
R E V I E W S

The “Colored Hero” of Harper’s Ferry: John Anthony Copeland and the War against Slavery

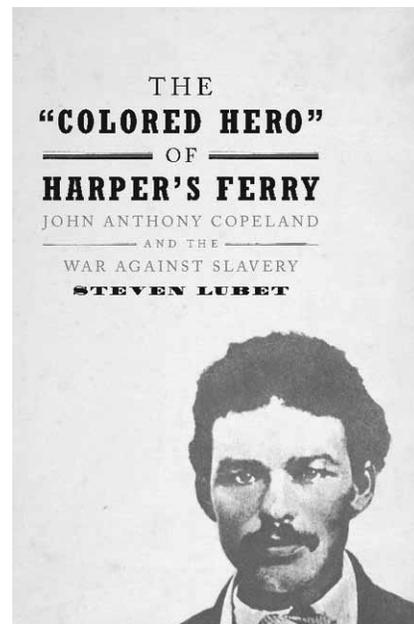
by Steven Lubet

xi + 272 pages, epilogue, notes, index, bibliography.
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, paper
\$27.99.

A book devoted to John Copeland, a free African American who fought alongside John Brown, is long overdue. Copeland was in his midtwenties when he joined Brown at Harpers Ferry. Arrested, tried, and condemned to death, Copeland was hanged just two months after the raid. In this thoroughly researched work, Steven Lubet attempts to bring him to life. Along the way, he offers a rich context of the history of Oberlin, Ohio, and of the life of free African Americans in the decades preceding the Civil War.

John Anthony Copeland was born in North Carolina in 1834. He was free, though his father had once been enslaved. Finding life increasingly precarious for free African Americans, Copeland’s family moved to the abolitionist enclave of Oberlin, Ohio, when he was nine. Though it was a welcoming (if not perfect) place, slavery remained a “constant presence” in the Copelands’ lives, all the more so after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act (p. 49). Lubet carefully traces Copeland’s antislavery involvement, noting that he likely crossed paths with the Boston fugitive Anthony Burns and that he participated in the Oberlin Anti-Slavery Society. In 1858 Copeland participated in the famous Oberlin rescue, and Lubet asserts that he was “precisely the right man” to spirit John Price away to Canada (p. 99).

Throughout the book, Lubet is challenged by a lack of direct evidence. For much of Copeland’s early life, Lubet is forced to build a context around his life rather than being able to precisely identify his motivations and feelings. Even in the case of the Oberlin rescue, Lubet is forced to concede that he cannot know for certain that Copeland accompanied Price to Canada, but he builds a strong case that Copeland did. Raider Aaron Stevens wrote an extraordinary number of letters to his family, to Annie Brown, and to others during his time at the Charles Town jail (now housed at the Massachusetts Historical Society); Copeland did no such thing. He did, though, pen a handful of poignant letters to his family. Lubet refers to these letters, but seeing as this is the rare instance in which we can access Copeland’s inner life and hear his explanation of his resort to arms, I might have liked to have the full letters included in the book. (They can be found at http://www.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/Copeland/copeland_letters.htm.) This criticism notwithstanding, Lubet has done a remarkable job of providing a detailed historical context of the time in which John Copeland and his second cousin Lewis



Leary (not his uncle, as many scholars have asserted) grew to manhood and decided to join John Brown.

Copeland and Leary arrived outside Harpers Ferry just days prior to the raid, apparently believing they were there to participate in a slave rescue along the lines of Brown’s Missouri raid and the Oberlin rescue. Leary died a terrible death during the course of the raid, while Copeland was captured and barely escaped lynching. He was put on trial, ably defended by George Sennott, who deftly used the Dred Scott decision to get the treason charge against Shields Green and Copeland dismissed. Nevertheless, Copeland was found guilty of the other charges and sentenced to death. His family was unable to reclaim his body; this was the case with many of the raiders, including Watson and Oliver Brown. Many of the bodies were later recovered, but not Copeland’s; he was taken to Winchester Medical School, which was later burned to the ground by the Union army.

