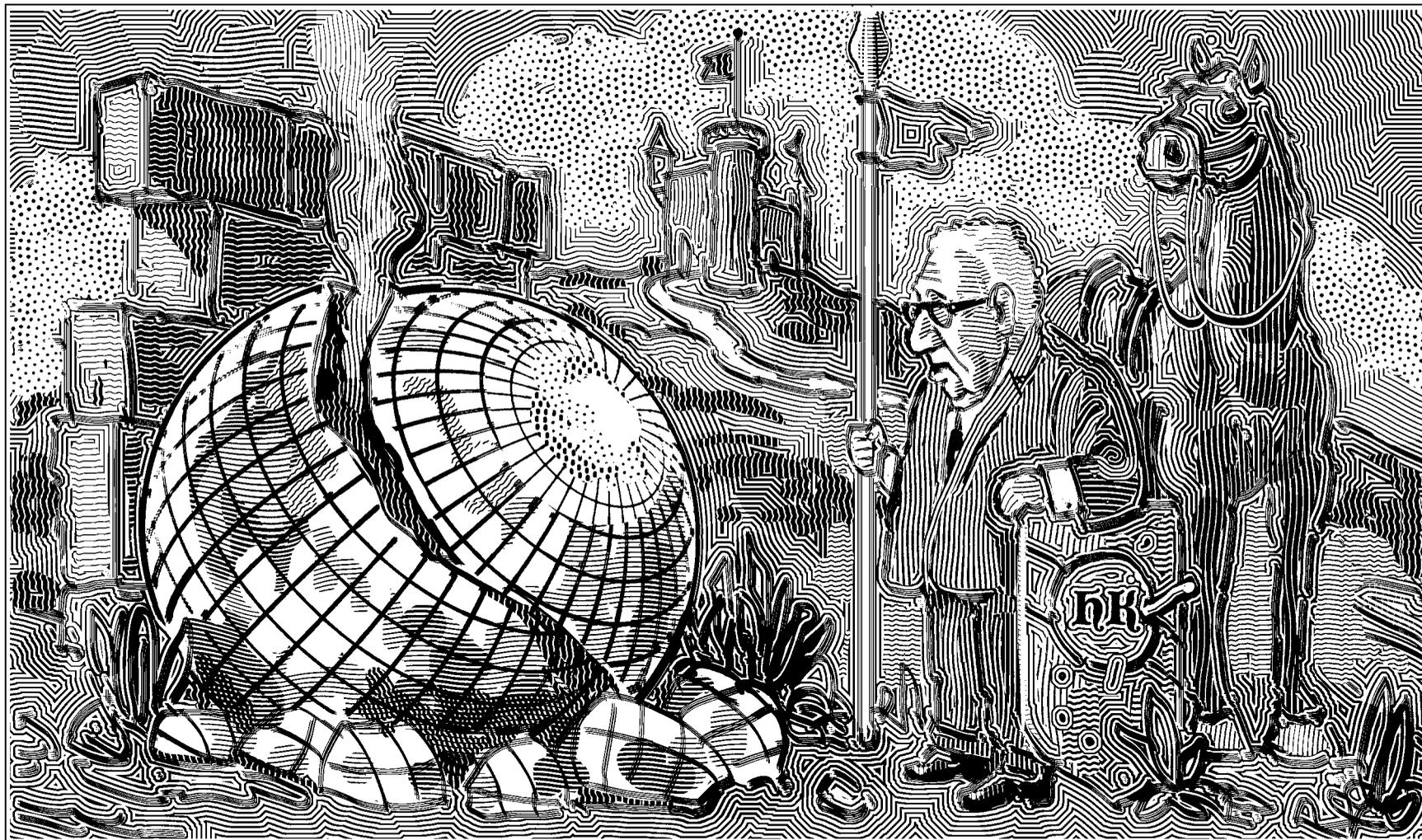


VOLUME XV, NUMBER 2, SPRING 2015

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*A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship*



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Book Review by Allen C. Guelzo

## SLAVERY ALL THE WAY DOWN

*The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, by Edward E. Baptist.  
Basic Books, 498 pages, \$35



