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Henry Goings. *Rambles of a Runaway from Southern Slavery.* Edited by Calvin Schermerhorn, Michael Plunkett, and Edward Gaynor. Carter G. Woodson Institute Series. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. 200 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-3238-5.

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Negotiating the Boundaries of Slavery

Antebellum Americans–whether black or white, northern or southern, enslaved or free–lived in a society made unstable by slavery. Free and enslaved blacks worked diligently to create a sense of stability wherever they could, even as they faced the constant threat of physical and emotional abuse. Mostly they dreaded having their world turned upside down by familial separation at the whim of others. Whites of all classes and regions, either consciously or subconsciously, waited for the almost inevitable disruption that could come from slave insurrections or a complete breakdown in the compromises that kept the Union together. For all, the weight of impending chaos weighed heavily. Collectively, Henry Goings's narrative, *Rambles of a Runaway from Southern Slavery*, and Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon's edited collection, *In the Shadow of Freedom*, illustrate the tensions that influenced the daily lives of Americans when slave owners held the balance of power not only in the South but also throughout the nation.

In the Shadow of Slavery is a collection of essays written by leading historians in the fields of antislavery and early American politics. Based on papers presented at the U.S. Capitol Historical Society's 2006 conference, the essays address two interrelated questions. First, since Washington DC was both the nation's capital and a slaveholding city, some of the essays consider how slavery affected politics and public policies created there. Just as important, other essays examine how slavery affected the daily lives of congressmen, free blacks, and slaves who lived and worked in the capital. The collection shows how the social reality of slavery had an impact on congressional debates over such issues as Texas annexation, the spread of slavery into western territories, and the demands of slaveholders for stronger fugitive slave laws. Antislavery congressmen and abolitionists had to face daily the horrors of human bondage, and they had to learn to fight the system while negotiating the political and social boundaries of a society dominated by slaveholding interests. Attempted slave escapes illustrated for both slaveholders and non-slaveholders how unstable the system was. While southern leaders saw tighter fugitive slave legislation as the answer, some northern leaders became increasingly certain that ending slavery was the solution.

Finkelman introduces the collection by tracing the political ramifications of allowing slavery to exist in the nation's capital. Essentially, he argues that it allowed southerners to dominate Washington society and gave them a sense that their system was secure in the nation. He also argues that the Three-Fifths Clause of the Constitution, provisions for national intervention in the case of slave rebellion, fugitive slave laws, and a perpetual veto power did indeed protect the system. Conversely, slavery in the capital exposed northern politicians and diplomats firsthand to the horrors of bound labor, especially because of the visible slave trade in the city. Finally, he shows that despite being a slaveholding city, DC had a degree of free speech unknown in the South. He supports this assertion by pointing to the existence of the *National Era* antislavery newspaper. In the end, "for northerners, slavery in the district symbolized how much the 'slave power' controlled the nation," but for southerners the ability "to openly hold slaves in the national capital symbolized the legitimacy of what they increasingly recognized as a peculiar institution" (p. 15).

David Brion Davis opens part 1 of the book,

"Congress and Slavery in Context," with an essay that puts the story into an international context by describing the impact of British antislavery on sectionalism in the United States. If southerners did indeed maintain an immense political and economic hold over national power, then why did they feel threatened enough to "overreact in counterproductive ways" to the small and weak abolitionist movement (p. 19)? According to Davis, the answer is that slaveholders believed they were up against not just American abolitionists but also a foreign power that they viewed as "America's 'natural enemy"' (p. 25). They also looked to the British abolitionist tradition and slave revolts in the British and French Caribbean as evidence of the dangers of any discussion of abolition. Ultimately, they decided that American abolitionists were part of a British conspiracy not only to end slavery but also to weaken the United States. Basically, slaveholders convinced themselves that the British, who were trying to lead in the production of tropical staples while relying on nominally free apprentice labor, knew they had to take away slaves from Americans because they would never be able to compete with slave produced goods. "The South's fixation on British abolitionism and the declining economy of … the Caribbean," he argues "helps to explain the southerners' almost paranoid and disproportionate response to critics in the North" (p. 33). In the end, their obsession and overreaction, not British interference, proved the greater danger to their system. Their paranoia led them to attack civil liberties of whites in the North, which led more and more northerners who would not otherwise have cared about slavery to cry out against the excesses of the "slave power" that had a stranglehold on American society and politics. As southerners insisted loudly that slavery be spread into the western territories, they awakened more northerners to the importance of stopping southern aggression. At that point, a political strand of abolition emerged that eclipsed the social movement. Ironically enough, this more powerful abolition was not connected to Great Britain. Perhaps the best irony of all, however, according to Davis, is that the Confederacy needed British support during the Civil War and almost got it, partly because by the 1860s Britain had started to abandon its moral high ground on abolition in the face of pseudoscientific racism.