The motivations and beliefs of John Brown have long been scrutinized. More interesting, I think, is what motivated twenty-one young men (twenty if one does not count the older Dangerfield Newby) to fight alongside him. In the days prior to the raid, Owen Brown and Aaron Stevens suspected that their lives were likely to end as a result of their involvement, and yet they went “with the old man,” as Shields Green famously told Frederick Douglass. Lubet has made a valiant attempt to recapture the story of another young raider; the lack of evidence means, however, that his reader walks away completely fascinated with Copeland but with unanswered questions about both him and his relationship with the fiery Brown.

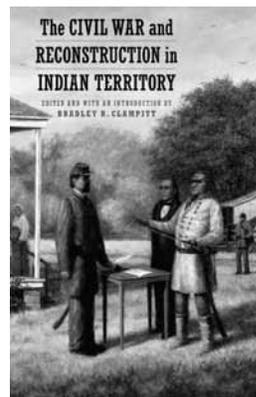
*Reviewed by Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz, assistant professor,
Eastern Illinois University, Charleston.*

The Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory

edited by Bradley R. Clampitt

vii + 192 pages, notes, index.

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015, paper
\$25.00.



In the past few years, historians have turned their attention to the consequences of the Civil War in the trans-Mississippi West. There, questions of land tenure, Native sovereignty, labor, and citizenship brought people into opposition. Yet one theater of the war and its aftermath seems to lack coverage—the Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma). Few large engagements occurred there; the territory did not boast important resources. Much like their neighbors in Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas, residents of Indian Territory spent much of the war fighting one another. *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory* is an effort to understand that conflict.

The backgrounds of the editor and the authors of the anthology's eight essays hint at a likely reason for the paucity of literature on the subject—the interest is largely regional. (All of the contributors save one are affiliated with Oklahoma- or North Texas-based institutions.) In a brief but cogent introduction, the editor hints at another explanation: the Civil War in Indian Territory was just as much about Native people as it was about North and South. The contributors' sensitive treatment of topics such as sovereignty, intertribal politics, and cultural practices makes clear that fluency in indigenous issues is crucial for anyone who wishes to talk about this part of the war.

Sovereignty, in fact, is the driving force behind the book. The contributors demonstrate that the war undercut Native sovereignty by exacerbating existing divisions and disagreements within the tribes. At the war's end, federal authorities distorted the indigenous peoples' support of the Confederacy—support that was never wholehearted, always complicated, and frequently pragmatic—as a pretext for nullifying existing treaties. When Anglo-American settlers were allowed to invade the territory after the war, their seizure of indigenous lands (with government approval) dealt another blow to the strength of Native nations. Clampitt asserts that self-interest and a desire to preserve their autonomy drove Native peoples to act as they did during the war; in the essays that follow, the contributors set out to prove this.

Richard B. McCaslin offers a short essay concerned with traditional military history—that is, battlefields and commanders. The war in Indian Territory was indeed complicated, but too many details (names, dates, events) make it difficult for the reader to follow the action. The author points out that Indians were hardly welcome in Confederate units and refers to divisions among Cherokees and Creeks but spends

little time discussing soldiers' motivations, which might have strengthened the essay.

Clarissa Confer's essay on the home front explores the damage done to Native, Anglo-American, and black communities. She explains that the chaotic wartime environment put pressure on people to discard traditions of hospitality, kinship-based loyalty, and other cultural practices specific to Native peoples. Amanda Cobb-Greetham's essay on the historical memory of Cherokee and Creek women offers a fitting counterpart to Confer's work on the home front. By quoting Native women's testimony at length, the author gives voice to the voiceless; pointing to Native memories of the Jacksonian-era removals, she also illuminates reasons for Indians' alliances with the Confederacy. F. Todd Smith offers an equally compelling essay on the Caddoes, Wichitas, Tonkawas, and Penateka Comanches, all of whom were subject to constant dislocations and forced moves thanks to Anglo-Americans' animosity toward Native peoples before and during the war. Smith amplifies the horrors faced by refugees and illuminates the complications of tribal political dynamics.