IT MIGHT SEEM STRANGE, GIVEN HOW much has been written on American slavery just over the past half-century, that yet another book, in its title, could propose that *The Half Has Never Been Told*. But the half that Cornell historian Edward Baptist believes has “never been told” is revealed in the subtitle: *Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*. The half that remains to be told is about capitalism’s complicity in slave labor—at which point we realize that this is not a book about slavery after all; it is a teeming, visceral condemnation of capitalism, and it is of a piece with a “new history” of capitalism which, according to Brown University’s Seth Rockman, sees “southern slaveholders as architects of a capitalist system predicated on commodity production, entrepreneurship, technological innovation, and lengthy chains of trans-Atlantic finance.” The fundamental argument of this new history is that slaveholding and capitalism, which were once seen as antithetical—so antithetical, in fact, that Charles Beard and the Progressive historians built a scholarly empire around the idea that

the Civil War was waged so that Northern capitalism could destroy its Southern agrarian rival—are not really opposed at all. “The antebellum South’s economic structures and mentalities” are seen instead as “converging with those of the North,” writes historian Scott Marler, so that “the South and North were more alike than different prior to the Civil War.” Capitalism, in Orwellian juxtaposition, has become slavery.

THE CENTERPIECE OF BAPTIST’S indictment of capitalism is a single, remorseless fact: cotton was the great engine of antebellum America’s rise to economic success. Cotton, he writes, “drove U.S. expansion, enabling the young country to grow from a narrow coastal belt into a vast, powerful nation with the fastest-growing economy in the world.” The Industrial Revolution was, in large measure, a revolution in the production of textiles in Great Britain; that production depended on the import of inexpensive, high-quality cotton, and no place on the face of the earth fulfilled that

demand as readily as the American South. Especially once Eli Whitney’s “cotton gin” simplified the separation of the cotton boll from its seeds, Southern cotton production soared, from 36 million pounds in 1800, to 480 million pounds in 1835, then to 1.92 billion pounds by 1860, so that Southern cotton exports constituted 72% of all world cotton exports. By 1860, Southern cotton constituted 57% of all American exports. Compared to Northern grain agriculture, which exported only 5% of its total crop, Southern cotton plantations shipped 75% of their cotton abroad. But more than merely filling plantation owners’ coffers, the profitability of cotton fueled two other developments. First, it firmly cemented into place the use of slave labor as a production force. Second, it drew into its orbit a supporting cast of government and finance as its collaborators. Brokers and bankers serviced the transport and sale of slave-produced cotton; the U.S. government provided credit in the form of cheap land sales in the Mississippi Valley frontier; and slaves themselves were



furnished by internal export from the worn-out agricultural lands of the upper South to the new cotton lands from which the federal government had ruthlessly evicted their Creek, Choctaw, Cherokee, and Seminole inhabitants. "An increasingly efficient market" thus blindly and willfully created what Baptist calls "a nexus of cotton, slaves, and credit." And it was very much a capitalist nexus, as "enslaver-generals took land from Indians, enslaver-politicians convinced Congress to let slavery expand, and enslaver-entrepreneurs created new ways to finance and transport and commodify 'hands.'"

Nor did this new cotton empire resemble any benign Kentucky home. The passion for cotton profits drove slaveholders to the extreme limits of violence and expropriation. "Enslaved African Americans were the world's most efficient producers of cotton"—not because of any invisible hand, but because of the all-too-visible whip, which "was as important to making cotton grow as sunshine and rain." Each slave was capable of producing 5 or 6 bales (between 450 and 500 pounds, worth about \$360). We should, Baptist argues, abandon the idea that slavery was unproductive; but we should not leap from there to assume that its productivity was based on a nice regard for the capital investment slaveholders had made in their slaves. Slaveowners had no worry about the consequences of working their slaves to death, since more slaves could always be supplied relatively cheaply. "We should call torture by its name," Baptist insists, and torture thus "extracted an amount of innovation virtually equal in numerical measure to all the mechanical ingenuity in all the textile mills in the Western world."

