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Matthew S. Weinert on Slavery and Emancipation edited by Rick Halpern and Enrico del Lago. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. 416pp.

Matthew S. Weinert
University of Denver

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Rick Halpern and Enrico Dal Lago's fourteen-chapter compilation of primary and secondary sources concerning the American experience with slavery begins with a 1619 letter written by Virginia tobacco planter John Rolfe—who married the legendary Pocahontas in 1614—describing the arrival of nineteen African slaves to the Jamestown colony, and ends with a September 1863 statement of “an anonymous colored man” lamenting “that the Collored population has got two [masters] a rebel master and a union master...one wants us to make Cotton and Sugar and they Sell it and keep the money the union masters wants us to fight the battles under white officers and they injoy both money and the union Black soldiers” (385). Betwixt the two, the volume reproduces documents such as a 1767 Virginia Gazette runaway slave ad; a 1726 description of “the patriarchal idea” (57); Lord Dunmore's 1775 proclamation freeing all Virginia slaves if they joined the British army against the American rebels; an 1857 defense of the benefits of slavery; various accounts of life as a slave, a plantation mistress, and a master; 1830s abolitionist documents; and Lincoln's 1858 “House Divided” speech and 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. Each chapter, which covers topics as diverse as (among others) colonial origins; slavery and the American Revolution; the growth of the cotton kingdom; plantation life and paternalism; slave resistance; abolitionism; the civil war; and emancipation, pairs three primary documents with a concluding article by a prominent historian. This makes for a lively and engaging conversation between fact and interpretation, text and reader.

The 1619 letter is interesting on three accounts. First, the incident couples what would become the first two acknowledged crimes of a universal nature: piracy and slave trading. Second, the arrival of slaves to the colony appears an accidental, not a planned affair. Two pirate ships, the Dutch Trier (or Trer as Rolfe spelled it) and the British Treasurer, seized the Portuguese slaver São João Bautista, here described as “probably...Spanish.” After the two lost one another in rough seas, the human cargo was transported to Jamestown where the Governor purchased the Africans for use as slave labor. Third, the irony of America's founding as a free land, that *novus or do saeculorum*, a new order of the ages, reveals itself in the stark coupling of the arrival of the slaves with the convening of the first representative assembly in North America—the Virginia Assembly.

Until the 1630s, legal statutes in Virginia made no distinction between African slaves and indentured white servants. But in 1630, owing to the sexual transgression of colonist Hugh Davis, the colonial government forbade white men from engaging in sexual relations with black women. This instigated a series of legal measures reproduced by Halpern and Dal Lago further entrenching peoples of African descent in slavery. The text, to my dismay but perhaps for reasons of documentary unavailability, does not mention the existence of slavery in the North. The Dutch introduced slavery in New Netherland in 1624 in conjunction with the settlement of what is today the southern tip of Manhattan. Slaveholding was initially restricted to public, that is, Dutch West India Company (WIC) ownership. After the construction of the original five-sided fort at New Amsterdam, and cultivation of land for crops, patrons or wealthy Dutchmen who were given large tracts of land, powers of local government, and a share in the lucrative fur-trade if they encouraged the settlement of fifty colonists in New Netherland, were permitted slaves who, much in contrast to the harsher system to the south, were allowed considerable freedom. Not a gesture toward human dignity, this “loose” slave system saved money for the WIC and patrons.

For obvious reasons, much of the book focuses on the antebellum South, but an additional chapter concerning the North would have provided a more complete picture of slavery in North America. Nevertheless, the book delights, especially with its chapters on slavery's colonial origins and the American Revolution. Very little attention is given to "the nearness of abolition in the American Revolution,"^[1] and thus the Lapern – Dal Lago volume is a welcome and sorely needed addition to the literature. The chapter excerpts Peter Kolchin's American Slavery, 1619 – 1877, a laudable and significant consideration of slavery as a serious social issue during the Revolutionary era, but it fails to mention the astonishing fact Gilbert and Hugh Thomas, author of The Slave Trade, highlight: 50,000 slaves fled bondage and joined the British army to secure their freedom. "Now," as Gilbert remarks, "that would have been an eighth of all black people then living in slavery in the United States and a tenth of all black people."^[2] Kolchin's excerpt does discuss the compelling—yet sadly defeated by the South Carolina legislature in early 1782—proposal by South Carolina Colonel John Laurens advocating the enrollment of "up to five thousand slaves in the Patriot army, with freedom promised for them at the war's end" (103).

Overall, Slavery and Emancipation is required reading. Its astute selection of source material, intelligent organization, and comprehensive account of slavery in the American South highlight the central importance of this social, political, and economic system that transformed American life and continues to affect us today. As the editors note in the introduction, America's second revolution, the Civil War, left unfinished business that "did not reach its next defining moment till the post-World War II civil rights movement...and the 1965 Civil Rights Act. As a process whereby Americans come to terms with race and attempt to make good the promises of their first revolution, it remains ongoing today" (8).

*Matthew S. Weinert, Josef Korbel School of International Studies University of Denver
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[1] I borrow the subtitle of Alan Gilbert's provocative and lively University Lecture at the University of Denver, 7 April 1999, entitled "Emancipation and Independence."

[2] The exact number of freed slaves is controversial. Gary Nash's 1990 *Race and Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990) mentions 100,000. See Gilbert, *Ibid.*