Other essays point to intratribal divisions (Brad Agnew), the legacy of Reconstruction (Christopher Bean), and the lives of freedpeople (Linda Reese). Bean's essay offers an intriguing discussion of Chickasaw and Choctaw resistance to freedpeople; in keeping with the theme of the anthology, he points out that sovereignty, and not mere bigotry, informed Native attitudes toward blacks. Reese does not shy away from the brutality of slavery in Indian nations; her essay is a model of balance and honesty. The final essay reads like a primer on historical reenactments and is thus very limited in its definition of public commemoration.

As a whole, the anthology could have benefited from better coordination; essays overlap at times, particularly in terms of federal plans for indigenous peoples after the war. The authors make much of the abandonment of Indian Territory by the Union but are slow to consider the relative weakness of the army in the West prior to 1860. In general, this book raises more questions than it answers. That being said, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory* is a welcome addition to scholarship on the sectional conflict in the American West.

Reviewed by Catharine R. Franklin, assistant professor of history, Texas Tech University, Lubbock.

Picturing Migrants: The Grapes of Wrath and New Deal Documentary Photography

by James R. Swensen

xi + 256 pages, illustrations, notes, index, bibliography.
Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015, cloth
\$34.95.

The iconic image of migrants moving from the dust storms of the Midwest to the agricultural fields of California in rattletrap trucks stuffed with children and household goods is an image that speaks of the Depression. In the early 1930s the numbers of migrants on the road escalated, thanks to the proliferation of the automobile. From 1935 to 1938 an estimated 350,000 to 400,000 migrants flooded into California. Farm refugees came from all over, but the greatest numbers came from the Midwest farming states of Kansas, Missouri, Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.

In 1985 I moved to a new job from the University of Oklahoma in Norman to the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. Moving with my two small children, I left my husband behind to sell the house. I piled everything into an old VW van, needing to bring enough items to survive in an unfurnished house for at least a month. But when my husband offered to tie a mattress on the top of the van, I put my foot down. There was no way I was traveling across the country to California with a mattress on top of a car with Oklahoma plates. Although I was a child of the 1960s, the image of the migrants of the Dust Bowl was strong in my mind. I felt a very personal connection as I read this book because, having worked as a librarian in Oklahoma and in the Central Valley of California, I know firsthand the strength of the people who built both states.

James Swensen's book *Picturing Migrants* brings the history of the Dust Bowl migrants into clear focus. Swensen describes how the photographs of the Farm Security Association (FSA) influenced John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, as Steinbeck relied heavily on FSA-collected sources to develop his ideas and narrative. Conversely, FSA administrators and photographers used the success of Steinbeck's book to promote the needs of migrants by telling the "Grapes of Wrath" story through photographs.

The large-format book provides ample room for the photographs scattered through the text. Together, text and images provide analysis of both the intent of the FSA photographers and the stories of their subjects. For example, although most of us know Dorothea Lange's work, especially *Migrant Mother*, the detailed histories of the other photographers and administrators of the FSA's Historical Section outlined in this book offer a wealth of new information.

Dorothea Lange and her economist husband, Paul S. Taylor, gave a voice and face to the migrants. Taylor and Lange's reports found their way to Roy Stryker, the head of the Historical

PICTURING MIGRANTS



*The Grapes of Wrath and
New Deal Documentary Photography*
JAMES R. SWENSEN

Section, and Stryker began to employ photographers to generate support of his program. His object was to show that the farmers had human dignity.

In California John Steinbeck was compiling material that included his own experience and interviews with migrants using FSA photographs. *Life* photographer Horace Bristol worked closely with Steinbeck on what was to be a photograph book with text, but Steinbeck pulled out of the project and turned to writing his novel *The Grapes of Wrath* instead. One can suspect that as a writer, Steinbeck did not want images to compete with the power of his words.