IT IS WITH THAT SENTENCE THAT BAPTIST unloads what I suspect is his real indictment, against capitalism and industry as a whole, since for him, all capitalist production is "systematized torture," which was "crucial...to the industrial revolution, and thus to the birth of the modern world." Critics of slavery might like to bleat that coercion was inherently inferior to free wage labor, but Baptist will have none of it. Plantations are, simultaneously, engines of efficient production and "slave labor camps," even (borrowing Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's metaphor) an "archipelago of slave labor camps, a literal organism of economic production." And what they were continues to make us what we are. "Slavery's expansion was the driving force in U.S. history between the framing of the Constitution and the be-

ginning of the Civil War," and in the process, it permanently (and unjustly) created wealth for whites and poverty for blacks. Moreover, the pattern of systematic expropriation established by capitalism was continued after slavery's death in the form of "scientific management, the stretch-out, management studies," as well as in "anti-Semitism, the extermination of native peoples around the world, brutal forms of colonialism, and the exclusion of immigrants." Like the little old lady in Stephen Hawking's story, who believed that the earth rested on the back of a turtle and that "it's turtles all the way down," for Edward Baptist, capitalism is slavery, and it's slavery all the way down.

It becomes, then, a good question why, if slavery was the summation of everything that capitalism worshipped, it permitted slavery to be destroyed in America in a monstrous civil war from 1861 to 1865. Baptist's explanation of the Civil War is as creative as his indictment of capitalism—because slavery unwisely turned on its host. (This is an inversion of the argument formulated by Eric Williams in 1944 to explain West Indian emancipation: slave labor was simply no longer as profitable for the capitalists as it had once been, so they cut their losses through emancipation.)

THE CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL center of *The Half Has Never Been Told* is the Mississippi Valley between 1830 and 1860, because it is in those years that the cotton rocket goes wildly up, and then wildly down again. Andrew Jackson's destruction of the Second Bank of the United States unleashed a flood of cheap credit from state banks and from European bankers, which allowed slaveowners to borrow at 8% and enjoy gross profits of 30%. No wonder, then, that production of cotton soared from 732,000 bales in 1832 to 1.5 million bales by 1837 (although it should be said that Baptist's numbers are far from reliable, compared with the tables in volume one of the *Historical Statistics of the United States*, J.D.B. DeBow's 1852 *The Industrial Resources, Etc., of the Southern and Western States*—see page 148—or John Downes's *United States Almanac or Complete Ephemeris for the Year 1844*—see pages 171-172). The cotton glut, however, drove prices down, which in turn caught lenders short, and by 1839 the cotton economy was in free fall. In its struggle to reclaim profitability, Southern slaveholders demanded more and more land to turn into cotton fields, and repudiated more and more of their debts to Northern bankers. North-

ern capitalists balked. Having made their fortunes from cotton already, they began to fear that placing all their bets on cotton was a mistake, and so Northerners increasingly withdrew from their collaboration with slave capitalism. This, in turn, created the political tension between North and South that triggered the Civil War. Game, set, match. Beard and Williams were right, after all.

BUT THIS IS WHERE THE WHEELS BEGIN to come off Baptist's overall strategy, which is to teach us that capitalism, having given us slavery, is thus shown to be the root of all evil. For one thing, he defines capitalism very narrowly—as a system of production—while ignoring the singular fact that slavery existed quite independently as a system of production far earlier, and for far longer, than capitalism. The Portuguese and Spanish empires of the 16th century were built on slave labor; but no one has ever accused them of being capitalistic. The production of textile products in the 19th century may have been capitalistic, but the production of cotton by slave labor was as ancient as any traditional society's deployment of compulsion to ensure agricultural production. It was "the superior quality of United States cotton" that "always enables it to command a higher price," not the labor that produced it. Nor does Baptist offer us any way of seeing how the slaveowners' totalitarian tactics were responsible for the systems of factory labor discipline ("scientific management") which emerged in the North. It was, if anything, Northern manufacturers' constant wail before the Civil War that labor costs easily dwarfed capital investment. This, in turn, is why almost no one saw anything capitalistic about slavery, including the people who were managing it. Daniel Harvey Hill described the South he had defended as a Confederate general in terms which would have made Adam Smith cringe. "The South... built no great cities, for they had no trade," Hill wrote, "they developed no mines and erected no factories, for their laborers were better at field work than at anything else. The Southern men of property went to the country and became feudal lords of black retainers."

