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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Stanley Harrold. *American Abolitionists.* Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001. 164 pp. $15.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-35738-9.

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"Masterly but Misdirected?"

Given the huge amount of material published on the American abolitionists, I was delighted to be asked to review this slim volume. As part of the Seminar Studies in History series, the book aims to integrate all the latest research on American antislavery movements and make it accessible to a broad reading population, including students. How wonderful to find a text that would integrate the myriad new studies in my field of research, while also potentially serving as an introduction to the topic for my students in Jacksonian America or the History of American Social Movements. The book does provide a masterful introduction to abolitionist studies, with a strong emphasis on the relationship between violence and masculinity. But alas, despite the helpful glossary of terms, chronology and who's who list, much of the book would probably go over the head of the average student without student, unless the professor provided considerable contextualization.

The book's introductory chapter makes clear the major themes of the nine chapters of text. Harrold focuses on the biracial character of the abolitionist movement, including the impact of slaves on its development. He is also particularly interested in the "increasingly aggressive tactics employed by abolitionists against slavery in the South" (4). Refuting the claim that abolitionists abandoned the South after the mid-1830s, Harrold stresses throughout the book those abolitionists who went South, sent literature South, or lived in the border states of the upper South, providing a nice balance with the more traditional focus on William Lloyd Garrison and the eastern seaboard abolitionists. Harrold also makes clear the importance of the antislavery movement for women's rights and the coming of the Civil War, although this last topic gets far less attention in this work than in many others. The discussion of how abolitionists were seen as causing the Civil War, then understood as irrelevant to the war, and now seen as one factor which shaped how the war developed is particularly useful.

Yet this introductory chapter is primarily historiographical, as Harrold stakes out his ground within the highly complex history of antislavery studies. While Harrold provides a delightfully nuanced explanation of his positions in relation to numerous other authors, this chapter is quite off-putting for students who find themselves confronted with names and arguments with which they may be completely unfamiliar. This chapter could work well if students are prepared for a discussion of how the interpretation of history changes over time, with new documents, new types of interpretation, and new racial understandings.

Chapter two gives a remarkably thorough history of early abolitionism, beginning with a brief history of American slavery that places it in a broad chronological and geographic context. Harrold makes clear that American slavery was part of a broader Atlantic system, and developed into its antebellum form over time. Harrold integrates studies of slave revolts into his summary of antislavery efforts, again challenging the general definition of abolitionists as northern and white. The breadth of his coverage more generally may be made clear by noting that this chapters includes references to Bacon's Rebellion, the Stono Rebellion, rationalism, commercialism, evangelicalism, the American Revolution, Quaker antislavery efforts, northern abolition laws, Shay's Rebellion, the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, Gabriel's Rebellion and Deslondes' Rebellion. As a scholar, I am somewhat awed by Harrold's broad familiarity with the literature, and ability to make rich and complex connections among events. For a student, the rich detail tends to overwhelm the larger points of the chapter.

The center of Harrold's text focuses on immediate emancipation, with a chapter introducing the main players, tactics and beliefs, another on abolitionists and gender and a third on abolitionists and race. Harrold does an excellent job of making clear the importance of conceptions of masculinity and femininity to antislavery tactics, as well as the racial tensions inherent within the

movements. Generally Harrold tends to give the abolitionists more credit than most for at least attempting a biracial movement, even while noting their inability to live up to their highest ideals. However, this text underplays women's involvement in the antislavery movement; women all but disappear from the text after 1840, when Harrold turns to the more aggressive abolitionist tactics and the relationship between abolitionist efforts and slave revolts. Women's continued involvement in sewing societies, missionary efforts, and political campaigns is not mentioned at all, and women do not reappear (except for Delia Webster's work with the Underground Railroad) until they head south during the Civil War to work with newly freed slaves.

Members of H-CivWar will probably be disturbed to discover that Harrold covers the entire military trajectory of the war in one paragraph and other aspects of the war in three pages. Yet he makes quite clear the dramatic impact abolitionists had on the war, by creating an antislavery constituency in the north, and pressuring Lincoln to make the war an antislavery effort. Harrold's closing chapter on the impact of the abolitionists emphasizes that the Civil War was in many ways a fundamental turning point for black freedom, while also failing to achieve many of the abolitionists early goals, including an egalitarian, biracial society. Harrold's emphasis throughout the text on the increasingly violent abolitionist means might suggest new ways of thinking about the Civil War as a culmination of antislavery violence.

Following these analytical chapters are eighteen primary documents, beginning with John Woolman's warnings for slaveholders in 1762 and ending with Frederick Douglass' call for black men to enlist in the Union army in 1863. The documents include at least six written by black abolitionists (slave or free), three related to women's rights, and six which debate or discuss the value of violence. The documents are referenced in the text, although a few with so little explanation or context that reading the documents can be a difficult proposition. Document number 6, the Declaration of Sentiments of the American Anti-Slavery Society, is referenced at least a half-dozen times, in ways which enable readers of all levels to gain new insight into its meaning, and this reviewer had hoped for similar richness for the other documents.

The scholarly and educational apparatus of this text is fairly cumbersome. There are no footnotes. Rather all references to primary and secondary sources are made by using bracketed numbers which refer to a numbered bibliography. Primary sources included in the book itself are also referred to by bracketed reference numbers. Throughout the text, there are italicized words which students can look up in the glossary, although many italicized words are not there. More consistency in this feature would have increased its usefulness and decreased the distraction for more knowledgeable readers. The chronology which follows the primary documents is useful, but does not include many of the events referenced in the text. The who's who listing provides birth and death dates and a two sentence discussion of each persons' contributions to or participation in the antislavery movement. Not all of the persons mentioned in the text are included, but the listing is very thorough and quite helpful for keeping the players straight.

Since maps are relatively rare in this type of text, I am grateful for the inclusion of a map of the United States in 1850. It gives students a good sense of how much of the American west and midwest were still unorganized into states, underscoring the importance of this issue to the debate over slavery. However, the choice of 1850 is somewhat odd given that the text goes through the Civil War. The inclusion of a map including the Kansas-Nebraska territory would have been quite helpful, as would an indication of the 36' 30 Missouri Compromise line. Cities referenced in the text might have been included (including Alton, Illinois), and New Haven should have been placed in Connecticut, rather than on Long Island. And ah, if only the Bahamas really were further north than the Florida Keys!

For scholars, Harrold has provided a clearly written, comprehensive review of the extant literature on the American abolitionists. While the text is somewhat weak in its coverage of women after 1840 and abolitionists' family life, it is particularly rich when covering issues of violence, masculinity, the biracial character of the movement, and the relationship between abolitionists and the coming of the Civil War. For students, the book could provide an introduction to the historiography of abolitionist studies, coverage of the broad sweep of the movement from the 1760s to the 1860s, and a discussion of the central importance of black abolitionists, both slave and free. The primary documents will be useful for students to get a sense of how the arguments against slavery changed over time, and were influenced by the race, gender, and radicalism of the writer. In general though, I found the supposedly "helpful" features of italicized words very unhelpful, and the rich, layered, detail of the book overwhelming for an introduction to the topic. Scholars will probably be far more impressed than teachers, who should use this book with students only if they are ready to help students sort the theme from the detail.

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