James B. Stewart's essay adds to the story by focusing on one particular northern congressman, his exposure to the DC slave market, his efforts to loosen the southern grip on national politics, and the violent reaction he faced as a result. Through the story of Joshua Giddings, Stewart shows that the caning of Charles Sumner in 1857 was not an isolated incident. Instead, it represented "the most extreme enactment of rituals of violence that first began in Congress in the late 1830s" (p. 36). At that point, a small group of northern congressmen, seeing themselves as "Christian Statesmen," began to speak their minds and challenge their slaveholding colleagues. Of these, John Quincy Adams is best known for his opposition to the gag rules, but Giddings was "the most provocative and disruptive" of all, insisting that slaves had the constitutional right to defend and liberate themselves with violence if necessary (p. 37). Even so, he acknowledged masters' constitutional rights to their slaves. In the end, then, both sides had constitutional backing but only one side was morally right. Giddings had long opposed slavery, and the climate of Washington DC, strengthened his resolve, according to Stewart. He saw firsthand the horrors of slavery and the trade in a way that he would not have in his home state, and he boarded with like-minded men in one of the city's boarding houses, a situation that reinforced his ideas. By arguing that slaves could rightfully revolt and that the national government should not intervene, Giddings touched a nerve with southerners who lived in constant fear of slave insurrection. As a result, he faced constant bullying from southern congressmen who worked hard to silence him. They even managed to lead the House to censure him in 1842, but his constituents reelected him and sent him back to Congress with a mandate to continue his efforts.

Gamaliel Bailey was another abolitionist who influenced and was influenced by DC culture. Stanley Harrold and Jonathan Earle each contribute essays on his career, with Harrold describing the way in which Bailey was able to walk the political tightrope required to edit an antislavery newspaper in the slaveholding capital and Earle describing the antislavery culture he helped to nurture in the city. Harrold's essay shows that one factor in Bailey's success was his pragmatism and another was his political focus. Though an immediate abolitionist, Bailey was no Garrisonian. In fact, he played a principal role in building the political antislavery movement that created the Liberty Party. Whereas William Lloyd Garrison avoided politics, focused on civil rights for black Americans, and used rhetoric that alienated southerners, Bailey was "more interested in national politics than in a practical local struggle for black rights," and he worked to reach a white southern audience with his newspaper (p. 63). By establishing "good community relations," disavowing "illegal tactics," and arguing for the importance of observing constitutional guarantees, he gained northern nonabolitionist and southern white readers and played a key role in making antislavery "politically expedient" (pp. 65, 68). Harrold explains clearly how Bailey's career bridged

the gap between immediate abolition and antislavery politics.

Harrold also argues that Bailey played a crucial role in creating an antislavery niche in the slaveholding city, and Earle elaborates on this theme in his essay, "Saturday Night at the Bailey's." According to Earle, Bailey and his wife Margaret hosted social gatherings at their home that resembled in many ways the salons of France during the Enlightenment. Their guests played games, enjoyed each others' company, and talked politics. Bailey took care to invite men who had not yet made up their minds on such issues as free soil, and, according to Earle, the lively discussions helped nudge them in the right direction. Through these gatherings, antislavery congressmen managed to create a "small antislavery vanguard" that was ultimately able to turn the federal government's attention to the slavery issue (p. 85).

Though often shut out of the discussions that men like Giddings and Bailey engaged in, women also managed to find a way to enter into the political discourse, as Susan Zaeske shows. By using their rights as citizens to petition the government, women "boldly asserted their right to engage in political deliberation" (p. 102). The result was a moral standoff between northern women, who "warned that slavery corroded the moral health of the republic" and encouraged racial mixing, and southern men, who resented the accusation of sexual impropriety (p. 103). The women had violated southern ideas of proper female behavior and insulted southern male honor. By southern standards of the time this was grounds for a duel, but the congressmen could not challenge their opponents in such a manner so they had to result to oratory battle, which "took on the emotions, the stakes, and the form of a duel" (p. 112). They accused northern women of being "mannish" and northern men of being unmanly (p. 113). Since women could not present their case in Congress, John Quincy Adams presented their petitions and took up their cause, absorbing the wrath of his southern associates. In the end, he won the duel of words as he defended the women of his region and created a new feminine ideal that made more room for women as true citizens of the Republic.

The final essay in section 1, David Zarefsky's "Debating Slavery by Proxy: The Texas Annexation Controversy," looks at arguments made for and against annexing Texas to the United States, showing the relationship between westward expansion and abolition. He argues that many supporters and opponents of annexation at first found ways to debate the question "without bringing the slavery issue to the surface" (p. 129). Even so, the slavery issue entered the debate and highlighted the connection between slavery and westward expansion. Once that happened, according to Zarefsky, the political landscape shifted in a way that broke apart the Whig Party's carefully balanced regional coalition.

Section 2, "The Politics of Slavery in the District of Columbia," offers essays that address both political and social aspects of life in the city. It begins with an essay by A. Glenn Crothers that describes the 1846 retrocession of Alexandria from the district back to Virginia. Crothers argues that Alexandria joined the district during the peak of nationalism before 1820, a time when Virginians envisioned DC as a transportation and commercial hub that could link the East and West together and foster national prosperity. Their "dreams of commercial glory slowly evaporated," however, and Alexandrians began looking back to Virginia (p. 147). This state, rather than federal, orientation increased as abolitionists and politicians like Giddings began to talk about ending the slave trade and slavery in the national capital. Fearing that DC would be used "as a field for legislative experiments" Alexandrians became eager to rejoin Virginia, where they hoped slavery would remain safe from prying congressmen (p. 154).