What foreign observers noticed first about the South was not a bustling, entrepreneurial spirit, but its lassitude and poverty. "For the first time in the States," wrote William Howard Russell of the *London Times* as his train crossed through into North Carolina in 1861, "I noticed barefooted people" and "poor broken-down shanties or loghuts" filled with "paleface...tawdry and ragged" women and "yellow, seedy-looking" men. Even



Northerners felt that, moving through the South, they were visiting a foreign country. In 1856, Frederick Law Olmsted felt moved by his “saddle-trip” to Texas to offer a telling contrast between “two recent immigrants, one in Texas, the other in the young free State of Iowa.” The Texan wants to build a house, and buys a slave; the Iowan “advertises in the newspapers, that he is ready to pay better wages than carpenters can get in the older settlements.” The Texan “tries to get on” with his slave, but slave-labor can only build him an “ill-furnished plantation workshop,” while the Iowan is able to begin investing money in “merchants, mechanics, or manufacturers who are disposed to establish themselves near him.” The Texan can only purchase the bare basics: “salt, sugar, molasses, tobacco, clothing, medicines, hoes and plow-iron,” and probably couldn’t purchase more if he wanted to because there is no capital available for “systems of public conveyance.” The Texan is always in debt, and can only survive by growing cotton, which in turn demands the purchase of more slaves, which produces more debt, which requires more cotton-planting. But worse than debt, slavery molds an authoritarian frame of mind. Slavery “educates, or draws out, and strengthens...to an inordinate degree, the natural lust of authority” in a slaveowner, and makes him “prefer to accept much smaller profits, much greater inconveniences...rather than submit to what he considers to be the insolence of a laborer, who...demands a greater consideration for his personal dignity” than a slave. “The longings of South Carolina are essentially monarchical rather than republican,” wrote Illinois reporter Sidney Andrews, after touring the South in 1865, and “everywhere” there is “a rigid spirit of caste.” Nor did Southerners themselves try to make it appear otherwise; if anything they dwelt in what they imagined was a feudal economy, not a modern one. James Walker, a Charleston lawyer, went so far as to insist that “ours is in truth not so much slavery as feudality.”

**N**OR DOES BAPTIST PAY MUCH ATTENTION to what the slaveholding South created as an economy during the brief time it imagined itself an independent nation, since the narrative portion of his book effectively ends in 1860. Far from dreaming capitalist dreams, Southerners (despite their attacks on federal authority) never hesitated to endorse state-sponsored experimental farms, state-sponsored agricultural apprenticeships, state institutes for training farmers, and even a “Southern Central Agricultural

College.” Jurist-philosopher Francis Lieber thought it ironic that “almost all, perhaps actually all, the most prominent extremists on the State-Rights side...have been at the same time strongly inclined toward centralization and consolidation of power within their respective States.” And it showed in the way Southern state governments funded their railroads, which garnered state funding at twice the rate Northern rail lines enjoyed—not because they represented state support for capitalism but because the rail lines afforded speedier avenues for moving state militia to quell slave revolts. Despite Southerners’ incessant complaints about Northern tariffs, the Confederacy imposed tariffs from 5-25%, and imposed formidable bureaucratic restraints on the movement of goods within the Confederacy—revenue locks on freight cars, permits for inland transportation, authorizations for Confederate revenue officers to inspect passenger baggage. Even to ride a train, passengers had to obtain government passes.

### If slavery was everything that capitalism worshipped, why did it permit slavery to be destroyed in a monstrous civil war?

It may be saying too much to claim that the Confederacy was the first modern example of “state socialism” or “war socialism.” But it is no exaggeration at all to say that the Confederacy behaved more like a pre-capitalist, feudal state than a modern one. The Confederate government nationalized Southern war industries, resorted to draconian regulations for curtailing profits, and, in the end, created that frequent monument to anti-capitalist government policies, a thriving black market. The last thing plantation elites wanted to see was any emergence of a powerful industrial middle class in the South, and both the Confederacy and the Jim Crow South that followed it ensured that this was one threat they would have little to worry about.

**B**APTIST’S 1860 CUT-OFF ALSO MEANS the book does very little to explain why or how the supposedly integrated connections between Northern investors and Southern planters somehow came so dramati-

cally and expensively undone—or whether they were ever there at all. “The legislation of the South under the old system” offered “little inducement...to capital, foreign or domestic,” wrote former Confederate general Thomas Logan, and the numbers show much less of a connection between Northern economic activity and Southern cotton production than Baptist implies. Cotton may have been America’s biggest export item by *volume*, but in 1856-57 New York overshadowed every other state in the Union in the *value* of exports of “produce”—and almost twice as much as all the slave states combined (except for Louisiana)—which does not exactly look as though flows of investment capital were a North-South street. Similarly, New York banks possessed capital almost equal to that of all 15 slave states, and with three times the amount of specie in their vaults; it doesn’t look as though Northern capitalists were nearly as heavy investors in the South as Baptist supposes. Foreign capital was being injected into the American economy, but those investments came in the form of foreign purchases of bonds for canal-building, railroads, mining, manufacturing, and utilities. Seven major foreign-owned banks with close ties to the cotton trade (like the Bank of Mobile) were headquartered in the slave South (three of them in New Orleans alone). But that was out of 985 banks operating in the United States in the 1850s.

