people of color defined freedom to include basic protections enjoyed by most white citizens, such as the right of unconstrained freedom of mobility, the right to pursue a chosen trade, the right to reap the fruits of one's labor, and the right to ensure the physical and financial security of self and family. Additionally, the rich literature on women in slave societies has documented how women of color were simultaneously victimized yet were proactive in navigating the shifting and treacherous realities of daily life in the racist and hyperpatriarchal antebellum South. Carefully researched and lucidly written, *Forging Freedom* affirms all these conclusions. Amrita Chakrabarti Myers argues that black women envisioned their lives as free citizens, strategized to establish that freedom, and used myriad tactics to defend it against insuperable odds. Many "utilized opportunity, hard work, wealth, the law, and their connections to persons of stature" to "work from within this inequitable system" to shape "their lives to better fit their own definitions of justice, freedom, equality, and citizenship" (pp. 18, 205). That some black women in Charleston, South Carolina, succeeded is, as Myers aptly notes, "a testimony to their intellect, their determination, their courage, and their willingness to make sacrifices" (p. 205).

While focused squarely on a finite social group—free women of color in Charleston—Myers compares and contrasts the boundaries of their lives, the strategies and tactics they used, and their vulnerabilities and strengths with those of the white women and free black men of Charleston and those of free black women in other southern cities. Thus, *Forging Freedom* is grounded in and draws heavily from the rich historiography on enslaved and free people of color in, especially, Charleston, Baltimore, New Orleans, Savannah, and Petersburg, Virginia.

Throughout *Forging Freedom* Myers eloquently summarizes and restates common themes in the literature on slavery. For example, the gap between claims of absolute white power and the reality that even the wealthiest southern white men did not hold all of the cards all of the time has been well established. What Myers adds to this understanding is her clarity in interpreting old and new evidence on specific women of color who petitioned state legislators to ratify their freedom, brought suit against prominent white families that reneged on business contracts, skirted payment of black capitation taxes, and filed lawsuits to safeguard their property.

Ultimately, *Forging Freedom*'s unwavering reiteration that Charleston's women of color were "shrewd political actors who understood that manumission did not grant them unfettered access to equality" is its greatest strength (p. 115). Myers provides multiple examples of "black women [who] . . . used their wealth to position themselves as taxpaying citizens entitled to certain rights, privileges, and protections . . . [and who] . . . worked the legal system in order to defend their own image of freedom" (*ibid.*). Another forte is Myers's unblinking realism and clear prose, as when she acknowledges that—in a sad and darkly ironic way—"the tragedy lies in the fact that black female freedom in South Carolina was so tenuous that owning certain black persons became instrumental in solidifying the freedom of other black persons" (p. 128).

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Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation. Ed. by John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011. xx, 313 pp. $49.50.)

Over the last two decades, scholarship on the relationship between slavery and U.S. politics has moved decisively away from the four decades before the Civil War. The current focus has turned to the forty years between the decision of the Massachusetts State Supreme Judicial Court in the matter of Quock Walker (a series of cases that successfully challenged the legality of slavery in Massachusetts in the 1780s) and the completion of the Missouri Compromise in 1820. This collection does an excellent job of assembling some of the top historians working on those decades.

Including the introduction cowritten by John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason, and a concluding comment by James Oakes, there are fifteen essays in the collection. Their number

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precludes individual review of each, but the editors have collated them into three sections. The first is "Slavery and Ideology, Action and Inaction." These five essays provide explanations for a "why the dog stopped barking" question: the authors examine the inability of the first generation of American citizens to translate antislavery sentiment into action. Notable here is Mason's overview, which concludes that northern antislavery sentiment acquired weight in political calculations only when slavery and its expansion impinged on free-state economic interests.

The second section, "The State and Slavery," reexplores the territory mapped out by historians such as Donald L. Robinson and David Brion Davis. These chapters force reassessment of conventional wisdom. Brian Schoen's essay on the lower South's relationship to the early federal government builds on studies of low-country political communities to argue that the lower South ended up on a path of confrontation with the federal government in part because of pragmatic choices. From the 1780s onward their political leaders amplified claims of difference to win concrete concessions from the rest of the Union. George William Van Cleve's chapter, meanwhile, on the emergence of a federal union emphasizes the ways the national constitution and other key institutional bargains built in protections for slavery. The union as constructed eschewed the kind of strong federalism colonists had experienced in the British Empire and "rejected natural law as a basis for federal constitutional interpretation where slavery was concerned" (p. 118). On the latter point, Van Cleve contends with Abraham Lincoln and all who have supported his Theodore Parker–inspired argument that the Constitution was a natural-rights document that made logically inconsistent but politically necessary accommodations for slavery.

The final section, "Slavery, Sectionalism, and Partisan Politics" leads into the post–Missouri Compromise era. The relationship between interregional electoral and legislative alliances, on the one hand, and strains that the continued enslavement of human beings in the southern half of the Union put on those alliances, on the other, is of course what destroyed the so-called second party system. These chapters consider both the effects of those shearing forces on the first party system, such as it was, and their role in the transition to a second interregional alignment. Recent work by historians such as Mason have reminded us that congressional debates over slavery began long before New York Republican representative James Tallmadge proposed to close slavery's further expansion into Missouri. As Rachel Hope Cleves demonstrates, however, New England Federalists, the main source of antislavery proposals in Congress before 1819, could not decide whether their occasional discomfort with slavery was based on moral objections to slavery as an antirepublican force, or on the need to secure tactical political victories over southerners.

Many questions remain. The four essays in the last section implicitly disagree on an important point. Did the Missouri crisis of 1819–1821 represent the signal of a coming unending conflict over slavery and its expansion? Or was it an interlude between two lengthy periods in which most white American citizens readily accepted slavery in the practices of political and economic union? While the editors proclaim the need to put the United States into an international context, the only chapter that does so is Edward B. Rugemer's on the relationship between Caribbean slave revolts and the gag rule. I wonder how Haitian independence, Spanish American emancipations, or the economic and social shifts of Brazil and Cuba—much like those appearing simultaneously along the southwestern cotton frontier of the United States—might have shaped the politics of North American slavery. But this is perhaps an agenda for the second edition. Until that is produced, this will remain an essential resource for every historian of the early U.S. republic.

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Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South. By Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. xviii, 232 pp. Cloth, $90.00. Paper, $26.99.)

Over the past half century, the brilliant, if contentious scholarship of Eugene D. Genovese

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