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Lacy K. Ford. *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. viii + 673 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-511809-4.

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The Strange Career of South Carolina Paternalism

In *Deliver Us from Evil*, Lacy K. Ford has delivered a history of proslavery that serves as a companion piece to Ira Berlin's work on North American slavery (*Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* [1998]).[1] Just as the practice of slaveholding and the experience of slavery changed over time and space, Ford demonstrates, whites' attitudes toward slavery and the ways in which they defended it also evolved over the years and varied from place to place. Ford's work is an ambitious synthesis of scores of local studies augmented by a staggering amount of original research, largely in state papers but also in newspapers and personal papers. He shows that whites in the upper and lower South had persistently divergent visions for the future of slavery and offers a detailed view of several different debates over slavery within southern state legislatures. While there is room to dispute some of Ford's specific conclusions, his is the best synthesis to date that accounts for the malleability of proslavery ideology across and within state lines.

Ford argues that white southerners' ideas about slavery "evolved through three identifiable phases between 1787 and 1840" (p. 5). He characterizes the first phase, from 1787 to 1808, as a period in which whites in the upper South discussed–but did not initiate–a gradual end to slavery, while lower South whites grew more attached to slavery as a result of increased cotton exports. In his second phase, through the sensational events of the 1830s (including the dissemination of David Walker's *Appeal*, the Southampton Insurrection, and the abolitionist mailings and petition campaign), upper South statesmen tried to erode slavery by "whitening" their states through colonization and participation in the internal slave trade, while their southern neighbors displayed much less ambivalence over slavery itself and debated instead the relative merits of paternalism over more harsh, traditional modes of slave control. In Ford's account, paternalists triumphed in the 1830s, when a majority of whites accepted that a more "humanitarian" approach to slaveholding (or at least paternalists' more humane rhetoric of slaveholding) offered slaveholders the best defense against reform-minded northern antislavery activists.

In an organizational decision that serves well to underscore the extent of geographic variation in whites' ideas about slavery, Ford structured *Deliver Us from Evil* in seventeen, chronologically overlapping chapters dealing with either the upper or lower South, respectively. In general, South Carolina stands in for the lower South, while chapters on Tennessee and North Carolina force Virginia to share the limelight in the sections on the upper South. The predictable tradeoff to such an approach is the difficulty of crafting a coherent narrative–only the principal South Carolina arc of chapters 5 through 9 has any real continuity–but surely this is part of Ford's point. White southerners improvised their policies toward slavery on a state-by-state, county-by-county, church-by-church, or even household-by-household level for much of the early national period, and proslavery could look very different from community to community. At the same time that prominent white Virginians were discussing behind closed doors the possibility of colonization in response to the discovery in 1800 of Gabriel Prosser's plot, for example, white South Carolinians were raising the possibility of reopening the Atlantic slave trade. The whiplash that the reader feels when reading *Deliver Us from Evil* therefore serves as a wholesome tonic to historians who might otherwise forget that there were still "many Souths" when it came to proslavery ideology.

In the powerful final chapter, Ford suggests that white defenders of slavery found common ground in the face of slave revolts and abolitionist criticism in the 1830s. In his reckoning, the "reconfiguration of slavery" at this critical juncture consisted of three significant ide-

ological shifts, namely, "an insistence that slavery as it existed in the South was justified by racial differences," the contention "that slavery protected the independence of whites by preventing the development of a dependent white working class," and "a full embrace of paternalism both as the ideology of slaveholding and as the best practice for slave management" (p. 508).

Deliver Us from Evil is about southern whites' ideas about and attitudes toward slavery, but Ford does not always distinguish between the way that white southerners thought about slavery itself, and the ways in which they thought about how best to defend slavery against outside critics, control enslaved people, or keep the institution profitable. In the conclusion, for example, it is difficult to discern whether he is treating paternalism as a tactic to defend slavery or as a set of deeply held beliefs about the proper relationship between enslaved and enslaver. He cautions that "an embrace of paternalism as an ideology did not even require agreement on all matters closely related to slavery. Many paternalists still thought slavery an evil, if a necessary one, while others came to see it as a positive good" (p. 522). But such cautions leave unclear whether Ford views paternalism merely as the rhetorical posture that best served southern whites in their contest with abolitionist reformers or as a coherent way of thinking about the peculiar institution in its own right.

