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Stanley Harrold. *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003. xv + 280 pp. $71.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2805-3; $26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8071-2838-1.

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Stanley Harrold in *Subversives* provides a focused study of antebellum Washington, D.C. and the struggles to destroy and conversely to defend slavery in the nation's capital. Harrold places his work within the broader context of abolitionism in the United States, particularly the northern abolitionist movement. In his telling of this great contest between antislavery and proslavery forces, Harrold sets out to show the "interracial cooperation" among opponents of slavery within Washington, D.C. and the Chesapeake Bay. Harrold vividly illustrates what he calls "practical abolitionism" among free and enslaved African Americans and approving whites. Historians have rarely spotlighted the daily tribulations within the antislavery movement, and for Washington, D.C., this is a first. Historian Peter J. Parish has observed that sweeping studies of slavery on a national and international scale have given way to more localized studies. As Harrold's work demonstrates, this is also becoming the case with the history of abolition. This micro (rather than macro) approach allows for more in-depth coverage of the antislavery movement, thereby leading to a deeper understanding of the individuals involved.

Harrold sets out to challenge earlier historical interpretations of the antislavery movement, using "interracial cooperation" as his central thesis. He disputes the "Revisionist" interpretations of the 1920s and 1930s that abolitionists were religious and moral fanatics, even insane. Quite the contrary, according to Harrold's depiction of abolitionists. Harrold describes whites and African Americans, both free and enslaved, as rational and intelligent individuals who committed themselves to work together for the common cause of eradicating slavery. He accomplishes this by meticulously scouring primary sources such as private letters, unpublished papers, and streams of newspaper articles and editorials. He augments these sources with a rich variety of secondary works, including his own: "The intellectual and historiographical parameters for this book are most directly established in my *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861*."[1] He also acknowledges influence and support from the historian and editor of the series in which *Subversives* appears, James Brewer Stewart, author of *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*. Harrold draws on several other important historians of the abolitionist movement such as Betty Fladeland, who not only studied the movement, but also was an activist in the modern civil rights movement. Unlike other historians of abolition history, however, Harrold is not necessarily looking for a "usable past" to emulate or to justify contemporary movements to achieve an integrated society. Harrold combines sociology and social psychology along with studies on community in his analysis of abolitionist's motivations and characteristics.

Central to Harrold's thesis is the abolitionists' choice of Washington as the most vulnerable and symbolically important point to attack slavery. Washington was the place where slaveholders maintained their power through the national government, ironically using the ideology of states rights to protect slavery. Antebellum African Americans recognized Washington's importance in slavery, as Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. notes in his recent book *Exodus!*: "We are still the New Israelites, but the United States is Egypt, and the seat of Pharaoh is in Washington, D.C."_.[2] Harrold correctly points out that an attack on slavery in Washington, D.C. meant an attack on the seat of the slaveholders' power. Slaveholders equally understood that they had to muster all of their power to resist abolitionists in the nation's capital.

Like other historians of Chesapeake history, Harrold describes the agricultural changes as the Chesapeake region shifted from labor-intensive tobacco cultivation to capital-intensive grain production, leaving planters with a surplus of slaves. With the opening of new land for short-staple cotton and sugar cultivation in the Old Southwest, the demand for slaves rose there. Chesa-

peake slaveholders thus found a market for their increasing number of surplus slaves during the antebellum period.

The rising demand for slaves in the Old Southwest transformed the Chesapeake into the center of the domestic slave trade. Baltimore emerged as the principle slave market during the early antebellum period. Eventually, the slave-trading center shifted to Washington and its immediate environs, including Alexandria, Virginia.

According to Harrold, abolitionists were well aware of these new developments and focused their moral persuasion efforts, beginning in Baltimore and then in Washington. Benjamin Lundy, a northern-born newspaper editor and Quaker, was an early opponent of slavery. In 1824, Lundy moved his abolitionist paper, *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, which focused on moral suasion, from Ohio to Baltimore. William Lloyd Garrison later joined him as associate editor for a short time before going on to establish the *Liberator*. As an alternative to abolition, the American Colonization Society, which was active in Maryland and Washington, D.C., advocated relocation of free African Americans to Liberia.