FSA photographer Russell Lee decided to create a photographic illustration, or "shooting script," of Steinbeck's novel (p. 62). As part of his documentation he found a family to represent the fictional Joads as they migrated to California. Lee also went to Sheridan County, Kansas, to take images of client farmers who were benefiting from the FSA program. Stryker was eager to take advantage of the novel's fame to further the needs and programs of his agency. He began an ambitious exhibition program. He also sent photographer Arthur Rothstein to California to document the improving conditions in the migrant-worker camps. The success of Steinbeck's book was further promoted by the film adaptation produced by Darryl F. Zanuck and directed by John Ford. The film drew not only on the novel but also on the FSA photographs, even to the extent of re-creating scenes from the images.

World War II finally brought an end to the Depression. People wanted to forget past hardship. But in the 1960s FSA photographers received renewed interest and credit for their impact on the fields of photojournalism and portraiture with images that speak to us of suffering, hard work, and family. This book is highly recommended for academics, libraries, and popular audiences for its historical analysis as well as its stunning photography, historical photojournalism, and artistic value.

Reviewed by Daryl Morrison, head, Special Collections, University of California, Davis.

Thomas Hart Benton: Discoveries and Interpretations

by Henry Adams

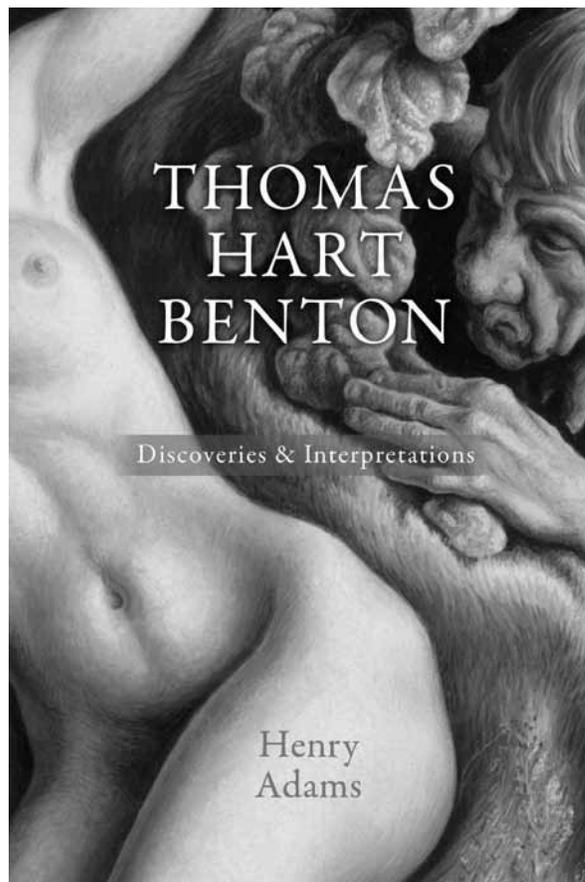
ix + 364 pages, illustrations, notes, index, bibliography.
Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2015, cloth
\$50.00.

According to Henry Adams, the artist Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri has gotten a bad rap. Adams successfully argues that Benton, described for decades as parochial, conservative, and a purveyor of a so-called Regionalist style that nostalgically valued rural, white America, was actually on the cutting edge of American modernism in the 1910s and 1920s. According to Adams, Benton was a leftist whose work pointed out the vitality of American life in its many guises. Adams also says Benton was tremendously influential for his student Jackson Pollock, the Abstract Expressionist painter whose subject matter was totally different from Benton's.

What turned the tide against Benton was, oddly enough, communism. By 1920 Benton had won recognition as an abstract painter. He had studied in Paris and been influenced by the work of the American Stanton McDonald Wright, the inventor of Synchronism, which combined Picasso's Cubism with the brilliant color of Matisse and the Fauves. Benton's version of Synchronism emphasizes the rhythmic movement of undulating forms throughout the canvas. Then, in the early 1920s, Benton began a large series of ambitious murals called *The American Historical Epic* that combined Synchronist form with American subject matter.

