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**Ira Berlin**. *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves.* Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003. ii + 374 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-01061-1; $19.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-674-01624-8.

**Reviewed by** Gary Edwards (Department of History, Arkansas State University)
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Anyone who teaches the first half of U.S. history has grown accustomed to the popular misapprehension that American slavery possessed a monolithic sameness until the institution's eventual demise during the Civil War. Ira Berlin charges to the aid of all who labor to demonstrate that slavery entailed meaningful change across three evolutionary centuries. *Generations of Captivity* offers a reflective synthesis and broad narrative. Moving fluidly, the author navigates the current of historical transition from one era to another and one region to another. Throughout, Berlin has crafted a trenchant review of the salient elements of African-American enslavement. One of the author's stated goals is to draw upon the abundance of new scholarship (well over two hundred books) during the five years since his highly acclaimed *Many Thousands Gone*. The number itself is a testament to the fecund nature of recent slave historiography and the valuable service offered through Berlin's efforts. He reminds us that, like all other human interactions, slavery also rested on a continual process of negotiation.

Neatly divided into four primary sections, Berlin effectively employs a generational research model beginning with the appropriately titled "charter" generations. Slavery's formative years, by default, will always remain shrouded beneath a greater degree of mystery than antebellum slavery. Nevertheless, Berlin is perhaps at his boldest when he affirms the significance of the charter period and its key players: Atlantic creoles. Influenced by two centuries of European contact along coastal Africa and often finding themselves in the West Indies prior to their mainland arrival, creoles seemingly possessed a cosmopolitan sagaciousness born of their unique context. Anthony Johnson, perhaps the most well-documented instance of seventeenth-century creolization, represented the possibilities before the legal codification of racism in colonial Chesapeake Bay. Berlin does not limit himself only to the famous example of Johnson. However, his inclusion of the free black tobacco planter is indicative of both Johnson's significance and the constraints of limited evidence from American slavery's genesis. Berlin reminds us that one of the distinctive features of the charter generations was their diminutive size relative to their influence. It remains a tantalizing notion of counter-factual history to re-imagine a Chesapeake where Anthony and Mary Johnson's great-grandchildren prospered alongside eighteenth-century white neighbors. Instead, they became the objects of financial security in reflection of the circumscribed nature of their ancestors' influence.

Moving the schema forward, Berlin examines "plantation" generations. Although the degradation of black life possessed numerous sources, "the largest was the growth of the plantation" (p. 54). Indeed, degradation is the fundamental variable which shadows the emergence of this new paradigm. Whereas creoles experienced racism, they nevertheless existed in something like an embryonic phase of potential societal development. The future remained to be set. The plantation changed that. It emerged as midwife and oversaw the birth of institutionalized racism sustained by the growth of agricultural capitalism. The monolithic scope of these new plantations exerted an inescapable gravitational pull. Everything soon moved around them in a prescribed orbit. Both their size and insatiable labor needs fundamentally altered eighteenth-century America. Most importantly, Atlantic creoles (such as the Johnsons) largely disappeared from the colonial landscape. Berlin places great significance on this transformation. The exponential demand for labor could no longer be met via the West Indies' surplus or from limited experimentation with enslaved Native Americans. African slaves from the continent's interior now composed the bulk of forced migrants to colonial America. Unlike their "charter" generation predecessors, they increasingly relied on preserving past cultural links as a means to endure an impossible situation. Planters likewise found themselves in the midst of a generational transition. Consolidation of resources necessitated consolidation of power. A new sense of white mastery yielded a reciprocal increase in societal hierar-

chy. Lastly, Berlin spreads his analysis beyond the Atlantic South to the Gulf Coast and the North as he offers a balanced appraisal of slavery's significance throughout colonial America. While this was not Berlin's purpose, it stands as an important rebuttal to the prevalent misconception outside academia that many historians seem either unaware or unconcerned about slavery's existence in the North.[1]

Next, Berlin ushers in the broadly defined "revolutionary" generations. The author utilizes a broad canvas as he paints a contrast between the promise of the American Revolution and the shock of the ensuing Cotton Revolution. The accompanying emphasis on gradual emancipation and the opposing influence of cotton yielded a more thoroughly dichotomized nation. Berlin carefully weighs the limited gains of a "free" North in the midst of what Don Fehrenbacher called a "slaveholding republic." While this is familiar ground, Berlin skillfully constructs the foundation for what may become the most enduring section of the book.

"Migration" generations illustrates African-American enslavement at its zenith as an institution; fiercely disruptive and passionately contested, it shaped every facet of American life. While previous chapters chronologically cover the same material as *Many Thousands Gone*, this section moves into new territory. Berlin reaffirms how different slavery looked at the end of the eighteenth century compared with the middle of the nineteenth. Cotton cultivation, residence in the black belt, and Christianity all emerged as new components during this period. He correctly points out that the specific reasons why this happened remain imprecise. Certainly, this will serve as an impetus for new studies by scholars who invoke Berlin's expertise as their mandate for renewed analysis of an imperfectly understood process.

The chapter also provides what may become one of Berlin's more memorable contributions to the arena of interpretive discourse. He describes the forced migrations of the nineteenth century as a "Second Middle Passage," thus offering a potent metaphor for those who wish to either agree or dispute the veracity of the accompanying mental image. Berlin interprets this generational phenomenon in the strongest language: "it was the central event in the lives of African-American people between the American Revolution and slavery's final demise in December 1865" (p. 161). Berlin concludes the entire book with an epilogue and gives a parting nod to the existence of "freedom" generations and its array of unique challenges.

Overall, criticisms of this work are more likely to revolve around form instead of substance. Some readers may question how successfully Berlin proved his assertion in the prologue that the better analytical framework for U.S. history is found in the binary distinction between slaves and slaveholders rather than slavery and freedom. Such a notion seems to omit the bulk of the nation's inhabitants, white nonslaveholders, who neither owned nor were themselves owned by others. Arguably, the division between slavery and freedom still retains greater interpretive flexibility. Berlin's work also stands as an important barometer, indicative of the current climate as well as the future "weather" within the field. Although it was not emphasized in this review, *Generations of Captivity* is a vigorous affirmation of the seminal importance of human "agency" and its continuing historiographic vitality. If this book is any indication, the forecast for slavery studies suggests a continuation of the "reign" of agency.[2] This award-winning sequel to *Many Thousands Gone* is an admirable compliment to the author's sweeping overview of slavery in America. It further solidifies Ira Berlin's secure standing as one of the generation's preeminent scholars on the topic.

Notes

[1]. Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jennifer Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005). The publication of this work two years after *Generations of Captivity* and its popular reception as a new idea is indicative of the gulf which still needs to be bridged between an interested public and an introverted academy.

[2]. A provocative critique of the utility of "agency" overall is found in Peter Coclanis's review of *Generations of Captivity*. See Coclanis, *William and Mary Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (July 2004): 544-556.

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