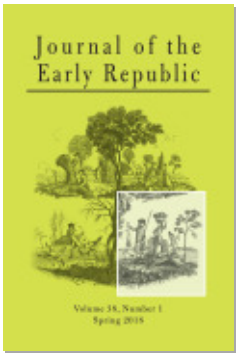
Bonds of Union: Religion, Race, and Politics in a Civil War Borderland by Bridget Ford (review)



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of the various possibilities of Hamilton's sense of identity, perhaps through that courtroom discussion of skin and hair or through the shifting stories Hamilton told about where he had been born. The portrait of Jeremiah Hamilton as a wealthy black man who turned his back on other African Americans feels too simple for an individual who was so complicated and in some ways remains mysterious.

The Prince of Darkness is an accomplishment of research, an engaging narrative, and an important exploration of an astonishing black life. It is a long-overlooked story that deepens our understanding of the power of racial prejudice and unencumbered capital accumulation in the early republic. In his introduction, White compares Hamilton's marginalization by his contemporaries to his invisibility among scholars, perhaps unable to see a black man who lived so far outside of well-worn stories of struggle and deprivation in the nineteenth century. Jeremiah G. Hamilton should lead us to think further not only about the possibilities of life in the early republic but also about the possibilities for the kinds of lives that historians might recover through our own creative maneuverings.

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Bonds of Union: Religion, Race, and Politics in a Civil War Borderland. By Bridget Ford. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016. Pp. 424. Cloth, $45.00.)

Reviewed by Jeffrey Thomas Perry

Examining the Ohio–Kentucky borderland from 1830 to 1865, Bridget Ford describes Americans' attempts to conceptualize and realize the "bonds of union" holding them together. But more specifically than "union," Ford is interested in the "imagined connections" that linked the disparate population of the Ohio Valley amidst sectional fervor and fracture (xviii). In three parts, she brings to life how Americans' lived experience in matters of faith, race, and politics checked divisive tendencies and helped secure the Union.

Ford begins with a survey of the Ohio Valley's booming religious landscape during the antebellum era. As Cincinnati and Louisville emerged as important economic and cultural hubs, Protestant churches flourished, establishing a range of missionary and educational associations. Their Catholic counterparts also witnessed institutional growth in the 1840s and 1850s alongside increased immigration of Germans and Irish. Protestants feared the influx of Catholics and warned of Papist designs to undermine republican institutions. In other instances, they turned to violence, setting city blocks ablaze or firing cannons into immigrant neighborhoods. Despite this friction, Ford asserts that especially in urban areas Protestants and Catholics grew to look quite similar. Seeking to retain or gain adherents, Catholics adopted the more personal, even revivalist speaking style that evangelists had perfected, while Protestants embraced medieval architectural styles virtually synonymous with Catholicism. Taking the edge off of doctrinal disputes, Ford concludes that these new rhetorical and architectural "styles of persuasion" "encouraged residents to lower their defenses" and "imagine bonds between unlike persons and things" (63).

In Part II, Ford directs her attention to race relations, asserting that the racial ideas nurtured, if not realized, in antebellum Ohio and Kentucky "might well be considered harbingers of national trends for the nineteenth century" (91). Though many in Louisville called for the colonization of free blacks, and despite the fact that a steady influx of free blacks and escaped slaves to Cincinnati had led to a series of race riots, violence, and a revival of Ohio's dormant Black Codes, Ford contends that blacks and whites in both cities "found it impossible to live without the assistance of the other in the competitive market economy of antebellum urban America" (121). The white bourgeoisie needed black menial labor: domestics, barbers, dressmakers—occupations housing some of the cities' top black wage earners. Free blacks, moreover, depended upon their white patrons for the protection of their property and other civil rights. Prominent black churches did not hesitate to form key connections with whites in their fight against colonization. North and south of the Ohio River, antislavery reformers—even more so than their eastern counterparts—praised the benefits of education and literacy for civic equality. By highlighting blacks' intellectual capacities and personal subjectivity, antislavery fiction writers allowed whites to grapple with the potential of a biracial society. Reformers' educational focus also

expanded public schooling opportunities for black children in Ohio and forged a closer connection between African Americans and the state. This focus on literacy, reading, and universal common schooling, Ford concludes, "helped to make enlightenment a bond of union at a pivotal moment" (200).

Part III looks to the Ohio Valley's role in the sectional controversy and Civil War. Although Cincinnati and Louisville served as important entrepôts for the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys, "blunting the force of northerners' and southerners' divergent interests through the mysterious workings of commerce," in the 1840s the cities' Protestant churches were at the forefront of the sectionalization of the religious landscape (203). While church-goers in Cincinnati were adopting a radical anti-slavery stance, their Kentucky counterparts spearheaded the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church–South. Baptists and Presbyterians also flocked to sectionally based denominations. Careful to illuminate the role of black church-goers in shaping the views and actions of whites, Ford argues that evangelicals in Ohio and Kentucky, by steering their "congregations into separate denominations and toward radically different positions on the morality of slavery," reinforced the sectional tensions growing in the country's political and legal systems (223). In the political realm, Ohio antislavery activists pushed for legislation to secure the state as a "safe haven" for blacks, and Kentucky lawmakers enshrined slavery in the 1849 state constitution (228). Over the next decade, however, as sectional tension intensified to secession then war, Kentucky remained within the Union due to the Lincoln Administration's forceful diplomacy and widespread constitutional–unionist sentiment articulated by prominent Louisville residents.

During the War, with Confederate troops just fifty miles from the Ohio River in late 1862, chaos reigned in Cincinnati and Louisville. Political dissension, mass arrests, and slaves fleeing to nearby Union camps led many to re-imagine and practice new forms of allegiance to the Union. Most notably this took place within relief organizations such as the U.S. Sanitary Commission, whose Sanitary Fair showcased blacks' achievements and enabled Ohioans to envision a post-war, biracial democracy. Though the Emancipation Proclamation rankled Kentucky slaveholders, Ford argues that Union advocates in Louisville pushed for the ideas of emancipation, black military service, and civic equality, believing they would bring peace and order. For organizations such as

the National Union Association and Louisville's Union Executive Committee, slavery engendered war while emancipation bonded the Union together.

Bonds of Union is a deeply researched story of lesser-known historical actors including the immensely successful black minister Henry Adams, Bishop John Purcell, and free black entrepreneurs such as the hairdresser Eliza Potter. It is an ambitious book that seeks to illuminate the connections rather than the fissures of the Civil War-era United States. Ford admits early on that this is a difficult quest, and at times she overlooks or downplays divisions within groups. For instance, while she acknowledges that the region witnessed much religious tension during the antebellum period, Protestants often appear as a unified block, despite continued sectarian strife and doctrinal schism (much of which had nothing to do with slavery) throughout the 1850s. Nonetheless, Ford's book contributes to the growing historical literature on the trans-Appalachian West during the Civil War era and will be of interest to scholars of American religion, race, and society in general.

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New Directions in Slavery Studies: Commodification, Community and Comparison. Edited by Jeff Forret and Christine E. Sears. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. Pp. 261. Cloth, $47.00.)

Reviewed by Emily West

This succinct collection of twelve essays seeks, as the title suggests, to highlight current scholarship in the field of slavery studies, dividing recent research (very conveniently for alliterative purposes) into three broad areas of "commodification," "the slave community," and "comparative slavery." Some sections are stronger than others, and the book does not quite come together as a whole. However, there is some strong scholarship here by well-respected authors in the field, and the collection also illustrates (perhaps unsurprisingly for a book dedicated to Peter Kolchin and written by many of his former students) the continuing relevance of comparative research to historians. It poses new ways in