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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.

Reviewed by Michael Pierson (Department of History, University of Massachusetts, Lowell)

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Biracial Abolitionism in the Heart of Slavery's Republic

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Stanley Harrold's new book continues his ongoing efforts to shift the attention of abolition studies southward. While the people of Boston, Peterboro, and points in between figure in this book, Harrold's focus is on Washington, D.C., and there he finds a surprising amount of abolitionist activity. By tracing the actions of these borderland abolitionists, Harrold fashions three challenging conclusions. First, studying these abolitionists changes our perceptions of the entire antislavery movement, especially if we have spent too much time thinking about the Bostonians. Second, he posits that these men and women, by operating in the presence of slavery's political elite, significantly influenced sectional politics. Third, Harrold finds in the abolitionist community of Washington, D.C., a significant amount of interracial cooperation. The group, he writes, could only function as it did if blacks and whites cooperated on relatively equal terms. Nor was it just a marriage of convenience; Harrold argues that the white and black abolitionists of the nation's capital went beyond simple alliance or teamwork and actually forged a "community." All of these conclusions warrant further elaboration.

Before examining the book's analytical points, however, it is worth noting the factual scope of the book. While it starts with the Gag Rule debates and their context, it really picks up steam in the 1840s. There is an excellent chapter about Charles Torrey and Thomas Smallwood's underground railroad in the nation's capital. According to Harrold, it helped perhaps four hundred fugitives between 1842 and 1844. Facing constant opposition, their efforts eventually came to a crashing end amid a hail of slavecatchers' bullets and Torrey's fatal imprisonment. Other chapters about the *Pearl* incident and Myrtilla Miner's school for African-American girls offer arguably the best secondary accounts of those important but neglected topics. As with the story of Torrey and Smallwood, Harrold's chapters illuminate events and people who have previously occupied a secondary place in the history of abolition. This is a welcome change, and not just because it redresses historiographic imbalances. Events like the *Pearl* incident, in which blacks and whites chartered a ship, docked it in Washington, loaded seventy-seven fugitive slaves on board, and sailed for Philadelphia only to be becalmed and captured at the last moment, cannot but excite the reader. Such chapters are the stuff of successful undergraduate classes. They are also enough to make even a seasoned historian glad for the reminder that abolitionism was not all writing, speaking, praying, and holding conventions.

Reclaiming such strangely neglected abolitionists and their actions allows Harrold to argue for new understandings of the antislavery movement. Over the course of three earlier books, Harrold has tried to re-focus abolitionist historiography on the places where freedom invaded slavery and vice versa. Whether it is his biography of Gamaliel Bailey (1986), his monograph *Abolitionists and the South* (1995), or his co-edited book of essays *Antislavery Violence* (1999), Harrold locates abolitionists in places outside of the Boston-upstate New York-Oberlin triangle. What he finds there changes our picture of abolitionism. In the border regions, abolitionist men are aggressive, not pacifist. Noting that Charles Torrey and African Americans such as Thomas Smallwood assumed "that they were tougher than the slaveholders" (p. 87), Harrold argues persuasively that the war against slavery along the freedom-slave border pushed abolitionist gen-

der ideologies toward an "aggressive masculinity" that had more in common with John Brown than William L. Garrison. In addition, abolitionism in Washington, in contrast to the North, was a more masculine community in terms of simple demographics; obviously, women played important roles, but they were not the majority that they represented farther north.

Harrold claims that the abolitionists in Washington made a direct impact on sectional politics. Rather than a group of thinkers who indirectly instigated political conflicts, the abolitionists of Washington dealt directly with antislavery congressmen and caused southern politicians real angst. These abolitionist subversives, he writes, made southern congressmen alarmed about the safety of slavery in the United States. "The perception among southern congressmen that slavery was under attack on its northern periphery," Harrold writes of southerners negotiating the Compromise of 1850, "had a significant role in the sectional crisis that led to the compromise proposals" (p. 164). Certainly slavery and the slave trade in Washington, D.C., were big issues in the Compromise of 1850. And who can blame the southern congressmen for being concerned? In another dramatic attempt to help fugitives, white abolitionist William Chaplin and a free black abolitionist, Warner Harris, began to head north with two slaves, Allen and Garland. These men were the body servants of Congressmen Alexander Stephens and Robert Toombs of Georgia. The fact that they were apprehended after a "desperate struggle" (p. 147) probably only partially re-assured the two southerners. Harrold argues that by pressing slavery at its political nexus, the abolitionists there convinced "the South's white leaders that they had to take extraordinary measures to defend slavery in the borderlands" (p. 256). When Lincoln's election meant that steps to protect slavery in the capitol could no longer be taken, secession seemed like a necessary step to protect slavery from the aggressively antislavery community in Washington. After all, would a Republican appoint a police chief for the capital who would enforce the Fugitive Slave Law, as the previous administrations had done? If they did not, who would guard against the future likes of Chaplin, Torrey, and the host of African Americans who labored with them? Harrold's study, by placing abolition literally under the noses of the southern political elite, re-invigorates the claim for abolitionism's importance.

Harrold's claim that there was an interracial community in Washington is timely and controversial. Harrold argues that black and white abolitionists did more than just work together towards a common goal. He writes that white and black men and women formed a community based "on physical proximity and on a shared opposition to slavery" (p. 36). Drawing on sociology, Harrold defines this biracial community as "relational," a community in which "empathy and altruism predominate" (p. 38) rather than a temporary or expedient alliance. This goes farther toward a claim for abolitionism as a true biracial community than historians usually go. Harrold does see limits to this biracialism, but he is adamant about studying the subversives "as an example of how progressive interracial cooperation … could exist for an extended period in a slaveholding region of nineteenth-century America" (p. 255).

Harrold is careful to place limits on his claim. Interracialism, he notes, fell on hard times with the arrival of Free Soilism, and it deteriorated steadily over the 1850s and especially during the Civil War years (pp. 169, 225-251). In addition, white abolitionists often worked only with the city's black "middle class," with whom they shared values and Christianity. Black Washingtonians such as the Edmondsons–part white and very refined–were most frequently the recipients of white attention. But there were affinities, Harrold writes, beyond those of class and culture. According to Harrold, antislavery whites on the border experienced external pressures that helped to forge interracial bonds. White abolitionists witnessed slavery's brutality firsthand, and the joint risks, triumphs, and social exclusions they shared with black abolitionists created emotional bonds between the two groups (pp. 45, 60). The presence of stronger interracial communities than abolitionist historians usually find, in other words, is yet another way that studying those who attacked slavery from within the institution itself changes our understanding of the movement as a whole.

Harrold's study further strengthens its argument for a biracial community by uncovering a great deal of evidence about the city's black abolitionists. By creating a rich portrait of Washington's black leadership and by emphasizing their active role in recruiting white abolitionists stationed in their city to their practical antislavery measures, Harrold makes the claim for an interracial community that is essentially initiated by blacks. They provide the physical and emotional context for the city's abolitionist movement, and one senses that whites such as Torrey and Chaplin were brought into a pre-existing black community as essential but minority elements of the movement. Perhaps the clear superiority of black organization in the city compelled white abolitionists to recognize the black community as both an integral part of

abolition and as a necessary source of emotional and social resources. It is Harrold's study of black abolitionists that makes his claim to have unearthed a truly biracial community a plausible interpretation for the 1840s and to a lesser degree the 1850s.

Like Harrold's other works focusing on the abolitionist campaign along the Mason-Dixon line, this book will challenge and sometimes enthrall its readers. It should also substantially redirect abolition studies in a number of ways.

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