears large historiographical implications for slavery and border state studies. Besides casting light on an understudied subject, Burke’s work reminds us that beyond numbers and practices, slavery was always about interactions between humans. This book stands as an example for historians of the rich rewards found in histories that are broad and comprehensive, but attuned to individual experiences and relationships.

Anne Marshall
Mississippi State University
Border War: Fighting Over Slavery before the Civil War
Stanley Harrold

This well researched, carefully argued study shows how fighting over slavery along the sectional border helped bring about the Civil War. It represents an important contribution to antebellum U.S. historiography and is of special interest to students of the Ohio Valley. Beginning in the 1780s with battles over re-enslavement in Pennsylvania, the conflict over slavery helped to define the sectional border that ran from the Pennsylvania-Maryland border to the Ohio River and (after 1820) Missouri’s northern boundary. Initially, Lower North states tried to discourage slave escapes by restricting free black citizenship rights, as Ohio did in 1804. Over time, however, resistance to slave catchers turned public opinion and local law officials against accommodation with slaveholders. Southern whites’ fear of antislavery militancy spawned slave patrols, militias charged with preventing slave escapes, and other Border South policing systems. Conversely, proslavery incursions across the border stoked northern fears that slaveholders threatened civil liberties, personal safety, and free labor itself.

Southern outreach to northern legislatures produced few victories. The exception, Ohio’s Fugitive Slave Law of 1839, which resembled the later national law of the same name, met bipartisan opposition and was repealed in 1842. That year the Supreme Court banned state interference with earlier federal statues dealing with escaped slaves. The collapse of interstate diplomacy spurred Border South U.S. senators to push for a tougher federal fugitive law as part of the Compromise of 1850. Like the Ohio measure, the national Fugitive Slave Law exacerbated armed opposition to slave catchers. In this context, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which created slave territory on Missouri’s western border, looks more like an effort to shore up slavery in the Border South than an offensive to spread it. In the late 1850s antislavery forces increased their attacks on the Border South, most prominently in Kansas but also in northern Virginia and Kentucky. Out of these campaigns emerged John Brown’s 1859 antislavery raid on Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. Secessionists argued that separation would stop future raids whereas Border South unionists reassessed their argument for a strong federal union committed to policing the border. Although much of the Border South remained in the union, the struggle was closely contested and Border South unionists’ hopes that the institution could survive the war were mistaken.
Border War has much to recommend it. The book moves forward Harrold’s earlier pioneering research on aggressive abolitionists that belied stereotypes that depicted them as nonviolent pacifists. Here, he delineates the vast geographic and chronological scope of armed conflict over slavery. In place of earlier scholarship that treated the rhetoric of pro- and antislavery violence as evidence of irrational fears or ideological exaggeration, he shows this rhetoric reacted to actual aggression. He also theorizes the border as a region of conflict in contrast to other historians’ claims for its conservative, pro-Union moderation. Finally, Harrold makes an original contribution to the dense historiography on the causes of the Civil War. He argues that “the fear in the Lower South of losing the Border South was a major cause of the Civil War.” In contrast to William Freehling and others who have looked at the South’s intrasectional tensions, Harrold “emphasizes a violent and often external threat to [the Border South’s] viable slave system” (13).

These achievements would have been greater if the book addressed some curious omissions. Harrold says little about Illinois’s Abraham Lincoln, a son of the border. If Republicans gave political expression to Lower North antislavery activism, what was the significance of Lincoln’s 1861 inaugural pledge to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law strictly and protect slavery in states where it already existed? Also missing is any discussion of other types of border-state violence. In the 1850s, the border’s highest death toll from civil disorder occurred not in a fight over slavery but during Louisville’s “Bloody Monday,” an August 1855 election riot between supporters of the nativist American Party and the pro-immigrant Democratic Party at which twenty-two people died. A year later, seventeen were killed at election melees in Baltimore, and similar riots produced smaller body counts in Cincinnati and St. Louis. If “physical clashes” and “expectations they would spread” (15) made the border war significant, how should historians interpret higher levels of violence in partisan conflict over immigration, and how did urban political tumult relate to fighting over slavery?

Finally, the book is well grounded in the historiography of abolition, but it ignores recent work by Steven Hahn, John Craig Hammond, Matthew Mason, and others that highlights slave resistance and the early origins of conflict over the status of slavery in western border states. Also absent are studies of proslavery nationalism that portray secession as a forward-looking bid to make an empire for slavery rather than a defense of the Border South. These criticisms aside, Border War is an excellent book that makes a lasting contribution to history of slavery, the North-South border, and the causes of the Civil War.