The next two essays offer a glimpse into DC life from the African American perspective. Mary Beth Corrigan describes efforts of those enslaved in the district to maintain family ties despite the constant threat of upheaval, and Mary K. Ricks tells the story of what happened when those ties were threatened. Corrigan argues that more than most southern cities, DC "provided its enslaved population the chance to forge meaningful ties with free black people" and forge their own community (p. 171). Though they enjoyed relative autonomy, they also faced conditions that made it nearly impossible to maintain nuclear family households. The city's slaves were often hired out by their owners, who showed no regard for slave marriages or parental relationships. This led the enslaved to try every possible means of securing living-out arrangements so they could be with their families, and they managed to succeed in many cases.

Even so, as Ricks shows in her essay covering the 1848 *Pearl* escape, families faced the constant fear of being separated and it sometimes led them to drastic measures. In this particular case, nearly eighty fugitives chose to escape rather than be separated from their loved ones. Aided by the city's Underground Railroad activists, who were in league with politicians like Giddings, they boarded a schooner named the *Pearl* and almost managed to make their way to freedom. Ricks argues that the bold

escape plan could not have happened in any other slave city, and she highlights the importance of the participation of Giddings and other congressmen who roomed together in a boardinghouse dubbed "Abolition House" (p. 205). Though the fugitives failed in their escape, the bold cooperative effort led to the "first practical step on the part of the North" to find a "backbone to stand up to the proslavery forces" that held a tight grip on the national government (p. 218). It also led eventually to the first substantial limitation on slavery in the United States–a ban on the DC slave trade.

Mitch Kachum concludes the collection by describing the end of slavery in DC and conflicting efforts to commemorate black liberty. Though not specifically framed as a conclusion, this essay does a nice job of bringing the themes of the other pieces together and tying up loose ends while taking the story into the Civil War years and beyond. After emancipation, he argues, the city's black community grew with an influx of former slaves from the South. Eventually cultural and class rifts developed and the community split over how best to commemorate the end of slavery. This debate continued into the present, with Congress finally passing legislation to establish a public holiday in 2007.

This essay collection does a nice job of keeping its focus, and all of the essays work well together. It offers a comprehensive understanding of just why it matters that the capital of the United States was a slave city. It also includes a diversity of perspectives–from the political to the social–and clearly shows exactly how slavery cast a shadow over all regions of the nation and all Americans.

The Goings narrative, edited by Calvin Schermerhorn, Michael Plunkett, and Edward Gaynor, offers further insight into the instability of antebellum life, especially the threat of familial separation. It addresses the promise of freedom brought forth by the Civil War and the ultimate disappointment as the end of the war failed to bring civil rights to the freed. Goings was a fugitive slave who, like the passengers on the *Pearl*, escaped along the Underground Railroad when he learned that he was to be sold away from his wife. After his escape, he spent years in Canada, returning at one point to try to usher his wife to freedom. More than a slave narrative, however, the book includes a final section written during and after the Civil War. This section, reminiscent of Martin R. Delany's *Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852), assesses the prospects for emancipated blacks in the United States. A chapter written during the Civil War calls on black Americans to fight for their freedom and full citizenship. Like Delany and other black leaders, Goings immediately saw the war as a war to end slavery, even when the official goal remained preservation of the Union. Also like Delany and several others, he encouraged blacks to seek real freedom beyond U.S. borders if they did not gain civil rights in the United States. The final chapter of the narrative, written after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, vacillates between optimism and uncertainty for the fate of freedpersons in the United States. He encouraged African Americans to seek peace and reconciliation and to push ever forward for racial uplift and civil rights.

By the end of the book, however, Goings had given up. Still in Canada, he had followed developments in the United States with great interest and had maintained at least a degree of hope until 1868 or 1869, when he added an appendix to his narrative. At that point, he decided black Americans would not be allowed full citizenship in the country of their birth and suggested they emigrate to Central America.

The narrative fits in many ways with the writings of northern free blacks, like Delany, William Wells Brown, and W. C. Nell. As the editors point out, however, it is quite different from most slave narratives in that it does not contain moral tales or melodrama calculated to stir readers' emotions. This is likely because Goings did not have abolitionist sponsors to fund, and ultimately influence, his work.

The editors of the Goings narrative go to great pains to offer corroborating evidence to the author's claims throughout the book. They also add a very useful chronology at the beginning, and their footnotes offer a wealth of contextual information that makes the story even more interesting. Between the narrative itself and the footnotes, this account tells much about the antebellum South, African American resettlement to Canada, westward expansion and the growth of the cotton kingdom, and the constant threat enslaved people faced of being separated from their families through forced migration and sale.

Collectively these two works illustrate just how unstable antebellum America was. The system of human bondage, and the politicians who fought so hard to protect it, caused all Americans to live under constant tension. The Civil War resolved some of the tension, but, as these works show, true freedom remained elusive for years to come.

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