

Virginia Reviews

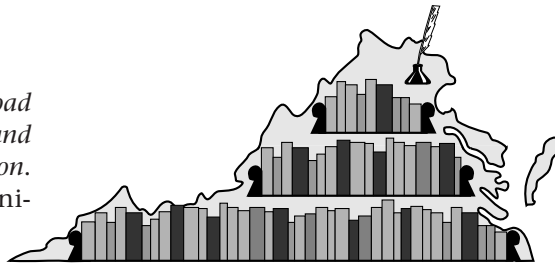
Reviews prepared by staff members of the Library of Virginia
Sara B. Bearss, Editor



Kevin J. Hayes. *The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson*. Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 2008. viii + 738 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-19-530758-0. \$34.95 (hardcover).

The Road to Monticello is a literary biography of Thomas Jefferson, a study that should have been written decades ago, but no scholar of the stature and erudition of Kevin J. Hayes came along before now to perform the deed. The result is a fascinating, original, and very readable reinterpretation of the life of Thomas Jefferson that puts his fascination with books and his intellectual life at the center of attention. What Jefferson read, and why and when he read it, significantly influenced what he did and what and how he wrote. Jefferson's deeds and important writings derived even more than we may have previously appreciated from his book collecting and reading, making this analysis even more important than it would have been if Jefferson had merely been equally interesting but less influential in American history.

A library that desires to have a genuinely useful collection of Jeffersoniana must have *The Road to Monticello*. It will probably take its place immediately among the essential studies of Jefferson's intellectual life, and because of Jefferson's significance to many aspects of American life, it may also become an influential landmark in American intellectual history.



is now customary for important studies in intellectual and literary scholarship to allow people who wish to understand Thomas Jefferson to acquire and savor this fine scholarship.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor,
Dictionary of Virginia Biography

How did white Protestant Virginians devise and accept a theology that justified their enslavement of black Protestant Virginians...?

IRONS REVIEW

Hayes's study of Jefferson's mind and of his reading and writing habits is very learned and elegantly written, much like Jefferson's own writings. Jefferson made notes on much of his reading, some of it in the form of annotations in the margins of his books and some of it in a literary commonplace book in which he abstracted or transcribed favorite passages. The fascinating details that Hayes retrieved from Jefferson's notes illuminate the many famous letters and public papers that Jefferson wrote about our political institutions and traditions by which our national literary history is enriched.

The publisher is to be commended for setting the price of this very large book much lower than



Charles F. Irons. *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. xi + 366 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-8078-3194-6. \$59.95 (hardcover); ISBN-13: 978-0-8078-5877-6. \$24.95 (softcover).

Two rich chapters on the rise of evangelical Protestant Christianity in colonial and Revolutionary Virginia among both black and white Virginians and one shorter chapter on the post-Civil War racial segregation of Virginia's churches bracket several rich chapters on the religious beliefs and practices of those Virginians during the decades between the American Revolution and the American Civil War. The central question that drives Charles F. Irons's inquiry is this: How did white Protestant Virginians devise and accept a theology that justified their enslavement of black Protestant Virginians

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whom they recognized as children of God, also?

This is as much a story of how and what black Virginians did and believed as it is about how and what white Virginians did and believed. In their racially integrated churches, white Virginians developed their ideas about Christianity and racial differences that by the final decades of the antebellum period convinced them that white stewardship and conversion work among enslaved (and some free) black Virginians justified the existence of slavery and gave meaning and purpose to the religious lives of the white people who were engaged in the saving of black people's souls. A proslavery theology allowed them to guide and control the religious lives of enslaved people.

This subtle and contextually rich account of the role of religious beliefs and practices among Virginia's large and diverse population is based on deep research in private papers and church records. It explains more convincingly than any previous scholarship how Christians embraced the seeming savagery of slavery as a positive good for themselves and also for their enslaved fellow Christians. It also sets the stage for understanding more thoroughly how in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery white Virginia Christians pushed their beliefs further into advocacy of racial segregation and a new theology of polygenesis—that black people were not, in fact, descended from Adam and Eve, and therefore not even part of the same human race with white people, and therefore easy victims for several decades of the savagery of Jim Crow.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography



James M. Campbell. *Slavery on Trial: Race, Class, and Criminal Justice in Antebellum Richmond, Virginia*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007. xiii + 264 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-8130-3091-3. \$59.95 (hardcover).

This well-written and well-conceived study of the criminal court records of Richmond from the 1830s through the 1850s focuses on slaves and slavery, but it also includes valuable information and insights about free African-

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CAMPBELL REVIEW

Americans and the white judges, attorneys, lawmakers, and others who encountered enslaved black men and women in court. Since the seventeenth century, enslaved Virginians had been tried for alleged infractions of the law in courts that had no juries and in which the procedural protections of the common law were largely absent. In the most serious cases, legal counsel was often provided, but, for the most part, enslaved men and women who were accused of crimes were entirely at the mercy of white court officials. For free blacks, their place in the judicial system had been somewhere between the vulnerable degradation forced on the slaves and the legal protections routinely afforded to all white people; but during the decades before the Civil War abolished slavery, Virginia's free black population when in court was gradually forced into a situation similar to that of slaves.