Frank Towers
University of Calgary

Blood Shed in this War
Michael A. Peake

Adolph Metzner came to the United States in 1856 after having studied pharmacy at the University of Freiburg and established himself as a druggist in Louisville, Kentucky. In August 1861, he came to Indianapolis to help organize the 32nd Indiana, also known as the First German regiment of Indiana, a crack infantry unit drawn largely from Turnverein members in the state and neighboring Louisville and Cincinnati. The regiment received its baptism of fire at Rowlett’s
Station, Kentucky, in December 1861, and saw action at Shiloh, Corinth, Stone’s River, Chickamauga, and Chattanooga, where the 32nd was one of the first two regiments to reach the top of Missionary Ridge. It persevered through most of the Atlanta Campaign until its three-year term expired in August 1864. Much of the time, the German Forty-Eighter August Willich served as regimental or brigade commander.

Metzner advanced in rank from second lieutenant to captain before being assigned as a topographical engineer in early 1863. What if any artistic training he had is unknown, but he was a talented and inveterate, one might almost say compulsive, sketcher, utilizing any material he could lay his hands on. His 105 surviving works reflect an output of one every ten days or so during his three years of service. Nearly one hundred pages, the heart of Michael Peake’s Blood Shed in this War, are devoted to Metzner’s war sketches in various mediums, ranging from pencil, pen and ink, watercolor, to one memorable oil work executed after the war from sketches made in the field. Only a handful of these works have ever been published before. This volume handsomely reproduces the artwork in full color in a generous nine by twelve inch format. Peake labels each image with respect to medium, original dimensions, and date if discernable, and provides captions often stemming from the artist himself, sometimes in German, other times in English.

Metzner’s sketches present a slice of military life, ranging from the boredom and horseplay of camp life to the heat of battle and the sometimes grotesque corpses left in its wake. Common soldiers certainly get their due, but Metzner also produced candid portrayals of generals Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, Alexander McCook, Col. Frederick Hecker, and multiple images of August Willich. Almost as an aside, Metzner’s drawings include much social and urban history beyond military life, from southern backwoods and plantation life to town and city views from an era before outdoor photography became widespread. Among the images Peake includes are an idyllic scene of St. John’s Episcopal Church established by future general Leonidas Polk (127), and two prominent buildings at Corinth, Mississippi, the Tishomingo Hotel (23) and Corona Women’s College (122), both appropriated for military purposes and neither of which survived the war. Most images, however, involve soldiering, though not always the most conventional aspects. Metzner, for example, sketched three soldiers clad in barrels with feathers in their hair being drummed out for chicken thievery (73). He also sketched some cavalrymen who considered the birth of a slave, overseen by a pipe-smoking Mississippi midwife using a birthing stool, a spectator sport (85).

Peake provides a brief biographical sketch of Metzner and a thirty-page account of the organization of the 32nd Indiana and its role during the war, though with little reference to Metzner or his art and without cartographic aids. The book leaves only a couple of things to be desired. First, it lacks a systematic listing of Metzner’s art works. More seriously, the
author appears blind to any evidence of ethnic prejudices in the portraits. No less than seven images depict in whole or part Jacob Lawinsky, a presumably Jewish orderly designated (apparently by Metzner) as “The Camp Comedian.” In most of the sketches, however, Lawinsky appears to be the target rather than the source of humor, and his portrayal, though bearing some resemblance to a surviving photograph, could easily substitute for a Shylock caricature. Metzner’s half-dozen representations of African Americans are equally stereotypical, with no trace of emancipationist idealism (and no index entry to enable readers to locate them easily). In fairness, even Metzner’s images of superior officers often show elements of satire. If not quite the Civil War equivalent of Bill Mauldin’s “Willie and Joe,” Metzner’s Yankee Dutchmen appear equally sardonic and irreverent toward authority, and show the same stoicism in the face of mud and snow.

Walter D. Kamphoefner
Texas A&M University

The Good Men Who Won the War:
Army of the Cumberland Veterans and Emancipation Memory
Robert Hunt

Robert Hunt’s The Good Men Who Won the War combines two maturing Civil War fields of scholarship, memory studies and soldier studies, to address how veterans of one Union army remembered emancipation. Comprised mainly of soldiers from the middle West and border South—Buckeyes, Hoosiers, Illinoisans, and Kentucky Unionists—the Army of the Cumberland saw action primarily in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia. These western soldiers, many of whom hailed from regions suspected of disloyalty, witnessed and became agents of emancipation in the trans-Appalachian South. Drawing primarily on published sources by former soldiers such as Joseph Warren Keifer, Wilbur Fisk Hinman, and Albion Tourgee, Hunt recovers the voice of a Union army that had neither the headlines of the Army of the Potomac nor the victories and leaders of the Army of the Tennessee.

