

ON THE BOOKSHELF

“Beyond Freedom: Disrupting the History of Emancipation”

Edited by David W. Blight and Jim Downs
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What did emancipation mean in post-war America to ex-slaves and to whites in the North as well as the South? Scholarship is ongoing, and the historians whose contribute to this fascinating collection bring new insight.

Richard Newman introduces a now-unknown but once very influential New York anti-abolitionist named Dr. John Van Evrie, who posited that since blacks were lesser beings than whites that emancipation would be detrimental to laborers and society. Others, including many church societies, knew that the end of bondage for slaves needed to be accompanied by the uplift of blacks or nothing really changed. It meant not only the cessation of slavery but also black liberty, with all the privileges that entailed.

Susan O'Donovan and Brenda Stevenson both address the significance of the history and culture of four million people within slavery, and their intellectual and emotional preparation for freedom. One of slavery's most cruel effects were to destroy black families, cheapen sex, and make a sham of weddings. That's why after emancipation, that freedmen's weddings were such elaborate and joyful affairs.

Kate Masur investigates the difference between civic equality and social equality. The tension between the Ideal and the reality of race relations is not merely historical.

Justin Behrend tells of serious militia-type warfare between black and white militia post-Civil War. The 1876 guerilla raids in Jefferson County, Mississippi, wasn't as brutal as a pitched battle between two groups that involved hundreds of militiamen in Wilkinson County, Mississippi. Local wars broke out in North Carolina, Texas, Kentucky, South Carolina, and other parts of the south. The Florida panhandle saw the Jackson county war from 1869 to 1871. In the 1970s, white Texans resumed guerilla raids against Tejano settlements, and in northern Alabama, white Unionists fought against Confederate until 1870!

James Oakes points out that in 1860, the most determined abolition proponents still saw this as an institution under the authority of each state, NOT the federal government. However, if the slave states left the Union and war broke out, the fed *would* have the power to end slavery in those states, to supersede their authority. And that's what happened.

Four more essays look at the meaning of freedom, the situation of slave women and children during the war, post-emancipation terror, and the Freedmen's Bureau. These are contributed by Thavolia Glymph, Carole Emberton, Hannah Riosen, and editor Jim Downs.