Far from capitalism and slavery being tied hand to hand, Abraham Lincoln believed that capitalism was always what set the North apart from the South. “Men who are industrious, and sober, and honest in the pursuit of their own interests should after a while accumulate capital, and after that should be allowed to enjoy it in peace, and also if they should choose when they have accumulated it to use it to save themselves from actual labor and hire other people to labor for them is right,” Lincoln said in 1859. This is what leads to “[a]dvancement” and “improvement in condition.” Slavery, by contrast, is the “effort of some to shift their share of the burthen” of labor “on to the shoulders of others.” Slavery was not merely about racial coercion; it was a system that “scorned labour” as slave-work and appealed to those “who looked upon work as vulgar and ungentlemanly.” And if we are to judge by the voices of Northerners at the close of the war, the imposition of capitalism on a South to which it had been a stranger was the first item on the Reconstruction agenda. There must, decided Union Army general Carl Schurz, be “[a] great social revolution” in the

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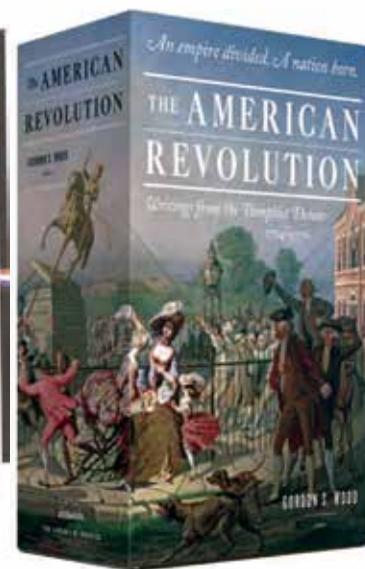
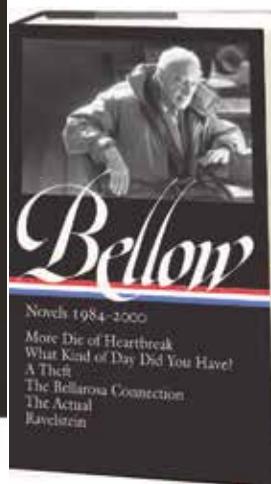
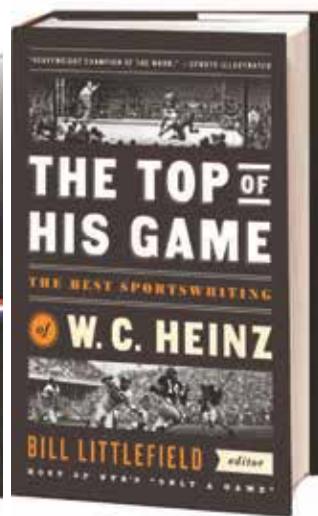
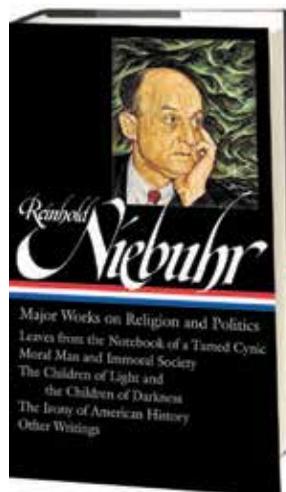
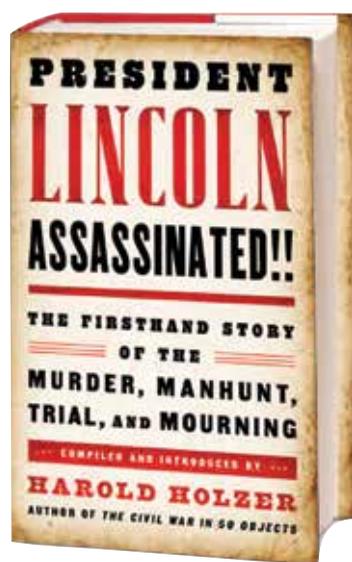
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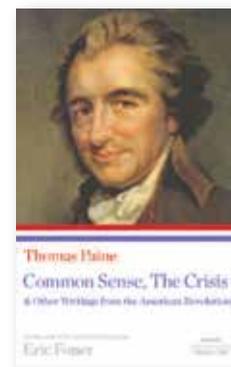
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South which will begin with “the abolition of slavery and the substitution for it of free-labor society.” Reconstruction would not be a revulsion *against* capitalism; it would be a revolution, and indeed, it would be the last revolutionary offensive undertaken in the war. “The whole fabric of southern society must be changed,” declared Radical Republican Thaddeus Stevens, “Heretofore, it had more the features of aristocracy than of democracy.... If the South is ever to be made a safe republic, let her lands be cultivated by the toil of the owners or the free labor of intelligent citizens.”

