

beyond the standard focus on the British or Spanish Empires, the book highlights the actions and strategies of the indigenous people in the face of European encroachment around the world. *Native Claims* challenges historians of Indigenous–newcomer relations to reconsider their most fundamental assumptions about indigenous peoples, their law, resistance, claims, and the very nature of Indigenous–newcomer encounter.

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Lea VanderVelde, *Redemption Songs: Suing for Freedom before Dred Scott*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 320. \$29.95 cloth (ISBN: 9780199927296).

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The case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* has long occupied a defining place in histories of race and rights in the antebellum United States. Begun as a freedom suit seeking the liberty of Scott and his family, the case has been relied upon to explain the history of citizenship, the exacerbation of sectional conflict, and the nature of high court jurisprudence in the era before the Civil War. Today, the literature on this provocative and often reviled case is so extensive that we might wonder if there is anything new to be said. Lea VanderVelde's *Redemption Songs* demonstrates that there certainly is.

*Redemption Songs* fits well into a trend that we can term “thinking beyond *Dred Scott*.” What happens when historians of slavery, race, and law undertake research that extends beyond that case's characters, narrative, doctrine, and reception? One answer lies in the freedom suits that archivists have identified in the very same St. Louis courthouse where Dred Scott was tried. Between 1814 and 1860, as VanderVelde's bibliography chronicles, dozens of other enslaved people also sued for their liberty. *Dred Scott*, we are reminded, was but one contest over slavery and freedom in antebellum Missouri. More so than in high court proceedings, it was in the local court house of this border state city that the power of slaveholders and the parameters of law were put on trial.

Readers will recognize in *Redemption Songs* an approach to explaining legal culture that relies upon an analysis of local courthouse records. Pioneered by legal historians such as Laura Edwards, Ariela Gross, and Dylan Penningroth, this method is premised on the significance of the claims-making of slaves and freed people. Those often said to have been at the margins of law were at the heart of its meaning, logics, and vernacular

understandings. Decentering landmark cases, this approach demonstrates the degree to which “law” was produced out of intimate contests that moved between the courthouse and the social world. VanderVelde returns to *Dred Scott*’s origins as a local dispute, one that can be better understood by situating it among the dozens of other such cases in St. Louis. Here, the law of slavery and freedom is told as a history of contestation and human agency rather than of doctrine.

VanderVelde is at her best when she is transforming shards of evidence into narrative. Readers of *Redemption Songs* are treated to twelve new and highly developed case studies. The themes of survival, gender, risk, calculation, the frontier, life history, and the nuts and bolts of antebellum legal culture show how these stories are tied to one another, and how they connect with freedom suits in other locales. They begin with local courthouse records: case files still tied with fading red tape. We only learn their full significance because of VanderVelde’s insistence on leaving no stone unturned. This legal history relies as much upon newspapers, family papers, census returns, and pension files as it does upon the artifacts of the courthouse. Here, VanderVelde exercises the same sense of archival tenacity that characterized her earlier work on Mrs. Dred (Harriet) Scott. The results are layered, dynamic stories that bring to light the grievances that explain why enslaved people turned to the courts.

VanderVelde’s narrative approach will leave some readers eager to read more into the analytic work on freedom suits in St. Louis and elsewhere. In this sense, *Redemption Songs* is an important complement to studies of New Orleans by the late Judith Kelleher Schafer, and forthcoming work on St. Louis by Kelly Kennington. There remain some unanswered questions. How should we understand the relative numbers of freedom suits in St. Louis over the first half of the nineteenth century? From a high of 107 in the 1830s to a low of only 26 in the 1850s, what were the structural frameworks that encouraged freedom suits in some periods more so than in others? Most provocative for legal historians may be VanderVelde’s assertion that the purpose of law “is to protect the weak from the strong” (18). Historians have explained the law of slavery as a reflection of numerous and competing interests and points of view, but rarely have they concluded that it originated in concerns about the well-being of those who were enslaved.

Were antebellum freedom suits the redemption songs of slaves? For nineteenth century Americans, this phrase would have brought to mind Christian redemption, with the song being the equivalent of prayer. For twenty-first century readers, the phrase might evoke Bob Marley’s circa 1979 song of the same name. The tone of Marley’s ballad is a mix of guarded hope and brutal resignation. In her *Redemption Songs*, Lea VanderVelde offers us yet another

meaning for this phrase. Her songs, the freedoms suits of slaves, are the embodiment of optimism, survival, and even triumph.

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Michael Todd Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014. Pp. 344. \$29.95 cloth (ISBN: 0801453267).  
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In *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis*, Michael Todd Landis fills a gap in the literature of the Democratic Party during the late 1840s and 1850s. Few historians, he contends, have unraveled the conundrum of why Northern Democrats worked so diligently in the late antebellum period to rid the party of antislavery members. Scholars have largely homogenized Democratic politicians and, in so doing, they have failed to fully appreciate the political allegiances forged between Northern and Southern party members. To remedy the tendency in the literature to elide “Democrat” with “Southern Slave Power”—or the propensity to ignore Northern Democrats’ distinctiveness altogether—Landis situates Northern Democrats at the center of his analysis of late antebellum party politics in America.

By interrogating the ways in which Northern members of the Democratic Party worked to prove their loyalty to Southern Democrats, Landis examines the Democratic Party’s demise as the slavery question destroyed it from the outside in. He argues that Northern Democrats worked diligently in the 1850s to expunge party members with any antislavery inclinations. To establish Northern Democrats’ proslavery bona fides, Landis shifts focus from “great men” exemplified by Kentucky’s Henry Clay, to less well-known doughfaces such as William Richardson of Illinois and William English of Indiana. In making this shift, he shows the extent of Northern Democratic adherence to proslavery doctrines during crises such as the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854, and the fraudulent passage of the Lecompton Constitution in 1857.

Landis begins by discussing how Northern Democrats—led by senators Stephen Douglas of Illinois, Daniel Dickinson of New York, and Jesse Bright of Indiana—made crucial political moves, which ensured that the Compromise of 1850, a series of laws the most controversial of which was the Fugitive Slave Law, would be passed. Northern Democrats’ contributions to this proslavery legislative platform during the late 1840s included backroom