Hunt focuses on regimental histories and memoirs published in 1880 or later, seeking to complicate current scholarship that dates the emergence of sectional reconciliation and the decline of white soldiers’ commitment to emancipation memory to the 1880s. He argues that emancipation remained central to the Army of the Cumberland’s remembered war. Casting

a critical eye on the work of historians such as Stuart McConnell and David W. Blight, Hunt maintains that his western soldiers did not suffer amnesia with regard to slavery and African Americans but instead linked emancipation to Union victory and the salvation of the nation. Many veterans believed that total war and emancipation were part of a national destiny centered on progress. White soldiers also absorbed the liberation theme because it “restored decency and selflessness” to a conflict that became destructive beyond their wildest expectations (74).

Although Hunt’s subjects never viewed blacks as social equals, the exigencies of war converted most “Cumberlanders” into “practical abolitionists” who grew to see black emancipation and the quashing of the plantation system as necessary for military victory and the maintenance of the Union. Following historians James M. McPherson and Chandra Manning, Hunt views white Union soldiers as pragmatic agents of change. In the process, they “turned emancipation into part of the comprehensive picture of American war making” (5), even if most veterans evaded the issues raised by the failure of Reconstruction after the war, and did not see the remaking of southern society as vital to their narrative of victory. Hunt insists that the “real war” (or at least their real war) did get into the books. The narratives produced by Army of the Cumberland veterans did not indulge in “literary escapism” (2), but instead constructed an argument about what constituted the ideal citizen-soldier and how the war had reshaped the country. Cumberlanders, Hunt insists, saw themselves as protectors of the nation-state and their army as a genuinely revolutionary vehicle. In a bold contention, he claims that Cumberlanders understood emancipation and total war as an indispensable first step in turning the United States into a global power.

Hunt’s assertion that the Cumberlanders produced a literature of victory and triumph rather than defeat and disenchantment challenges the work of Gerald F. Linderman and others who have focused on the disillusionment and false sentimentality of soldiers’ postwar writing. Yet Hunt offers no means to understand men like Ambrose Bierce. Were disillusioned veterans like Bierce simply outliers? One wonders, too, about the representativeness of Hunt’s sources. Most postwar published authors tended to be ideologically driven and more likely than the average soldier to celebrate and justify their cause and the means used to achieve it. Similarly, debates centered on abstract concepts such as “total war” and “total victory” sometimes obfuscate more than they clarify. Hunt’s conclusion that the Cumberlanders’ national vision—America as a benevolent and highly organized military power—became the template for the country’s twentieth century conflicts is particularly bold. The ideological connections he draws between Cumberland veterans, Frank Capra propaganda films, and Colin Powell are intriguing, if speculative. Moreover, a collective vision of national development centered on mass mobilization, a military-industrial complex, and a millennial sense of national destiny must have transcended Cumberland veterans.

But these are minor objections. Hunt’s conclusions are, for the most part, soundly argued and aptly supported. He has command of his sources and uses them judiciously. The Good Men Who Won the War pushes the memory and reunion school of Civil War historiography in a much-needed direction. Scholars who lament that memory studies have neglected the more complicated regions of the Border South and Lower North have reason to approve.

Matthew E. Stanley
University of Cincinnati
Many years ago, my wife caught her father, a Presbyterian minister, repeating a sermon he had delivered years earlier to the same congregation. Not missing a beat, he responded, “a good sermon is timeless.” Much the same could be said of the essays that comprise *Always a River: The Ohio River and the American Experience*. Originally published in 1991 as a companion for the Always a River Barge project mounted by the Humanities Councils of the states that border the Ohio River—Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois—it has been reissued by Indiana University Press in conjunction with the bicentennial commemoration of the voyage of the steamboat *New Orleans* on the Ohio and Mississippi during 1811-1812. Meticulously edited by Robert L. Reid, provost and professor of history emeritus at the University of Southern Indiana, the essays represent the insights of seven leading scholars from the fields of history, geography, English, and political science. Like most other works of this nature, the essays represent a broad range of approaches, reflecting the diverse interests of the authors. Several contributors have since produced additional works on the Ohio River, but these essays remain as fresh and relevant as when they first appeared in 1991.

The volume’s greatest strength lies in the essayists’ depictions of the Ohio River’s multidimensional character. English professor Scott Russell Sanders synthesizes historic descriptions of literary observers and artists and his own love of the river’s landscape to explain the river’s power to create “a sense of direction within the seeming randomness of the world” (28). Geographer John A. Jakle, a student of Ohio River imagery, compares and contrasts the travel accounts of eighteenth-century Englishman Nicholas Cresswell and late nineteenth-century historian Reuben Thwaites to chart the ebb and flow of development along the river. Another geographer, Hubert G. H. Wilhelm, provides a fascinating account of the Ohio Valley’s function as a cultural boundary between settlement and land use patterns north and south of the river. Historian Michael Allen underscores the Ohio’s history as a working river by examining both changing transportation patterns and the often-mythic personalities who operated the flatboats, keelboats, steamboats, and towboats that carried—and still carry—cargo on
the river. Urban historian Darrel E. Bigham cogently analyzes the Ohio’s role in generating economic development in cities and towns from Pittsburgh to Cairo. Leland R. Johnson, who knows more about the Ohio’s navigational and engineering history than any other living historian, deftly summarizes the ongoing efforts of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to maintain and improve the river as a working waterway. Finally, political scientist Boyd Keenan places the Ohio in its larger geopolitical context through a discussion of multi-state programs and studies to address a host of ecological and environmental issues that have affected the Ohio River basin since the 1930s.

