

includes an informative introduction and ends with some questions for closer reading of the text. The question of "How Did American Slavery Begin?" begs others that speak to "the black beginnings of America's unique society."

The first section on the beginnings of American slavery illustrates the pretentiousness of such an approach. Ira Berlin's 1996 essay "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," reprinted in its entirety from the *William and Mary Quarterly*, comprises 45 of the 47 pages devoted to the topic. The attempt to engage students in an open discussion and to guide them with focus questions takes up two pages, perhaps not even requiring a knowledgeable scholar like Countryman to miss an afternoon's teatime. Of the 150 plus pages of text and commentary, less than ten percent even attempts to concoct background information and context for students.

The essays in *How Did American Slavery Begin?*, written by such notables as Winthrop Jordan and Edmund Morgan, embody some of the best writing and thinking on the subject of early American slavery, but, because of that, they also are among the best known, thus easily accessible in journals, reprints, and as parts of edited collections. Frankly, I'd rather have students read them in professional journals and scholarly monographs, all the while allowing them to engage in the research work of the profession as well as in the curiosity of surrounding context and content. Of course, I'd also like them to read the original documents first and to understand the debate from its origins. That's as open and as engaging as it gets. As anyone who has ever taught history courses understands, the one who always gets the most out of any class is the teacher. Why? They have done the intellectual work necessary for learning. There are few shortcuts to learning but many pretensions, especially if understanding the outcome is considered more important than the process. If, as Edmund Morgan maintains, slavery continues to be the "Big American Crime" of its past, then scholars who profit from it under pretensions of helping poor students engage in its debate surely must be guilty of a smaller academic tort.

The University of North Carolina at Asheville

Milton Ready

Edward Countryman, ed. *What Did the Constitution Mean to Early Americans?* Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. Pp. xii, 169. Paper, \$11.95; ISBN 0-312-18262-7. Cloth, \$35.00; ISBN 0-312-21821-4.

This book is a collection of five essays plus an introduction in which the editor provides the historical context and traces the changes in historians' approaches to the Constitution.

Probably Isaac Kramnick's "The 'Great National Discussion': The Discourse of Politics in 1787" is too sophisticated for most undergraduates both in concept and language. Understanding the interplay of the four "languages" in which the Framers thought—"the languages of republicanism, of Lockean liberalism, of work-ethic Protestantism, and of state-centered theories of power and sovereignty"—is probably beyond all but the best undergraduates, and when they run into such a phrase as "one exclusive or even hegemonic paradigm" or "the power-centered paradigm's euphemisms for power," they might give up.

In his excellent "The Federalist Reaction to Shays's Rebellion," Stephen E. Patterson shows that Charles A. Beard was right in arguing that many of the supporters of the Constitution were motivated by economics. Long before Shays's Rebellion, the commercial and propertied interests wanted a strong central government to stifle the unrest of the less fortunate. Merchants wanted federal regulation of trade to block British competition and to encourage the American carrying trade. Artisans also wanted to eliminate the competition of British goods. Holders of public securities needed a government that could redeem them. Shays's Rebellion, which many of the Federalists welcomed, was the "dramatic demonstration of the need for a stronger national government."

"In "The American Science of Politics," which is the last chapter of *The Creation of the American Republic* and which considered by itself does not justice to that book, Gordon S. Wood argues that the Federalist writers created a new political theory in "response to the pressures of democratic politics." The theory "was peculiarly the product of a democratic society." As Wood shows earlier but not here, however, the Federalist writers had little confidence in democracy. They called their governments representative democracies or democratic republics even though they excluded much of the population from participation. Still the self-deluding James Madison could call the governments "wholly popular." Wood appears to agree. "The entire government," he says, "had become the limited agency of the sovereign people."

In her frustratingly vague "Of Every Age Sex & Condition": The Representation of Women in the Constitution," Jan Lewis claims that since government was designed to serve society, and women were a part of society, and since the counting of women in determining the apportionment of the national House of Representatives means that they were included among "the people," "the Constitution included women." What this purported inclusion was supposed to mean for women, however, Lewis never makes clear.

Jack N. Rakove's "The Perils of Originalism," which is the first chapter of *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*, should be read by every American—and by every American politician every week. Because it is impossible to know the "true intentions or understandings" of the men involved in the writing and the ratification of the Constitution, "the notion that the Constitution had

some fixed and well-known meaning at the moment of its adoption dissolves into a mirage." Various participants attached various meanings to the document.

Since even in an upper-level college course only two of these essays would be useful without massive explanation, the teacher might prefer to look toward other sources.

Cortland, New York

C. Ashley Ellefson

Larry Madaras and James M. SoRelle, eds. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History*. Vol. 1: *The Colonial Period to Reconstruction*. Guilford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill, 2000. 8th edition. Pp. xvii, 384. Paper, \$19.25; ISBN 0-07-303188-7.

This book, part of the long and successful *Taking Sides* series, brings together sixteen case studies in historical disagreement, starting with American exceptionalism and ending with the impeachment of Andrew Johnson in 1868. This eighth edition adds seventeen new selections to the book, including eight new units. It also adds the Dushkin web site <www.dushkin.com> for student use and internet resources keyed to each section of the book.

The addition of the new units is a substantial gain, as the added units, on subjects such as Columbus, the abolitionists, Jefferson's political philosophy, and Andrew Johnson's impeachment, create a balance between political and social history, and between the history of men and women. They also are useful in documenting the history of different groups in early America: European-Americans, African-Americans, and Native Americans. The book is, in many ways, a model of balance, something not found in many survey textbooks.

This range of issues and selections ensure that specialists in many fields will have quibbles with this book and the topics it includes. Some of the debates do not fit together exactly, and others seem to be stale compared to more recent debates, such as the three-decade old exchange "Were the abolitionists unrestrained fanatics?" The exchange between Oscar and Mary Handlin and Carl Degler on the origins of racism in America took place in the 1950s, and recent scholarship has produced many more appropriate selections that could have been chosen for this volume.

The *Taking Sides* approach focuses on secondary, rather than primary historical literature. In some instances, there is enough primary evidence quoted within the documents to allow students to see how primary sources are used by historians. In other sections, however, the argumentation becomes disembodied from the source material. With these, it is hard to see how students are expected to make up their minds about the two sides in conflict, since there is so little evidence in either piece of writing.