James M. Campbell dramatically demonstrates the extent to which the legal system that the owners of slaves devised worked to their advantage at the expense of their enslaved property. Campbell also provides strong evidence that the internal inconsistencies within that legal system, as internal inconsistencies within the system of slavery generally, often inadvertently worked to the disadvantage of slave owners.

That is most startlingly conspicuous in the cases Campbell describes involving Virginians of mixed race, some of whom were of such pale complexions that judges and juries and neighbors and physicians could not determine whether they were black or white. That determination was of fundamental importance, because although white people could testify against black people, black people could not testify against white people; and if it was not possible to tell whether a person was the one or the other, the justice system, such as it was, failed as a consequence of one of its own props.

Slavery on Trial is not so much about slavery or about trials or even about crimes as it is about the internal contradictions and self-defeating inconsistencies of slavery in a society that boasted of being based on the rule of law. The law of slavery was a brutal thing for all black Virginians, but it was a difficult tool for white Virginians to wield without occasionally wounding themselves and the system that the law of slavery was supposed to regulate.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography



Kenneth R. Bailey. *Alleged Evil Genius: The Life and Times of Judge James H. Ferguson*. Charleston, W.Va.: Quarrier Press, 2006. xiii + 210 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-891852-51-0. \$16.95 (softcover).

James Harvey Ferguson (1817–1898)'s career as a public servant began humbly enough in 1839 as a Cabell County jailor. This inauspicious beginning evolved into something more promising six years later when, having devoted himself to the study of law, he was appointed prosecutor for nearby Logan County. An excellent public speaker, Ferguson persuaded constituents in 1848 to elect him to the Virginia House of Delegates, won reelection in 1850, and represented, with two other men, seven western counties in Virginia's 1850–1851 constitutional convention. In those proceedings Ferguson employed his skills as an orator to argue on behalf of the western counties for internal improvements. He emerged as an effective political leader and eventually won public acclaim unthought of a decade earlier.

And then, for reasons that may never be fully understood, in the mid-1850s Ferguson left his wife, children, a successful law practice, and a flowering political career to journey west, where he remained for about ten years. He moved, it seems, from place to place. His disappearance, it was rumored, may have been linked to a relationship with a woman or to financial worries; but no evidence has surfaced to support the former or confirm the latter. Ferguson offered no public explanations after he returned east in 1864. Although these missing years were a source of speculation during Ferguson's lifetime and after his death, author Kenneth R. Bailey contends that the reason may simply have been that he needed to leave the state to earn a proper living for his family. Certainly the surprising ease with which Ferguson picked up the threads of private life would support such a theory. His wife having died several years previously, he set up a law practice in Cabell County, reestablished his house-

hold, and in 1865 remarried, all in the absence of any sort of public condemnation.

Ferguson's return to public office was unmarred by any hint of scandal. Taking advantage of the changed political landscape, in 1864 he left the Democratic Party, campaigned on the Union Party ticket, and won election to the recently established West Virginia legislature. Although an outspoken advocate of states' rights and, formerly, of slavery, he called for that

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BAILEY REVIEW

body to outlaw the practice, something that the new state constitution had failed to do. Reelected to three successive terms, Ferguson avoided the stigma of Republicanism and, indeed, returned to the Democratic fold early in the 1870s to help the party wrest control of the state away from the Radicals.

During this time Ferguson served as a judge for two years. He rode a circuit that included five counties, earned a reputation as a "king-maker" in local politics, and invested in various financial undertakings. But despite a profitable law practice, he was beset by financial problems and in 1872 was forced to file for bankruptcy. Desiring a fresh start elsewhere, Ferguson opened an office in Charleston with new partners and soon reestablished himself financially and profession-

ally. He became in time one of the leading experts in West Virginia and Virginia land law. He also won the confidence of Kanawha County voters, who sent him to the state legislature in 1878, 1881, and again in 1891.

Although some sources indicated that Ferguson enjoyed a leadership role in the Democratic Party (one contemporary referred to him as an "alleged evil genius" operating behind the scenes, and other evidence linked him to the "Kanawha Ring," one of several powerful party factions), Ferguson's role in western Virginia and West Virginia political history has failed to attract much attention from historians until now. As Bailey points out, the primary reason for this neglect was that documentation of Ferguson's political and business activities was woefully lacking until the West Virginia Department of Archives and History received his papers in the 1980s.

Ferguson's strong personality, lawyerly skills, and political astuteness enabled him to fashion a career that placed him near the centers of power, whether arguing a case before the Supreme Court of the United States, advising West Virginia's political leaders, working behind the scenes in the legislature to elect a United States senator, or acting as chief counsel on behalf of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company, where he formed a close bond with the railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington. Using the primary sources now available to scholars, Bailey's volume breaks new ground. *Alleged Evil Genius* sheds substantial light on the activities of an unsung player who, during the early years of statehood, made a contribution that deserves the attention and consideration of students of West Virginia history.

—reviewed by Donald W. Gunter,
assistant editor, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*



Chandra Manning. *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007. 350 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-307-26482-4. \$26.95 (hardcover).