Although the essays are republished without revision, the editor’s introduction to the second edition succinctly summarizes developments since 1991, including the creation of scenic byways, the construction of new bridges, the advent of riverboat gambling and demise of the riverboat passenger business, and the proliferation of riverfront stadiums, entertainment complexes, floodwall murals, and other projects that reflect the river’s continuing significance in a changing world. The second edition also benefits from the addition of a bibliography of major Ohio River scholarship.

Carl E. Kramer
Indiana University Southeast and Kramer Associates Inc.

New Philadelphia: An Archaeology of Race in the Heartland
Paul A. Shackel

The history of New Philadelphia, Illinois, a Midwestern, multiracial, frontier community founded, platted, and registered by an African American in 1836, reminds this reader of historian C. Vann Woodward’s provocative thesis—namely, that the timing, origins, and trajectory of segregation were never preordained nor fixed. Paul Shackel, who ignores Woodward’s work, draws a similar, if less elegant, conclusion. Shackel is professor and chair of anthropology at the University of Maryland as well as the director of the Center for Heritage Resource Studies. In this study, he uses the New Philadelphia archaeology project as a lesson for how (or not) to work with “local and descendant communities,” to show how a historic site can motivate civic engagement, and to draw attention to the ways in which “interpretations of the archaeological record are created” (xvii). Shackel’s overarching goal is to make this town’s history part of the “American story and national public memory.”
His laudable and lofty objective made a significant step forward in 2009 when the secretary of the interior placed the site on the National Register of Historic Places.

The first two chapters provide readers with a history of the settlement—how it came to be, the town’s growth, and its eventual demise. His heroic tale centers on former Kentucky slave Free Frank McWorter, who purchased his freedom (as well as that of several family members) to become the first African American to plat and register a town in America. Chapters three and four shift gears to give readers a rather chatty account of how Shackel and his team were drawn into the project, their difficulty in securing funding (along with an oddly placed critique of the Bush administration’s support for the National Endowment of the Humanities), and how they invited the descendants of McWorter to participate in the project. Chapter five again changes focus to describe the first field session, their survey and mapping, and gives readers their first real glimpse into the archaeology of New Philadelphia. The next chapter begins with an elementary discussion of the social construction of race. Much of the next three chapters explore Shackel’s stated objective, that of recounting the pitfalls and benefits of involving the local community (and the descendants of the first settlers) in the project.

Shackel’s goal of complete transparency is sometimes tedious in its detail but offers an important lesson for scholars whose projects invite civic participation—namely, that family lore, public memory, community participation, political support, and scholarly objectives may not (and usually do not) align. Shackel successfully illustrates the difficulty of constructing an internally consistent interpretation or establishing a coherent message for a historically significant place when different stakeholders “remember” and thus reconstruct “their” history. Chapters nine and ten return to the archaeology of the community before proffering a case for the site to be included on the National Register of Historic Places. The final chapter wrestles with how best to present New Philadelphia to the public. Should buildings be recreated, for example, and if so which ones and from which time period? Interpreting the landscape is usually a difficult task, but it is made especially difficult in New Philadelphia because “there is no physical or architectural evidence of what exactly existed above the ground in the town” (173).

New Philadelphia reflects the complexities of dealing with different communities and their respective agendas, politics, memories, and interests. But the movement within and between chapters, from the history and archaeology to banal discussions of race, feuds, politics, and name dropping makes it difficult to identify the book’s intended audiences. Are they undergraduate anthropology students, fellow travelers in public history, or a lay public? Perhaps all can discover something new between this flawed if still informative book’s covers.

Peggy G. Hargis
Georgia Southern University
As the title suggests, *An American Hometown* is a social history of 1927 Terre Haute, Indiana. Roznowski’s longing for the past is obvious. He yearns for the simpler, more resourceful and environmentally friendly days in which families bonded together through a sense of community and pride in their hometown. However, his rose-colored vision of the past and lack of source citations will make it difficult for readers to separate fact from fiction as he draws heavily from the murky waters of memory and speculation.