**T**HE SLAVEHOLDING SOUTH PARTICIPATED in a transatlantic capitalist system. But it was *in* it, rather than *of* it. Like the old Soviet Union, it could trade with the capitalist world even while wishing its destruction. Southerners like William Henry Trescot understood this quite well. Trescot was at great pains to distinguish between “those who produce cotton and those who manufacture it,” since they represented “two individual and inconsistent systems.” It certainly did not acquire a middle-class culture, just as 19th-century Germany created

a system of advanced industry while keeping its highly repressive forms of agricultural labor and feudal mentality. The Prussian nobility might not have been slaveholders *per se*, but in defending their estates, they shared vast common ground with slaveowners in the South by denying natural rights—“demagogic and egotistical ideas of equality,” as Trescot put it—and saw themselves as the deliverers of Germany from “selfish expediency.” The slaveholder, wrote one Northern correspondent for the *Atlantic Monthly*, had all the characteristics of Junker feudalism: “a...cast of character which was founded mainly on family distinction, social culture, exemption from toil, and command over the lives and fortunes of his underlings.” He was “careless of his own money, he was inclined to be careless in all pecuniary affairs, often running heavily into debt and showing habitual negligence in settling small accounts”; and “degenerated into bravoos and spend-thrifts.” Honor, not capital, was the slaveholder’s polestar. “The passing of high words and blows, canings, cowhidings, and so on, all terminated by the drawing of knives or pistols” in just the same way they ended for Otto von Bismarck as a young aristocrat at

Göttingen—in 25 duels—and duels, became every-day occurrences in the South, and especially in South Carolina and perhaps Mississippi.”

In that respect, the Civil War was a conflict between what political sociologist Barrington Moore called “a progressive capitalism and a reactionary agrarian society based on slavery,” the successor to the “medieval townsmen beginning the revolt against their feudal overlords.” Of course, if we define *capitalism* solely as, in Adam Smith’s terms, a natural inclination to truck and barter, then it has no more “progressive” meaning than the natural flow of a river; whether it serves to protect the life of a people or serves to enslave them is of no consequence to our estimate of rivers. But it evidently does make a difference to Edward Baptist, who can hardly wait to conflate the tortures of slaves with the labor of an automotive assembly-line, and, for an entirely different set of reasons, it should make a difference to us, as well.

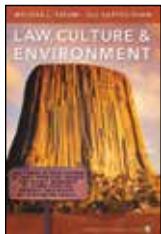
*Allen C. Guelzo is the Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War Era at Gettysburg College, and the author, most recently, of Gettysburg: The Last Invasion (Alfred A. Knopf).*

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### Law, Culture & Environment

Melissa L. Tatum, University of Arizona College of Law  
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2014, 290 pp, ISBN 978-1-59460-752-3, paper, \$38.00



negotiation and litigation, and the strategies used by the various stakeholders in their quest for success.

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Amy D. Ronner, St. Thomas University School of Law

2015, 322 pp, ISBN 978-1-61163-417-4, jacketed hardback, \$60.00

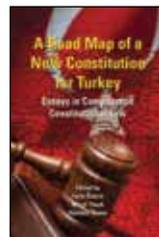
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### A Road Map of a New Constitution for Turkey

*Essays in Comparative Constitutional Law*

Fatih Öztürk, Faculty of Law, Istanbul University, editor  
Murat Yanık, Faculty of Law, Istanbul University, editor  
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2014, 390 pp, ISBN 978-1-61163-649-9, paper, \$50.00



In the last twenty years, the making of constitutions has gained considerable momentum in countries that have transitioned away from colonialist or communist regimes. Even though this new constitutionalism movement has been received favorably for the most part, some political scientists and lawyers approach these activities with suspicion and skepticism. The authors of this book hope that the new civil constitution being prepared in Turkey will be constructed based on a model that allows for public input both during and after the constitution-making period.