The American Historical Epic was not an uninterrupted paean to the creation and growth of the American nation but prominently emphasized some of US history's uglier aspects, such as slavery and the treatment of Native Americans. In fact, Benton in these years was very much associated with a growing group of American artists who called themselves socialists, or even communists. During the Depression this group of artists only became more prominent as its members used their art to portray the evils of capitalism. But Benton did not hew to the party line. Instead of always depicting downtrodden workers or proletariat heroes, Benton, who traveled the byways of America extensively in 1926, depicted the working class both as working hard and having fun. His less-than-orthodox approach publicly drew the ire of some communist artists, and the myth of Benton as a conservative reactionary was born. Benton, angered by this turn of events, returned to Kansas City in 1935, never again to regain his former prominence in the art world.

Benton's legacy, however, continued in the work of his students, including many African American students, and especially in the work of Jackson Pollock. Pollock studied with Benton and grew very close to him in the early 1930s; he remained in contact with the older artist until the end of Pollock's



short life. With a very different form of genius, Pollock, Adams argues, used Benton's compositional methods developed during the older artist's early experiments with Synchronism.

What is Benton's relevance for Kansas? His career clearly proves that great artists can come out of the Midwest. Moreover, his 1935–1936 controversial murals for the Missouri State Capitol, which depicted, among other scenes, a fur trader selling whiskey to an Indian, the outlaw Jesse James, and the corrupt Kansas City political boss Tom Pendergast, probably gave John Steuart Curry the courage to tackle equally vexed aspects of Kansas history in his controversial Kansas State Capitol murals begun in 1937. But neither Curry nor the Iowan Grant Wood, another Regionalist, seriously compares to Benton in terms of his contributions to American art.

If you read only one book on Thomas Hart Benton, read this one. It takes a balanced approach to Benton, refuting some recent claims that the Missourian was a racist who caricatured African Americans in his work. The book will give you an understanding of the full range of Benton's achievements; the political and social context of his work; and the history of his reputation in American art history, including recent scholarship on the artist.

Reviewed by Julie Myers, curator of collections and exhibitions, Mulvane Art Museum, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas.

Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe v. Wade

by Daniel K. Williams

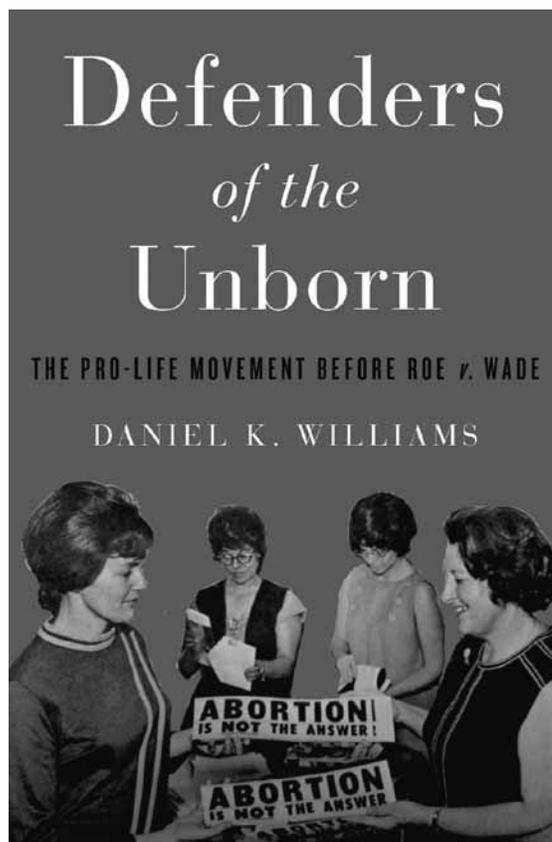
xxiv+336 pages, notes, bibliography, index.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, cloth \$29.95.