Roznowski organizes the book in a directory-style format, with individual entries of people and places in alphabetical order. Entries vary in length from one line to three pages. Roznowski focuses on the everyday people who lived in Terre Haute, from grocers and barbers, to vaudeville performers, mediums, and baseball players. As such, the book is full of useful quick references, but it lacks a cohesive narrative of the town in 1927. It offers a sense of the characters who made up the town but fails to examine the richness of how Terre Haitians interacted with each other and their environment on a day-to-day basis in the years before the Great Depression. In addition, many of the entries merely include the name of the person along with where they lived or worked, telling the reader little more than they could find in a city directory.

Roznowski’s decisions about who to include in the book appear arbitrary, based as much on “mellifluous monikers”—such as Leefronia Laffoon—as on any other standard. Surprisingly, the Hulman family does not receive its own entry, nor does the Clabber Girl Baking Powder Factory operated by Hulman and Company. Neither does the mayor, Ora D. Davis, a Republican in a town with a long history of supporting Democrats. In several entries, Roznowski hints at the town’s Red Light District. However, the notorious Madam Edith Brown remains starkly absent from the text despite Terre Haute’s national reputation as “sin city.”

Despite these shortcomings, Roznowski deserves praise for his discussion of the Jewish and Syrian communities, as well as “Baghdad,” the African American neighborhood. To his credit, Roznowski does not sugar coat race relations, dealing with segregation, mob violence, lynching, and the Ku Klux Klan. The
book devotes sections to the city’s labor history, including references to Eugene V. Debs. Roznowski even provides an account of the 1935 General Strike that shut down much of the city. In demonstrating Terre Haute’s commitment to social service, Roznowski pays homage to the Friendly Inn that gave many people a helping hand as well as the County Poor Farm. He might have enhanced this theme by including some discussion of the Terre Haute chapter of the Florence Crittenton Home, which provided assistance for single mothers. Terre Haute had the only Crittenton Home in the state, which linked the city to the national Progressive reform effort.

An American Hometown raises a central question: Why study Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1927? Why this town, in this year? Roznowski claims that after 1927, Terre Haute lost its sense of community and self-sufficiency. In the introduction he blames the dwindling of the railroad and the nation’s decreasing dependence on coal for the steady decline of the city. There is certainly truth in these claims. However, other national forces—most notably Prohibition—contributed to Terre Haute’s decline before 1927. Prohibition hit Terre Haute and its thriving brewing trade particularly hard, and it also reverberated through the city’s glass bottling industry. Farmers around Terre Haute also felt the impact of agricultural problems in the early 1920s. In short, sectors of the city’s economy suffered before the onset of the Great Depression and the decline of the coal and railroad industries. Roznowski blames the loss of Terre Haute’s manufacturing on corporate leaders’ desire to find non-union labor in other areas of the country. That certainly occurred but it provides only a partial explanation. The deindustrialization of manufacturing cities across the U.S. also contributed to Terre Haute’s economic woes.

An American City helps illustrate the nature of local life in Terre Haute in 1927, but it leaves many questions unanswered. What do we gain from looking at Terre Haute? Was this city’s experience in 1927 representative of other cities in the Midwest, or was it the exception? Establishing the national context and looking at the big picture might have helped Roznowski answer these questions. Though historians will find little here of note (perhaps beyond inspiration), Roznowski’s offbeat approach provides a good trip down memory lane for Terre Haute residents.

Laura E. C. Bergstrom
Ivy Tech Community College-Sellersburg

An Appalachian New Deal: West Virginia in the Great Depression
Jerry Bruce Thomas

Jerry Thomas is an old-fashioned historian, and we should be grateful for that. While many historians have been doing localized community studies and parsing obscure popular culture, much of Appalachian and West Virginian history goes unwritten. During his career, Thomas has simply and quietly explained the major changes in the politics and economy of the state of West Virginia during critical eras. Thomas’s An Appalachian New Deal, first released in 1998, has become such a foundational study that when it went out of print West Virginia University Press acquired the rights and has now reprinted it substantially unchanged. The book outlines the political and economic
history of the Mountain State from the late 1920s through the election of 1940, a critical period in West Virginia history for a few reasons. First, these years witnessed the fall of the old Republican guard and the rise of a new Democratic statehouse machine that would dominate West Virginia politics for decades to come. Second, the New Deal revolutionized the state’s bureaucracies, although that revolution remained far from complete. Third, the state’s economy went through dramatic changes as miners unionized, mines mechanized, and family farms began to disappear.

Thomas’s narrative revolves primarily around state politics and relief efforts. Local politics distorted and even obstructed orders sent down from the federal officials to West Virginia. The fiscal conservatism of state legislators and governors prevented many New Deal programs from following the designs of their creators in Washington, let alone achieving the desired results. State politicians opposed any increases in taxes, feared the effects of welfare, and resented the attempts of the federal government to expand its influence at a local level, even when that meant providing relief to desperate people.