### From Witches to Crack Moms

*Women, Drug Law, and Policy*

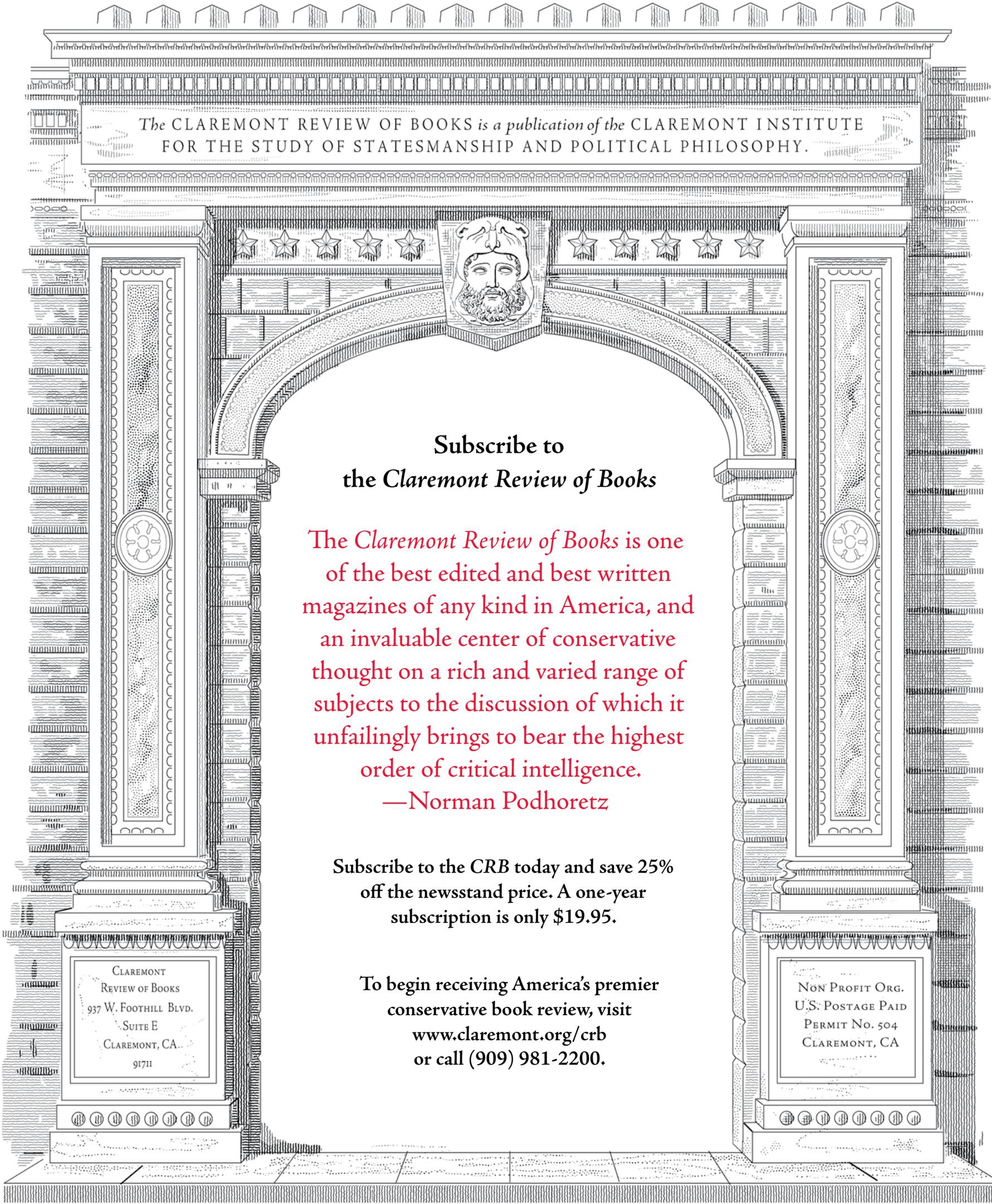
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