little of the scholarship from after 2014. While Helg cannot be faulted for failing to cite literature that came out while the book was in production, it is important to note that the study of slavery is one of the most popular and dynamic fields in the discipline today. Reading the work, one cannot help but wonder how the book would have been enriched by Ann Twinam’s *Purchasing Whiteness* (2015), about how free people of color in Spanish America bought certificates (*gracias al sacar*) that granted them the privilege of being white, or Brooke Newman’s *A Dark Inheritance* (2018), about free people of color and racial classification in colonial Jamaica. These are two works among dozens that have appeared in the past five years. Scholars looking for an up-to-date overview of the literature will be disappointed. Instead, the book’s value lies in defining self-liberation as an analytical framework.

Overall, despite its shortcomings, *Slave No More* is a monumental work of historical synthesis. This reviewer has long been a proponent of understanding slavery from Atlantic and hemispheric perspectives, which helps to avoid parochial and exceptional interpretations—two approaches that have plagued the study of slavery in New England, for example—of slave systems. In that regard, Helg certainly delivers and scholars of slavery will find her work useful for framing their own.


This fine book offers fresh and valuable insights into the experience of the transient poor in the antebellum Mid-Atlantic. O’Brassill-Kulfan argues that local and state governments tried to prevent indigent transients (the “vagrants” and “vagabonds” of the title) from becoming citizens of their communities by criminalizing their mobility and punishing them with incarceration and forced removal. Magistrates believed that “limiting the movement of their bodies” (159) would deter the transient poor from intruding into their communities.
For their part, struggling poor people moved about in meaningful patterns as a survival strategy, and official interference undermined their ability to eke out a living. This deeply researched and carefully written book rests on an exceptionally strong base of documentary evidence, which the author presents in thoughtful analysis, appealing narratives, and illuminating statistics. She engages fellow historians rigorously and establishes her place in the stream of scholarship on poverty and transience in American history.

O’Brassill-Kulfan develops her argument in six topical chapters. The first three chapters are especially excellent. First, she shows that, during the early expansion of capitalism and industrialization, vagrancy and settlement laws were designed to prevent transient poor people from becoming legal citizens of the community to which they had moved in search of work or aid. In the second chapter, she traces the geographic patterns of movement created by poor indigents, revealing that most circulated “between major capital cities and small market towns” (56). Here she also constructs a profile of the people in her study, noting the shift in identity from international arrivals to regional migrants, and clarifying that the transient poor were largely family groups, women, and people of color. In the third chapter, she shows how forced removal kept poor people on the move, but not in a direction of their own choosing. The business of stopping and redirecting the transient poor overwhelmed magistrates and institutions, especially in Philadelphia and New York City.

The three remaining chapters explore poverty and transience in the context of labor status, judiciary discretion, and disease. Chapter 4 presents evidence that paupers, vagrants, and slaves were perceived to have a “shared identity” because of their presumed experience with bondage (110). Chapter 5 shows how officials— influenced by public opinion—exercised considerable discretion in administering vagrancy law, leaving the transient poor highly vulnerable to “public justice” (116) from the moment of arrest to the moment of release from prison or almshouse. Chapter 6 focuses on the 1832 cholera epidemic in Philadelphia’s Arch Street jail, which experienced an appallingly high mortality rate of one in three. This case study illustrates the wider “pathologization of poverty” (137) in the antebellum era. Vagrants, the author finds, were deemed to be the principal causes of disease and they suffered even more than convicts, from whom they were separated during incarceration.

While O’Brassill-Kulfan’s overall argument is solid, a few threads of analysis do not square satisfactorily with the evidence. In
chapter 4, she argues that vagrancy was a “racial characteristic” (87) and that vagrant policy was “racially charged” (101). But the evidence she provides—the experience of indentured servitude for many white transients and the experience of enslavement for many transients of color—suggests instead that official concern was prompted more by a presumption that transients of any race or ethnicity were on the run from a master with a legal claim to their labor. In chapter 5, the author suggests significant potential for the transient poor to push back against authorities; she describes a handful of incidents in which indigents denied their vagrancy or idleness and asserted their industriousness. However, the small sample size makes it impossible to tell the real extent to which transient poor people countered official interference.

The range and depth of O’Brassill-Kulfan’s primary research is astonishing. Her extensive evidentiary base includes hundreds of interviews with the transient poor, prison and almshouse registers, legal statutes, newspaper commentaries, and much more. Her clear and careful prose, which frequently incorporates thoughtful quotations from the sources, makes her writing accessible to a wide audience, and those who dig into the nearly fifty pages of endnotes will find themselves well-rewarded with a fascinating tour of the archives by an accomplished historian.

O’Brassill-Kulfan is equally assiduous in talking to scholars. Her robust engagement of the secondary literature highlights and encourages conversation among historians of class, poverty, transience, capitalism, labor, inequality, and more. Much of this discussion is packed into the endnotes, some of which are historiographic essays in their own right. She is especially successful in showing that the conversation on poverty and transience in early America benefits significantly from a longer and wider perspective: chronologically, into the nineteenth century; geographically, out of New England and into the Mid-Atlantic.

A few quibbles. The title lays claim to more geographic and chronological territory than the book actually delivers. The author investigates not the whole “Republic” but the Mid-Atlantic, a region defined only in an endnote (177) and at times conflated vaguely with “the Northeast” (23, 60). As the text and notes reveal, the archival materials come largely from New York City and Philadelphia, putting the project in the field of urban history, a context that is not developed. Similarly, the term “Early American Republic” in the title suggests the story will begin in the 1790s. However, the author’s
primary sources date to the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s, an era she quite rightly calls “antebellum” in the text. I also question the author’s use of two terms associated with critical theory. She asserts that the transient poor “comprised a subaltern class” (2, 6, 180), but she does not develop this idea or situate her study within the field of postcolonial studies, where “subaltern” is most widely used. She also characterizes the transient poor as “stateless” (10), but does not pursue the implication that these people had no national identity in the modern sense of the term.

Vagrants and Vagabonds is a rewarding book. Professor O’Brassill-Kulfan’s commitment to wide archival research, excellent writing, and robust scholarly engagement make her work a pleasure to read and a model of good historical method.

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Late in Colonial Revivals Lindsay DiCuirci uses six verbs to describe Washington Irving’s approach to then-newly-available archival materials in his writing of Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus (1828): “he preserved and transformed them, he exploited and mined them, he cultivated and curated them” (156). Preservation, transformation, exploitation, and curation might well describe the range of approaches to the archive taken by all of the editors and publishers DiCuirci analyzes.

DiCuirci opens her study with a discussion of the preservation impulse; nineteenth-century antiquarians feared that the colonial past was being lost and sought to recover it through reprinting key texts. Moreover, they linked preservation of these texts with preservation of the nation itself, though ironically the mostly seventeenth-century books and manuscripts on which they pinned these hopes were by nationality British rather than American.

Although she writes of uncovering “the accumulation of meaning that followed the colonial book into the nineteenth century” (5),