This is a superb book on a chapter of history that has, until now, largely eluded modern historians. The pro-life movement developed well before the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 and won some key political victories limiting state abortion laws before the court decision ended such progress and substantially changed the pro-life movement in America. Williams, a historian of the religious right and modern American politics, has produced a thoroughly researched and well-written chronicle of how pro-life Catholic Democrats fought the movement toward permissive abortion laws and how the pro-life position evolved to include not only Catholics but also evangelical Protestants by the end of the 1960s.

Williams's greatest contribution to the historiography of abortion politics in America is to recast the pro-life movement not as a backlash against feminism or the sexual revolution but rather as a movement shaped by its defense of the rights of the unborn. His argument that the antiabortion movement developed from concern over the rights of the unborn, rather than as a challenge to the rights of women to control their bodies and terminate pregnancies, stands the history of abortion politics on its head and significantly alters our understanding of the politics of abortion in America.

Initially, as Williams reveals, the pro-life movement was heavily Catholic, heavily male, and overwhelmingly Democratic. Many of the leading figures in the movement during the early 1960s were Catholic priests and Catholic obstetricians. Williams demonstrates that the development of an agenda for more-permissive abortion laws started with doctors, whereas Catholic opposition to permissive abortions was predicated on church teaching linking abortion to growing tolerance of birth control. Williams also shows that the church's thinking on these questions did not square with that of the majority of American Catholics, who favored individual choice for birth control and surprisingly grew to tolerate some abortion rights as well. The conflict between Protestant doctors and lawmakers, especially California legislator Laurence Beilenson (D), is well described in the initial chapter of the book, reflecting the problems the church had in making its position known when it was so heavily influenced by male clergy.

By the late 1960s, with the growth of feminism and of counterculture positions on sexuality pulsating through American culture, the pro-life movement found itself on the defensive, even as it began to widen its network of committed



activists. Many of these new activists were women. It was not until the aftermath of *Roe v. Wade* and the growth of the populist New Right in the 1970s that the pro-life movement eschewed its earlier party affiliations and became synonymous with the religious right and the third great awakening of Protestant evangelicalism. A number of activists, especially Paul Weyrich—himself a Melkite Catholic—helped cement the new coalition of conservative evangelicals with the still heavily Catholic pro-life movement.

The culture wars over the past forty years in American politics have consistently been explained as a phenomenon of backlash politics. Kansas has often been at the center of these debates. Williams shows how Kansas passed a permissive abortion law in 1969 and discusses how Kansan Bill Roy (D) won a seat in the U.S. Congress by running for election as a champion of abortion rights. Williams also tells the story of how activists nudged Kansas toward a pro-life position once the heavily evangelical Protestants in the state pushed to take the Republican Party back from pro-choice moderates. Williams's account of state and local and national figures in the abortion movement makes *Defenders of the Unborn* an excellent addition to the literature on abortion politics in America.

Reviewed by Gregory L. Schneider, professor of history, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.

1950 FRESHMAN FOOTBALL TEAM—*Back row:* Emmett Breen, coach; Bud Cole, line coach; Joe Blanchard, line coach; Jay Hanson, trainer. *Fourth row:* Gerald Cashman, Ted Weaver, Earl Meyer, Tom Gowing, Donald Wiss, Patrick Manning. *Third row:* Dean Peck, Tom O'Boyle, Harold Jackson, Gerald Meyer, Vernon Hamilton, Jim Neifert, Charles

Eubanks, Don Muder, Sam Vitale. *Second row:* Tommy Cobb, Veryl Switzer, Charles Farinella, Tony Durso, Paul Barber, J. D. Yancey, Ken Beringer, Jerry Grieco, Kenneth Gowdy. *Front row:* Don Postlethwaite, Jerry Garris, Ronald Clair, Bob Miller, Rex Wade, Eddie McMahon, Richard Moos, Kay Driver, Arlan Frerking.

