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## Slavery and Freedom in Texas: Stories from the Courtroom, 1821-1871 (book review)

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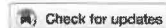
settlers can portray Native Americans both as embodying Anglo-Saxon freedoms and natural law, on the one hand, and on the other, as a tool by which those settlers can co-opt those virtues and eliminate the Natives themselves. In this case, Richards sees the rhetoric of white purity, including Natty Bumppo's, undermined by repeated suggestions of questionable ancestry and possible miscegenation. A similar kind of reversal takes place in the reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where Richards sees Stowe's well-known use of blackface tropes accompanied by instances of whiteface imitation such as Tom's portrait of a blackface George Washington: "Ironically, whereas whites imitated blacks by wearing blackface, Tom is imitating white culture by blackening George Washington" (p. 121). This kind of black resistance to the literal and figurative violence of minstrelsy, in turn, becomes central to the book's final chapter, which takes up a series of nineteenth-century novels by black Americans that counter the exaggerations of blackface caricature "with their own avenging distortions," including Martin Delany's *Blake*, which answers *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by relocating black nationalism from Liberia to the United States (p. 164).

Richards's method sometimes relies on an expansive sense of "performance." He writes, for example, that "by writing the black body [Washington] Irving engages in a blackface performance, replete with the desires, fears, disguises, and racial burlesque that crystallize in minstrelsy" (p. 73). To point out the similarities between blackface performance and such modes of writing is powerful and persuasive; to say that this kind of writing is blackface performance (to move from analogy to identity) is to unnecessarily minimize or even erase the significance of embodiment and audience. At other times, Richards attends to the importance of medium more precisely, as when he contends that for Cooper's character Natty Bumppo "[m]etaphoric redface and blackface allow the hunter to turn Native, turn black, and then back again to white, registering the racial privilege of these performance modes, which served as mediums for white personal and national self-discovery" (p. 105). To an important degree, the metaphor is the message.

And the message of *Imitation Nation* is compelling. Writing at the meeting point of historicist study of cross-racial performance and postcolonial theory, Richards finds ways to use the recent intensity and depth of argumentation about the signification of blackface minstrelsy to his advantage. Synthesizing the existing scholarship in clear and engaging prose, Richards takes up the contradictory impulses of blackface, redface, and whiteface. In *Imitation Nation*, the seeming contradictions resolve into paradoxical but forceful statements of cultural logic. In both historical and literary studies, this book deserves a wide and attentive academic audience.

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**Slavery and Freedom in Texas: Stories from the Courtroom, 1821–1871**, by Jason A. Gillmer, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017, Pp. 266, \$84.95 (hbk), \$27.95 (pbk), ISBN 9780820351339, ISBN 9780820351636

*Slavery and Freedom in Texas* is a remarkable study of the ways in which issues of color, race, class, and social customs generated contradictions between the law and ideology of slavery and the lived experience. These contradictions occasionally led whites to react not to buttress

the code of slavery and white supremacy, but to petition for exceptions to that code to aid or protect the persons of color known to them. Author Jason Gillmer has unearthed poignant, well-told stories that add substantially to the legal history of Texas and the wider history of American slavery.

Gillmer looks in detail at five Texas cases, most reflecting the borderlands of the law of slavery. Gillmer demonstrates that when stereotypes of race, color, and class, often reflected in the written law, were discordant with local knowledge of whites of the persons of color, the latter often prevailed over the former. The first case, discussed in both the Introduction and Conclusion, concerns whether a Choctaw named George Gaines was the owner of a woman named Ann. Ann possessed a much lighter skin color than Gaines. Gillmer notes the strength of the evidence that Ann was a slave, as she was the daughter and granddaughter of women who were both slaves. Even so, two juries in Central Texas found her "free because she looked white" (p. 178). Chapter One concerns the post-Civil War litigation of the estate of John Clark, a white man who lived for three decades with a woman named Sobrina, with whom Clark had several children before he died intestate in 1861. Clark bought Sobrina in the early 1830s, when Texas was a part of Mexico and slavery was unlawful. Sobrina's status as a slave or free woman, and as a common law wife or kept woman, determined whether their children inherited their father's large estate. The result in favor of the children may have been a high point in Reconstruction Texas. Chapter Two assesses how class differences among white Texans affected lawsuits involving a slave's loss of value. An overseer shot a slave for resisting the commands of the former, and the slave's owner both discharged the overseer without paying him his contractual salary and sued for loss of the value of the slave.

