

based on slavery and a social system based on the subordination of women.

Sylvia D. Hoffert *recently retired from Texas A & M University and is the author of three books on the American women's rights movement.*

Making Slavery History: Abolitionism and the Politics of Memory in Massachusetts. By Margot Minardi. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. vii, 228. \$49.95.)

In this smart, creative, and provocative account, Margot Minardi resists the historiographical impulse to ground the black American experience in the African Diaspora. Looking inward rather than out, she presents a series of close readings dedicated to understanding how black and white residents of post-Revolutionary Massachusetts came both to remember and forget the history of slavery in the Bay State. One should not, however, confuse Minardi's preference for the micro over the macro with historical myopia; the questions she raises go to the heart of the discipline itself.

Minardi mines the end of slavery in Massachusetts to query the meaning of history: who makes it? Who makes it into it? And how is it made? In this respect, her book meditates more on the historical memory of slavery than on the institution. The definition of history she provides—both “what happened” and “that which is said to have happened”—speaks to her primary objective: to reveal “how people in a certain place and time thought about who makes history . . . and how their answers to that question shaped their ideas about what sort of future to call into being” (p. 5). With this goal in mind, she acknowledges that she is not “seeking to peel away the layers of historical memory in order to reveal a hidden history; rather, [she is] interested in how those layers themselves came to contribute to historical transformation” (p. 6). In *Making Slavery History*, the narratives themselves have agency; stories more than individuals function as main characters.

Those seeking to understand the inner workings of slavery and emancipation could find fault with this approach. Words like “freedom” and “enslavement” often appear more as terms to be deconstructed than as experiences to be understood. Even her definition of what it means to be emancipated relates more to narrative than to experience. Minardi defines the “emancipated person” as one who could “enact historical agency” and ensure that future generations “recognized, narrated, and commemorated” his or her experience

(p. 9). Elevating text over context and the rhetorical over the personal also works at times to obscure the sadness and anger that infused antebellum black life.

Like Joanne Pope Melish, Minardi asks how New England came to forget its entanglement with slavery. But where Melish privileges Rhode Island, Minardi focuses on Massachusetts. Minardi supports her selection by pointing to the Bay State's enthusiasm for historical preservation and commemoration and to its residents' willingness to "project their [own] past" onto that of their nation (p. 7). Although Massachusetts complements her discussion of historical memory, it is less effective as a model for emancipation in New England. In most of the region, particularly Connecticut and Rhode Island, slavery's demise took decades to play out. Massachusetts represents the only state with a sizable enslaved population to forgo gradual emancipation. In this respect, it is more of an outlier than an archetype. Minardi acknowledges this difference in a footnote, but one wishes she had engaged with it more fully in the text.

Yet Minardi's uncommon talent for merging social history and memory studies is also what makes *Making Slavery History* so refreshing and such fun to read. Chapters encircle and build upon one another, each offering a unique and innovative approach to the craft and art of historical inquiry. Most impressive is her ability to wring meaning from varied sources: visual, material, archival, and literary. Her opening chapter, for example, utilizes epistolary and narrative texts to show how Jeremy Belknap, Theodore Lyman, and other early historians fused the end of slavery to an invented Revolutionary tradition premised on universal freedom. In so doing, they helped both to erase the memory of slavery in Massachusetts and to inspire Bay State residents to embrace abolition.

Subsequent chapters trace the memory of emancipation and the American Revolution into the nineteenth century. Minardi spirits her readers through the streets of Boston, lingering at commemorative celebrations and rallies for fugitive slaves. She lands on Bunker Hill, gazing up at Massachusetts' monument to its hypocrisy and its patriotism. She mines Revolutionary War pension records to show how Bay State residents came to forget black people's military service. She deconstructs visual images of Crispus Attucks to explain how and why black people's claim to citizenship and American identity became so tenuous. She sits beside Phillis Wheatley's writing desk, now housed at the Massachusetts Historical Society, and reveals how white New Englanders privileged her identity as a poet to forget her time in

slavery. She recounts how black activists like William Cooper Nell, William J. Watkins, and Martin Delany reclaimed their Revolutionary heritage to rewrite American history.

As these brief summaries suggest, *Making Slavery History* represents one of those rare books that can be savored in part and devoured whole. Scholars of the early republic, slavery, and the African American experience will no doubt find much to appreciate. But this book will appeal to generalists as well. Akin to such staples of the undergraduate curriculum as Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre* (1984) and Simon Schama's *Dead Certainties* (1992), Minardi's narrative masters the art of using small stories to tell large tales. She not only reveals who makes history and how history gets made, she reminds readers why the stories the living choose to tell about the dead really matter at all.

Hilary Moss is Associate Professor of History and Black Studies at Amherst College and the author of *SCHOOLING CITIZENS: THE STRUGGLE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATION IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).

New Essays on Phillis Wheatley. Edited by John C. Shields and Eric Lamore. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011. Pp. xxvi, 406. \$60.00.)

Taking a cue from editor John C. Shields's prior work, the first six essays of *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley* examine poems that point to classical forms or mythological figures, most particularly from Virgil, that the poet used as models or images. The second set of eight essays is balanced between further historical and cultural research that provides explanations for some of Wheatley's poetics as well as readings of her poetry from modern theoretical perspectives. Scholarship on Wheatley's life and poetry since Williams H. Robinson's *Critical Essays on Phillis Wheatley* appeared in 1982 has illuminated both these approaches to Wheatley's verse, but this is the first collection of essays in thirty years to pursue those two avenues.

Several essays are very good. Karen Lerner Dovell's "The Interaction of the Classical Traditions of Literature and Politics in the Work of Phillis Wheatley" gives a useful, if broad, survey of how the classical tradition informed the political rhetoric of Revolutionary-era America. Furthermore, it considers how several of Wheatley's political poems problematize "commerce" as a classical political virtue in light of the fact that she was herself a product of commerce. Equally enlightening