The book also documents the failure of the New Deal to provide adequate relief to West Virginians in need. Thomas’s view of the New Deal directly challenges Paul Salstrom’s interpretation, outlined in *Appalachia’s Path to Dependency* (1994), which holds that the New Deal undermined the health of Appalachia’s mining economy and drew many of its self-sufficient farmers into a cash economy and welfare dependency. Thomas argues instead that the state’s petty politics and the New Deal’s half-measures ensured that relief efforts did not go far enough to alleviate the misery of the unemployed and underemployed in mining camps and on hardscrabble farms. Nevertheless, he credits the New Deal with unionizing miners and creating a more modern and humane system for alleviating the suffering of the poor.

As critics charged when the book was originally published, *An Appalachian New Deal* sometimes gets bogged down in its account of petty politics, but it also builds a critical foundation for understanding the larger political struggles of the state’s history. Furthermore, the study is based on exhaustive original research in collections at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, the National Archives, and the West Virginia and Regional History Archive. Students and scholars interested in the history of welfare policies, the Great Depression, Appalachia, and West Virginia will find this reissued edition of *An Appalachian New Deal* invaluable.

Lou Martin
Chatham University
Ron Pen, a professor of music at the University of Kentucky, does an admirable job reconstructing the life story and music of author, folk-song collector, composer, and performer John Jacob Niles. Niles, born in Louisville in 1892, was a well-known musician and author in his time, but he is little known today outside of folklore and academic circles. Gaining his musical knowledge through the church, popular performance, and instruction at the University of Lyon and Cincinnati School of Music, Niles developed a keen ear for composition, an eerie high falsetto singing voice, and an eclectic and dramatic performance style. He also developed at an early age a love of collecting the folk stories and songs of his native state, Kentucky, and further afield.

Pen deals forthrightly with one of the issues that has plagued Niles’s legacy: his low reputation among folklorists because of his appropriation of folksong and the questionable authenticity of his transcriptions (107-9). Pen’s discerning musician’s ear rightly questions the authenticity of many of Niles’s early transcriptions of folk song, and he likewise documents that Niles’s attribution of songs to folk informants sometimes disappeared in subsequent publications in favor of credit to Niles himself. Niles was, as Pen argues, caught between being a working musician earning money from music copyrights—which he was not shy about defending through litigation—and at the same time marketing himself as a folk singer and collector, emphasizing the authenticity of his material and his background as a Kentuckian.

Pen further asserts—and this reviewer shares his view—that Niles is nonetheless important as a mediator between the folk tradition, popular song, and art music. Despite his flair for public relations hyperbole, Niles clearly saw himself as an interpreter and an artist in his own right. Pen argues that Niles’s early experience with popular song and vaudeville in his native Kentucky influenced his “middle-brow” approach to recasting folk music in a popular vein. Later, his classical training allowed him to reshape his material for more sophisticated audiences. Pen places Niles’s work in the context of the early twentieth century tradition of art song based on
folk sources, such as the recasting of spirituals by composers such as Harry Burleigh. Interestingly, Niles himself explored black folk song early in his career in collaboration with singer Marion Kerby and in printed collections, although this material largely disappears in his later work.

Pen paints an instructive picture of Niles’s participation near the end of his life in the first Newport Folk Festival. Included as an “original” of the folk movement, his performance style and long narrative introductions to songs certainly must have seemed out of place among most of the new folk artists. Yet like Bob Dylan—who is blurbed on the dust jacket—Niles presaged the 1960s folk singer’s process of recasting and personalizing traditional song to the needs of the audience and the times. Pen also explores but does not fully explain Niles’s curious relationships with women. Several played a major role in his life, most notably the photographer Doris Ulmann. Ulmann became an artistic partner as well as a patron of Niles, funding his collecting and leaving him a sizeable annual income in her will, much to her family’s chagrin. A first wife whom he married just before he left for World War I is nearly absent from Niles’s records and writings, and Pen amplifies documents Niles’s stormy relationship with musical partner Marion Kerby. There is something more here, but what exactly readers are left to wonder.

Pen has written a fine and detailed account of a collector and composer who brought classic songs such as “Black Is the Color,” “I Wonder as I Wander,” and “Go ‘Way from My Window” into the public imagination and into the folk canon. He is especially to be commended for providing not only a fine biography of a largely forgotten pioneer but also a detailed musical analysis of Niles’s work, something frequently missing from musical biographies.