The third chapter provides an intriguing history of the Ashworth and related families. They were called "Redbones," free people of color (tri-racial), some of whom settled in Southeast Texas before the Texas Revolution. Gillmer notes that several free men of color served honorably in the Revolutionary Army. After gaining its independence, Texans designated all free persons of color a "most obnoxious and dangerous population," and ordered them to leave absent consent from Congress to remain (p. 104). Despite this, the "Redbones" were several times exempted from Texas's draconian laws. Gillmer perceptively notes that this ideology was "based on perceptions rather than on actual experience" (p. 105). Gillmer then details the end of this coexistence as race-based stereotypes edged out older local knowledge. Chapter Four is another story of a wealthy white man and his long-time intimate partner and slave. David Webster left most of his extensive estate to his slave, Betsy Webster. David also freed Betsy by his will, seemingly contrary to Texas law. Again, local knowledge of Betsy's character in Galveston appears more relevant than formal law, though her lawyers deserve credit for winding the case around said law.

In each of these cases the author offers a postscript reminding the reader that obtaining a legal judgment is not a path to happiness or comfort, and that local knowledge could only do so much, as post-Civil War racism was usually triumphant. He also helpfully includes one or more maps of the areas in which each of these cases arises, and several photographs of the better-known Texans who played some role in them. What Gillmer notes so trenchantly in his text is also demonstrated by what is absent from his book: no photographs are found of the slaves or the free persons of color who are the central figures in *Slavery and Freedom in Texas*. Thus, no photograph exists of Ann, the "white" woman held in slavery by George Gaines, or of the children of John Clark, the Ashworths, or of Betsy Webster.

I have just a few quibbles. The number of persons involved in the Ashworth story makes it difficult to keep straight names and events. And Gillmer twice uses "flaunt" when he means "flout." These should not detract from the major accomplishment achieved here, though. Gillmer has done exceptional work in bringing the stories of these lawsuits to life. More

importantly, he has given the reader, as much as is possible, the story of the lives of the ordinary Texans, slave and free, whose lives were entwined in the Texas legal system.

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**Giant's Causeway: Frederick Douglass's Irish Odyssey and the Making of an American Visionary**, by Tom Chaffin, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014, Pp. 365, \$29.95 (hbk), ISBN 9780813936109

In 1845, seven years after gaining his freedom and weeks after publishing his famous autobiography, Frederick Douglass set off for a long speaking tour of Ireland and Great Britain. In this book Tom Chaffin aims, by means of close attention to primary sources and rich contextual details, to demonstrate that this journey transformed Douglass "from activist foot soldier to moral visionary" (p. xv). While Chaffin succeeds on the whole, the chapters on Ireland work better than the rest of the book in advancing this argument.

Chaffin's strong passion for the subjects of Douglass and Irish history serves the narrative well in the early chapters. The resulting detail and documentary grounding provide a window into the significant impact on Douglass of seemingly small events and interactions. Especially powerful are the chapters exploring the reactions of Douglass and others to the segregationist policy of the British ship on which he sailed to and from Liverpool in 1845 and 1847. Chaffin also deftly weaves together Douglass' concerns with those of many different actors hosting him in his travels. Douglass arrived at a complex and vital moment in Irish history, in which Daniel O'Connell was still leading agitation for repeal of the Union with Great Britain, temperance reformers led by Father Theobald Mathew had great momentum, denominational strife still roiled Ireland, and the onset of the Great Famine raised the stakes of debates surrounding repealing the Corn Laws. Frederick Douglass faced pressure from his hosts and especially his audiences to engage with these issues. But he knew that wandering into these minefields "would have divided and reduced in size the audiences that Douglass was seeking to reach" with his abolitionist message (p. 54). Chaffin's careful chronological narrative shows how it was only after some initial missteps that Douglass learned the discipline necessary to eschew contentious religious and imperial questions.

It was fortunate for Douglass that temperance was a less divisive issue, for he had no inclination to dodge it. On the contrary, not only was he a teetotaling believer in the cause but engaging in temperance advocacy also "accelerated Douglass's transformation from ... a teller of his own life story into a commentator on contemporary issues" (p. 4). Before leaving the United States he had chafed against white abolitionists' demand that he "repeat the same old story month after month" rather than branching out to other topics or even to other aspects of the antislavery struggle (p. 11). Douglass in Ireland thus embraced the "abundant opportunities to speak on" temperance, "a subject often denied to him in America" (p. 38).

Tom Chaffin also makes it clear how observing and contemplating Irish poverty expanded the breadth of Douglass' moral vision. He was so disturbed by the material suffering he witnessed in Ireland that he confided in William Lloyd Garrison that "I should be ashamed to lift up my voice against American slavery, but that I know the cause of humanity is one the