Tactics to defend or manage slavery and attitudes toward slavery are similarly interchangeable in other sections of the book. To cite several examples, there are detailed accounts of Louisianans debating how to manage slave imports (chapter 4), South Carolinians arguing over whether or not James Hamilton and his Magistrates and Freeholders Court exceeded their authority in responding to the Vesey scare (chapter 7), and North Carolinians wrangling over whether or not to ban black suffrage in their constitutional convention of 1835 (chapter 12). These examples, and many others like them, certainly help to support Ford's broader point that slaveholders and their supporters often disagreed with one another over the best approach to certain aspects of slaveholding, but the connections between short-term tactics to manage slavery and more fundamental beliefs about slavery are not always explicit.

Ford's emphasis on South Carolina as the hearth of paternalism yields some fruits, but at the same time it introduces some interpretive problems. The South Carolina Association, formed in 1823 to advocate for more stringent control of the Palmetto State's enslaved population, is an excellent foil to Lowcountry paternalists, such as Baptist Richard Fuller (p. 283). Ford uses the association adroitly to show substantive conflict among white South Carolinians about the best mode of slave governance. It is puzzling, however, why Ford insists so strenuously on South Carolina as the birthplace of a "historically specific and ideologically distinct brand of paternalism" (p. 141). According to Ford, the two most important prerequisites for the emergence of paternalism were "the closing of the foreign slave trade in 1808 and the dramatic spread of evangelical Christianity" (p. 148). The Virginia General Assembly stopped the Atlantic slave trade into that colony in 1774, and Virginia evangelicals were already numerous and politically powerful enough during the American Revolution to demand disestablishment of the Anglican Church. The reviewer is only one of many scholars who have noted the ascendency of paternalism in Virginia decades before Ford posits its rise in South Carolina, raising questions about what was "historically specific and ideologically distinct" about its Lowcountry variant.[2]

Regardless of paternalism's geographic origin, one thing that is clear is that Ford's approach to the concept is quite different from Eugene Genovese's–something that some readers will find refreshing while others will lament.[3] Genovese's paternalism is grounded in the day-to-day interactions between slaves and slave owners, but Ford pays far less attention to enslaved people or to free blacks, except in their capacity as revolutionaries. He gives extensive treatment of all of the major slave rebellions (Prosser, the German Coast, the Camden scare, Vesey, and Turner) and of whites' reactions to them, but there are no broken tools, no grapevines, no hiding or hiring out.

There is no question that Ford has identified and engaged a very important project–demonstrating variation in whites' approaches to slavery and trying to discern how and why several different regional proslavery streams merged in the 1830s and 1840s. He succeeds splendidly in showing the diversity of whites' approaches to managing slavery. Moreover, he suggests a plausible, if unsurprising, moment of extraordinary external threat at which white southerners circled the wagons. For all of this, however, white southerners' ideas about slavery itself–and about its companion, race–are often subsumed, in his account, within their arguments against abolition. Nor were whites' ideas about slavery in the abstract entirely inscrutable, as Larry Tise (*Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* [1987]) and many others have shown. But anyone who hopes to tell this story will first have to deal with Ford's important book.

Notes

[1]. See also Lacy Ford, "Reconfiguring the Old South: 'Solving' the Problem of Slavery, 1787-1838," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 1 (1998): 95-122.

[2]. For example, Charles Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Douglas Ambrose, "Of Stations and Relations: Proslavery Christianity in Early National Virginia," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery*, ed. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 35-67; and Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1998). Morgan concluded that a shift toward paternalism (a "more enlightened patriarchalism") "occurred earlier and more powerfully in Virginia than in South Carolina" (p. 300).

[3]. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972; New York: Vintage Books, 1976), esp. 3-7.

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