Gregg D. Kimball
Library of Virginia

Groping toward Democracy:
African American Social Welfare Reform in St. Louis, 1910-1949
Priscilla A. Dowden-White

Since the publication of George Lipsitz’s political biography of activist Ivory Perry, the study of twenty-first-century black communities and social movements in St. Louis and other border-state cities has continued to evolve in the work of Kenneth Jolly, Peter Levy, Tracy K’Meyer, and others. Some scholars, reinterpreting the politics of respectability among African Americans at the turn of the century, have sought to theorize better the multiple forms of black agency that conformed simply neither to resistance nor capitulation to racism. Still others, including Toure Reed, have critically reevaluated the legacies of the National Urban League and its affiliates. On all counts, Priscilla A. Dowden-White’s Groping toward Democracy is an important contribution. Combining social history methodology and social welfare theory, the book reexamines “African American social welfare reformers’ militant (though not particularly radical) efforts” (ix) during the 1920s and 1930s to build educational, health, and other institutions that served the social needs of black neighborhoods, generated employment opportunities for professionals and workers, pursued the larger goal of social justice, and laid the foundations for major post-World War II black freedom struggles.
Dowden-White argues that while St. Louis’s interwar-period black reformers accepted segregation in practice, and adhered to a strategy of gradual, patient consensus building, they nonetheless took advantage of opportunities to undermine Jim Crow racial apartheid. Black St. Louisans for decades had parlayed their use of the vote into a remarkable degree of political influence. Through their “manipulation of public culture,” they had over time perfected the skill of wrestling concessions from the city’s structures of white authority “by tapping into ideas of good and efficient government, democratic citizenship, equitable social welfare services, labor peace and productivity, and community harmony” (2). Buoyed by a “dynamic interracial civic culture” (5) encompassing St. Louis’s Urban League, the League of Women Voters, and the St. Louis Community Council, black social welfare workers attained qualified success in promoting the idea that black racial progress and fair play were essential to the common good.

In the short term, they achieved a rough equalization of education, health, and other services to African Americans under the rubric of “separate but equal.” The construction of St. Louis’s Homer G. Phillips Hospital, a state-of-the-art medical center and nationally renowned training facility for black physicians and nurses, was a shining accomplishment in this regard. In the long term, local black social welfare activists worked toward the eventual demise of Jim Crow by helping to “guide the nature of community organization away from its former paternalistic leadership of the Progressive era to the mass-based leadership strategies and agenda of the post-World War II modern civil rights movement” (xii). Pivotal to this transition from elite moral suasion to grassroots social action, the author maintains, was the local Urban League’s pioneering work in community organizing. Through neighborhood clubs and block units, a diverse cross-section of St. Louis’s black population addressed their needs for recreational space, transportation lines, rat control, and regular garbage collection; strengthened their collective resources through consumer cooperatives; and enacted their claims to citizenship and civic pride. “In light of—and in spite of—elite black social welfare community organizers’ efforts to control the movement,” Dowden-White contends, “community organization grew closer to its democratic ideal” of popular mobilization (20).

Exceedingly well researched, Groping toward Democracy marshals an exhaustive range of primary and secondary sources. Chapter one, in particular, provides a thorough and dense portrait of St. Louis’s border-state cultural and social peculiarities, and African Americans’ rich history of
community mobilizing and institution building within this context. Elsewhere, Dowden-White closely and skillfully limns the evolving ideas that anchored community organization theory and practice. In the process, she further establishes St. Louis as a key site of historical investigation, and vindicates black social welfare reform as a politics deserving of evaluation on its own terms beyond a stultifying progressive-conservative dichotomy. In delineating the Urban League’s strategy of “neighborhood organization,” Dowden-White broadens the term’s definition to include social welfare reformers’ neighborhood improvement projects. Like scholars such as Charles Connerly, she evokes a vibrant black urban planning tradition discursively connected to, yet independent of, mainline white institutions and practices.

Although mindful of class dynamics among African Americans during the period covered in her study, Dowden-White at times overstates the unifying nature of the politics of respectability and racial uplift, and elides the presence of competing black political tendencies that complicated cross-class racial unity. Yet this merely signals a healthy divergence in scholarly interpretations of the salience of class among African Americans, then and now. Painstakingly rendered yet accessibly written, *Groping toward Democracy* fuses African American history and social welfare thought in a manner that promises to appeal to specialists in both fields, as well as general reading audiences.

Clarence Lang
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**Grassroots at the Gateway:**
*Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-1975*
Clarence Lang

The subtitle of *Grassroots at the Gateway* is instructive and accurate. In Clarence Lang’s view, much scholarship on civil rights and Black Power has posited a unified racial community in pursuit of freedom that ignores or minimizes the role of working class activism and agendas. The resulting focus on middle class “civil rights leaders” and their deeds has given short shrift to the articulation of distinctly class-based concerns and to the actions of working-class African Americans. As Lang notes, “St. Louis’s black laboring class shared a common ‘platform’ of jobs, trade union organizing, social security expenditures, housing, neighborhood amenities like trash collection, street repair and recreational space, public health care and education, consumer cooperatives and rights, and the abolition of Jim Crow” (41). Yet by the 1970s, the most visible protest campaigns...
focused on black elite access to economic and political resources and working class demands for “social wages” had receded. Lang seeks to provide an answer to Julian Bond’s question about the shift in movement goals: “When and how were ‘jobs and freedom’ replaced by ‘joint ventures and set-asides?” (6).

