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Laura Edwards, *A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Nation of Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, £50.00 hardback, £19.99 paperback). Pp. 212. ISBN 978 1 1070 0879 3, 978 1 1074 0134 1.

Martin Ruef, *Between Slavery and Capitalism: The Legacy of Emancipation in the American South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014, £24.95 hardback, £19.95 paperback). Pp. 285. ISBN 978 0 6911 6277 5, 978 0 6911 7359 7.

Even though the Civil War and its aftermath remain a rather inward-looking period of American history, some of the best, most searching studies of the period have been written by scholars who have looked past the traditional story to chart new paths, further afield. These two works push readers to consider two very different dimensions of the period and the result offers some arresting conclusions about the war and its aftershocks.

Reading Laura Edwards's slim study of the legal history of the war and Reconstruction, one is reminded of just how much a creative scholar can add to historical debate. In a book that is a long way from traditional studies of case law and Constitutional digression, what Edwards looks to show are the many ways in which the war and emancipation fundamentally rewired the relationship between people and government. She argues that the war altered the compact between the American government and citizens, turning ideas about due process and the rights of property holders on their head, while at the same time the Confederate government massively enlarged its authority to protect slaveholders and their right to human property. The changes wrought on both sides of the battlefield created a vacuum, within which a new legal order emerged: one in which a victorious American national government loomed large, with all of the panoply of state powers at its disposal to build a new nation on new foundations. In keeping with the new work on the subject, Edwards makes it plain that the Civil War marked a fundamental break in the history of the period. There is little talk of reintegration or the dressing of an older republic in modern clothes. While she is clear that the architects of Reconstruction had their blind spots, she argues that at least with the postwar Constitutional amendments, Republicans looked to create "legal equality by denying the past – a past in which legal jurisdictions, at all levels, had allowed for African Americans' systematic exploitation on the basis of race" (124). While she dwells on the problems inherent in this legal revolution – particularly in a fascinating fourth chapter that looks at those groups on the jurisdictional edges of a postwar state – she is clear that the legal apparatus created by the war and emancipation would set the stage for a century's worth of struggle. By placing the lived experience of the law and the powers of the national state at the centre of the analytical frame, Edwards has written a bold book that scholars will have to reckon with.

While there is not much that conceptually unites Laura Edwards's work with that of Martin Ruef, both authors set the period against the broadest of canvases. In Ruef's case, a background in organizational psychology leads him to examine how much emancipation altered the southern economy. What lies at the heart of the book is a venerable question for cliometricians: to what extent did plantation agriculture dissolve in the postwar period? As Ruef has it, it was the uncertainty brought about by seismic change that threatened the lasting prosperity of former slaves and the region in which

they lived. Placed under the pressure brought about by a scarcity of capital, the fluctuations of labour supply and demand, and the broader changes of an industrializing national economy, plantation agriculture could not endure. Moreover, African Americans struggled in this changing system to attain and preserve their economic power, leaving both them and white southerners unable to chart a transition to modern capitalism. While Ruef is devoted to the idea of placing the lived experience of emancipation at the forefront, there is a tension in the text between the author's commitments and the data mining that yields analysis on everything from the southern labour market to farm acreage and more. At times, too, the breadth of the many case studies that the author takes up makes it hard to tie all of the threads of his analysis together. Historians will find a good deal to think about here, though within chapters there is a scattered quality to the analysis that gets in the way of a coherent argument.

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