

JOHN CRAIG HAMMOND. *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West*. (Jeffersonian America.) Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press. 2007. Pp. xi, 245. \$35.00.

Thomas Jefferson famously described the Missouri Crisis (1819–1821) as a “firebell in the night,” but as John Craig Hammond suggests, the problem of slavery in the West had been smoldering since the 1780s. His book explores the contest over the status of slavery in the region that became Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Louisiana, and Missouri. Drawing from territorial and federal government records, western newspapers, and the correspondence of government officials and migrants, Hammond argues that the interplay between local and national politics explains why slavery was blocked in the Northwest Territories while it expanded in Louisiana and Missouri.

Key to the contest over slavery in the early national West was Article Six of the Northwest Ordinance, which prohibited slavery in the territory northwest of the Ohio River. Hammond does not dwell on the enactment of Article Six in 1787, which has been thoroughly analyzed by other scholars, but he does trace the struggle to preserve and enforce the prohibition in the territorial and state politics in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois over the next thirty years. Proslavery forces tried to roll back Article Six either through forthright attempts at repeal or, when those attempts met with opposition from Congress or popular resistance at the local level, through the subterfuge of indentured servitude. Among those who championed the proslavery forces was Indiana’s territorial governor William Henry Harrison, who had to do an abrupt about-face when he met with broad popular resistance to slavery.

Hammond shows that northwestern proslavery advocates faced an uphill battle wherever slavery emerged as a popular political issue. Indeed, democratic politics in the Old Northwest served as a crucible for antislavery ideas and feelings, hammered out and refined by ambitious politicians and newspaper editors. The antislavery coalition included evangelical abolitionists who regarded slavery as a sin and migrants from slaveholding states who were fleeing from its evil effects. They decried slavery as an aristocratic cancer on republican society, inimical to free labor and subversive of liberty. Article Six was their guiding star, or as Senator Benjamin Ruggles of Ohio put it, a “cloud by day and pillar of fire by night” (p. 158). Hammond finds surprisingly little racist prejudice in this phase of the northwestern antislavery movement; it seems to have been motivated by a genuine egalitarianism rather than a desire to exclude black people.

The balance of political power was different farther south. Article Six did not apply to the Southwest Territory, which became Tennessee, or to the Mississippi Territory, which became Mississippi and Alabama. After a vigorous debate, Congress allowed slavery with some restrictions in the Orleans Territory, the southernmost portion of the Louisiana Purchase, and essen-

tially punted on the status of slavery in Upper Louisiana so that local law authorizing slavery prevailed. Hammond argues that the decisive element in the failure of Congress to prohibit slavery in the southwestern territories was concern for the fragility of the Union. National policy makers recognized that the federal government was especially weak on the southwestern frontier, and they could not afford to alienate local slave-owning elites in the region.

This argument is a valuable addition to the historiography of early national state formation in the United States, which emphasizes the challenge of nation-building given the constraints of a relatively weak national-state apparatus. However, Hammond could have strengthened his point by offering a more robust analysis of the actual prospects of secessionism or irredentism in the southwestern and Louisiana Purchase territories. He offers no new evidence that slave-owning elites were really prepared to bolt if their concerns were not alleviated. What if an antislavery Congress had called their bluff? Where were they going to go?

The book under review also dovetails with recent scholarship resuscitating the antislavery reputation of the Democratic-Republican tendency in American politics. Challenging historians who emphasize Federalist antislavery, Hammond argues that it was northern Republicans who held the line against the expansion of slavery. In the Northwest, he argues, antislavery Republicans defended Article Six against erosion, and in Congress northern Republicans often took the lead in trying to block slavery’s expansion, as Representative James Tallmadge of New York did in the Missouri Crisis. Hammond’s argument raises the question of how southern Republicans like Jefferson managed to cast antislavery as a crypto-Federalist plot.

Hammond’s careful delineation of the emergent boundary between slavery and freedom in the western United States reminded me of a fragment from a little poem by William Blake that bears witness to the symbolic power of the Ohio River in the transatlantic imagination: “Tho born on the cheating banks of Thames / Tho his waters bathed my infant limbs / The Ohio shall wash his stains from me / I was born a slave but I go to be free.”

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L. DIANE BARNES. *Artisan Workers in the Upper South: Petersburg, Virginia 1820–1865*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 2008. Pp. xi, 253. \$37.50.

In this useful and nicely written monograph, L. Diane Barnes asserts that the Upper South had “a capitalist mentality and a strong and vibrant market economy” (p. 7). Its focus is Petersburg, Virginia, which emerged during the antebellum era as one of the key manufacturing centers in the slave states.

Located at the falls of the Appomattox River, Petersburg shared with nearby Richmond a location that combined both commercial and industrial potential.