Harrold next describes the transformation of the abolitionist movement into a more radical movement characterized by northern abolitionists working with African Americans in Washington. Over time, abolitionists moved away from earlier strategies of moral persuasion and colonization schemes perceived as racist to a strategy of "immediatism." They worked to secure the freedom of enslaved African Americans through legal challenges, through purchase, or by helping them run away to freedom in the North. "Immediatists" correctly understood that it was easier for enslaved African Americans in the Washington region to escape to the North. Additionally, the Chesapeake region contained the largest free African American population in the country, making it easier to find willing allies for the radical abolitionist movement. Abolitionists believed that if they could show slaveholders their property was insecure, they could hasten slavery's demise. However, this approach often backfired, as slaveholders sold their chattel before they could run away, breaking up families in heart-wrenching scenes throughout Washington, D.C. These scenes, publicized in antislavery newspapers throughout the North, highlighted the horrors of slavery and helped solidify northern opposition to slavery.

One central figure in developing the radical abolitionist strategy in Washington was Charles T. Torrey. Contemporaries and historians alike portrayed Torrey as a fanatic or insane. Harrold rejects the claim "that mental instability contributed to his actions" (p. 68) and shows how important Torrey was in laying the foundation of interracial community in Washington dedicated to abolishing slavery.

Torrey was a northern abolitionist who broke away from William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) over the latter's "nonresistant theories," and founded the Massachusetts Abolition Society in 1839. From this new base, Torrey advocated aggressive action against slavery. In so doing, he was instrumental in the 1840 founding of the Liberty Party, which chose former slaveholder-turned-abolitionist James G. Birney as its presidential candidate. Torrey fervently committed himself to "immediatism."

In 1842, Torrey decided to confront slavery in its "citadel," as Frederick Douglass described Washington. Torrey began helping enslaved African Americans escape to freedom through the Underground Railroad, and he supported noted African American abolitionists such as Thomas Smallwood, a Washington resident. Harrold points out in an elaborate analysis of abolitionists' responses to proslavery attacks against their manhood that Torrey's "aggressive masculinity foreshadow[ed] that of John Brown" (p. 88). Harrold also attributes the same "aggressive masculinity" to Smallwood.

Torrey's final act of "aggressive masculinity" came after his arrest in Maryland for helping enslaved African Americans escape. Torrey's acquaintance, Daniel A. Payne, had warned Torrey about a plot against him. Ignoring the warning, Torrey practically welcomed his arrest, hoping to use the trial to publicly attack slavery. This collaboration also highlighted the interracial cooperative effort between white and black abolitionists. Torrey had successfully extended the interracial cooperation well beyond the confines of Washington.

In challenging the "Revisionist" interpretations, Harrold also criticizes the "liberal" historical interpretations. In contrast to the "liberal" historians, Harrold unapologetically claims that abolitionists were indeed radical and were politically influential. Harrold also disagrees with the "liberal" historians claim that radical abolitionists were ineffective. He asserts, "the aggressive action against slavery in Washington and other vulnerable outposts in the borderlands … undoubtedly helped bring on the Civil War" (p. 257). This convinced "the South's white leaders that they had to take extraordinary measures to defend slavery in the borderlands" (p. 256), leading to the secession of southern states following the election of

Abraham Lincoln.

Essential to this argument is the interracial thesis of the book. In support of this, Harrold directly challenges the thesis of historians like Larry Gara, author of *The Liberty Line*. Gara attempted to overturn revisionist interpretations by claiming that African Americans were the central characters in the Underground Railroad. Harrold agrees that there would have been no northern abolitionist support in Washington, D.C. without signs of African American resistance to slavery there. Nonetheless, Harrold disputes Gara's conclusion. Without the efforts that crossed the color line, Harrold argues, there would have been little hope of creating a successful challenge to slavery in the southern borderlands. In the process, whites and African Americans overcame their own race, sex, and class biases, at least enough to build an interracial community that effectively challenged the peculiar institution within its seat of power. Harrold readily confesses that his "analysis is compatible with a contention, popular among historians during the first half of the twentieth century, that abolitionists caused the Civil War" (p. 256).