Lang’s central thesis is that the black working class and black economic elites represented two distinct forces in the broad-based struggles for racial equality in the twentieth century United States, with often allied but sometimes conflicting agendas. The detailed stories of specific campaigns in St. Louis illustrate why heralded victories against segregation often produced disappointing results for the majority of the town’s black citizenry. The “lack of unity” so often mentioned as a cause of movement defeat was the product of a class divide made starker by the middle class gains arising from sustained mass movement pressure. Reflecting a national pattern, St. Louis ended up with many blacks worse off, despite the decades of struggle by several generations of committed activists. Today’s bleak urban landscape, with inner city residents locked out of opportunity, provides evidence of the defeat of the working class agenda, which both the state and black middle class leadership have abandoned.

Lang’s close inspection of mid-century struggles reveals worker-based insurgency, giving the lie to the myth that elites always led or directed civil rights campaigns. Workers provided the backbone of struggle and actively shaped movement agendas to a far greater degree than scholars usually acknowledge. Lang effectively shows that the rhetoric of racial uplift pitted “responsible Negroes” (170) against their working class brethren. These class differences led to conflicts over tactics, most clearly in the 1963 Jefferson Bank boycott. The campaign provoked intense criticism among many older activists because they considered it irresponsible and led by citizens of lesser pedigree. Even among the boycotters, quite serious class cleavages developed. Doctors with picket signs stating “Responsible People Want Justice” (170) directly rebuked younger activists uncommitted to maintaining bourgeois decorum in confrontations with racist power.

*Grassroots at the Gateway* provides a multigenerational account of anti-racist activity and discusses little known but significant episodes of working class insurgency in St. Louis. These include the women who led the 1932 “July Riot” at City Hall against relief cuts; female pecan pickers who went on strike against racial discrimination in wages and work conditions in 1933; the vibrant local chapter of the 1940s March on Washington Movement; the lead role played by St. Louis’s CORE chapter in that organization’s militant challenges to racial discrimination; and the multiple groups, philosophies, and goals that comprised the city’s Black Power movement. Lang complicates the narrative of female marginalization in Black Power by situating the public housing rent strike, led by women, within the masculine discourses—“More and Better Paying Jobs for Black Men” was a major slogan (199)—enunciated by more visible spokespersons during this period.

Seen this way, Black Power represented a working class reaction to increased marginalization and movement drift from the goal of citizenship toward a focus on the inclusion of black elites. This class-based reaction grew out of legitimate needs and analysis but was doomed by increasing factory automation, the loss of industrial jobs, and white flight. Lang’s attention to the intersection of movement demands and structural economic and demographic changes makes *Grassroots at the Gateway* a valuable addition to the new urban history and the growing literature on local black freedom struggles.

W. S. Tkweme
University of Louisville
Announcements

Rocky Mountain Express

Hop aboard and travel through the Canadian Rockies on a steam train adventure of a lifetime. Experience the human drama and epic engineering involved in building a railroad through some of the most demanding and breathtaking landscapes on Earth. Join passionate engineers as they work to re-ignite the fires of the Age of Steam and restore a champion locomotive. Together, they will pit their skills and an old engine against the perils of great mountain passes and rugged terrain. All aboard! Opens October 14 in the Robert D. Lindner OMNIMAX Theater at Cincinnati Museum Center.

Holiday Junction Featuring the Duke Energy Holiday Trains

Holidays at Cincinnati Museum Center will be even more memorable for years to come! Duke Energy has gifted their priceless and timeless holiday trains to Cincinnati Museum Center to create the Cincinnati Museum Center Holiday Junction Featuring the Duke Energy Holiday Trains. Opening November 5, 2011 through January 1, 2012, all generations can enjoy the hustle and bustle of the holiday spirit, decorations, seasonal music, and a full slate of activities to thrill railroad enthusiasts of all ages. Don’t miss the model trains zipping around a winter wonderland, Santa taking time from his busy schedule at the North Pole to visit with children, an interactive play area for kids and their chance to escape into their own holiday wonderland as they ride through a magnificent winter scene on a special kid-size train. Don’t miss this holiday tradition at Cincinnati Museum Center!
The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society is a peer-reviewed regional journal dedicated to the publication of new work by leading historians, including some of the brightest young scholars working today. Published continuously since 1903, the Register remains a vital contribution to new knowledge of Kentucky history. Beginning with volume 108, full-text issues of the Register may be accessed through Project MUSE, the digital publications arm of The Johns Hopkins University Press.

To subscribe, contact Leslie Miller, membership coordinator, at leslie.miller@ky.gov.

For information regarding manuscript submissions, contact Nelson L. Dawson, editor, at nelson.dawson@ky.gov.