Harrold offers probably the best example of the strength of interracial coalition with his discussion of the *Pearl* Affair in 1848.[3] The largest planned escape of slaves in American history involved over seventy enslaved African Americans, the best known of whom were Mary and Emily Edmondson. All were captured on the coastal trader the *Pearl*, captained and owned by Edward Sayres and crewed by Chester English and Daniel Drayton. Abolitionist William L. Chaplin, who had replaced Charles T. Torrey in Washington, organized the failed escape attempt. Harrold offers a vivid description of the event and the network of abolitionists that included members of Congress like Joshua Giddings of Ohio and newspaper editors like Gamaliel Bailey of the *National Era*. Tried but undaunted in their antislavery efforts, abolitionists continued their subversive activities in Washington. Nonetheless, the *Pearl* Affair did bring unwanted attention to their clandestine work. Eventually, Chaplin left Washington following a shoot-out with local authorities during an escape attempt that he had precipitated.

The significance of *Subversives* lies in its detailed description of the day-to-day interracial activities of radical abolitionists, including their work on the Underground Railroad. Harrold also emphasizes that white abolitionists tried to immerse themselves into the African American community by attending black churches like Mount Zion Negro Church and Israel Bethel Church. Daniel Payne, who had become an immediatist following his conversion to the cause by abolitionist Lewis Tappan, was also a pastor at Israel Bethel before moving to the A.M.E. Church in Baltimore in the 1840s.

Within this context of interracial community, Harrold dedicates significant space to Myrtilla Miner. While visiting the American Missionary Society in New York City, Lewis Tappan introduced Payne to Myrtilla Miner, who reported her proposed divine mission to establish a high school for young African American girls in Washington. Payne recalled his conversation with Miner in his book titled *Recollections of Seventy Years*. He asked, "Have you counted the cost? Are you prepared to burn between two fires ... a white fire on the one hand and a black fire on the other? "[4] She responded, "I am prepared, and must go if I die in the attempt."[5] She opened the school in 1851 and faced immediate, often violent white opposition. Her school received support from northern abolitionists like Gerritt Smith, and abolitionist and education reformer Horace Mann, both of whom served in Congress. She also received support from the African American community.

The discussion of Miner raises questions regarding African Americans and their inner discussions and conflicts regarding interracial cooperation. In *Recollections of Seventy Years*, Payne also described the removal of a white woman from A.M.E. Bethel Church in Philadelphia in 1853. She had opened a school for African American children in Philadelphia and had decided to attend Bethel since so many of her students were members of the church. An outraged Payne blamed the black women in the church for her removal. He then resigned his ministry without an appointment elsewhere in protest. He went on to report: "The pastor himself visited me full of anger, and, thrusting his clinched fist in my face, said, 'You dare to leave me without an appointment on account of that white woman!... Open your mouth if you dare, and I will lay you flat upon the floor.' "[6]

Finally, Harrold examines the heroic efforts of African Americans in attacking the institution of slavery and even describes their occasional timidity following violent encounters with proslavery proponents. He also shows how African American freedmen possessing white middle-class values doubted the ability of former slaves to make the transition from slavery to freedom as they struggled to survive in the wretched conditions of the refugee camps.

Harrold depicts the humanity of both whites and African Americans in *Subversives*. He probes the depths of the interracial cooperation within the abolitionist

movement, overcoming the challenge faced by such studies of clandestine organizations–the dearth of written sources. Above all else, Harrold shows that through the interracial cooperative efforts, abolitionists were effective in eliciting fear among slaveholders and hope among enslaved African Americas. Frederick Douglass testified to this by writing, "I saw that there was fear as well as rage in the manner of speaking of the abolitionists, and from this I inferred that they must have some power in the country, and I felt that they might perhaps succeed in their designs."[7] Harrold's is a refreshing and stimulating work, which will make it required reading for any student of the antislavery movement.

Notes

[1]. Stanley Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

[2]. Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 48.

[3]. Harrold draws on his earlier published work on the *Pearl* Affair: Stanley C. Harrold, Jr., "The *Pearl* Affair: The Washington Riot of 1848," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 50 (1980): pp. 140-160.

[4]. Daniel Alexander Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, (Nashville: Publishing House of the A. M. E. Sunday School Union, 1888), p. 114; electronic edition: Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001. <`http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/payne70/payne.html$>$`, 2001.

[5]. Payne, p. 114.

[6]. Payne, pp. 116-117.

[7]. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time* (Hartford: Park Publishing Co., 1881), p. 81; electronic editon: Academic Affairs Library, UNC-CH University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999. <`http://docsouth.unc.edu/douglasslife/douglass.html$>$`, 1999.

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