Chandra Manning's *What This Cruel War Was Over* directly and persuasively challenges one of the most enduring assertions to be found in Civil War historiography: that the men who fought on either side did not initially (or at all, according to some interpretations) regard slavery as the central cause of the war. *What This Cruel War Was Over* is one of the best, most persuasive, and deeply researched books on the subject of what Civil War soldiers thought about the war. It has received the Avery O. Craven Prize from the Organization of American Historians and also honorable mention for the 2008 Lincoln Prize, administered by Gettysburg College.

Manning's reading of thousands of wartime letters and newspapers of Confederate soldiers and of both black and white Union soldiers convinced her that on the whole Confederates understood from the beginning that their army was fighting to preserve a distinctive way of life that everybody acknowledged was based on slave labor. Union soldiers on the whole, though by no means always sympathetic to abolition and often betraying a large measure of racial prejudice, understood that their army was fighting to preserve a free nation that slavery and secession threatened to destroy. After black men were allowed to enlist in the Union army, even though they received less pay than white soldiers and were treated poorly in many instances, they certainly regarded the war as a war of liberation for enslaved people and fought bravely and well. They convinced many doubting Union men that they were deserving of freedom,

even if not always of respect and equality.

Manning very persuasively charts subtle changes in the opinions that Union soldiers expressed about slavery, about emancipation, and about black people generally. During 1863, Manning concludes, "the men of the Union rank and file on the whole continued to serve as advocates of emancipation, partly because they knew that emancipation was necessary to save the Union, but also because they now

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MANNING REVIEW

recognized that it was necessary to make the Union worth saving" (p. 83).

After emancipation became the obvious consequence if the Confederacy was defeated, Confederate soldiers in some instances redoubled their commitment to winning for that very reason, but in other instances they began to question whether they were paying an unnecessarily heavy price to preserve an institution from which they poorly benefited.

What This Cruel War Was Over should be regarded as essential reading for anybody who wishes to understand the men who fought in the American Civil War.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor,
Dictionary of Virginia Biography



Gary W. Gallagher. *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten: How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know about the Civil War*. The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era. William A. Blair, Series Editor. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 274 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-8078-3206-6. \$28.00 (hardcover).

In this volume, the noted Civil War historian Gary W. Gallagher turns his attention to the manner in which popular culture, particularly through film and contemporary art, has shaped public understanding of the underlying causes of the devastating four-year conflict and portrayed, for better or worse, the nature and motivations of the combatants involved. A natural subject for the big screen, the Civil War was depicted on film several years before D. W. Griffith produced his controversial masterpiece *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and was most memorably portrayed in the 1939 motion picture adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's novel of the South, *Gone With the Wind*. But while Gallagher comments on these films, and to a lesser extent on such other notable cinematic efforts as John Huston's *Red Badge of Courage* (1951) and *Shenandoah* (1965), the latter a wartime chronicle of a Virginia family opposed to slavery, he primarily focuses on some fourteen movies produced during the last two decades, thereby extending a study undertaken by Edward D. C. Campbell Jr. in *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth* (1981), which examined the first seven decades of Hollywood's fascination with the Civil War. Toward the end of the book, Gallagher also assesses the effects of the expanding market for contemporary Civil War art, a phenomenon much in evidence during the last twenty years.

In surveying the ways in which the war has been interpreted, Gal-

lagger examines four competing traditions. He begins his discussion with a historical overview of the Lost Cause tradition. The term, taken from Edward Pollard's 1866 history of the Confederacy, became synonymous with the efforts of Southerners, many of whom were former high-ranking Confederate officers, to win in the eyes of posterity what they had lost on the battlefield. Prominent among them was former Confederate lieutenant general Jubal Anderson Early, who, in his 1866 memoir and in subsequent writings, undertook a defense of Southern gallantry and national aims while describing in the harshest terms the destructive war, sometimes aimed at civilians, that Union armies had waged. These writers emphasized the long odds against which the Southern soldier heroically fought for his ideals and trumpeted states' rights and economic independence as legitimate political goals while downplaying slavery's major role in igniting the war. This tradition dominated the cultural landscape for decades and lingers on today, although in a much weakened state.

In contrast, the rival Union Cause championed Northern efforts to defend the work of the Founding Fathers by preserving, through force of arms, the democratic ideals threatened by an aggressively expanding, cruel slavocracy. Although certainly not neglected by Hollywood, until recently this tradition had not gripped the public's imagination like the cinematic images of a defeated, prostrate South. Americans, as filmmakers know, like an underdog, and the glamorous South of legend, its history sanitized by sentimentality, was especially sympathetic. A third tradition, the Emancipation Cause, defined the fighting as a means to liberate millions of slaves, while the Reconciliation Cause emphasized the native virtues shared by

both contestants in an attempt to bring the regional rivals together in a show of unity on a national stage. Both the Union and Emancipation traditions have enjoyed a surge in popularity in recent years through such notable feature films as *Glory*, a 1989 release that showcased the exploits of the 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, a unit made up of rank-and-file African-American soldiers.

Northerners have long been repelled and fascinated by the Old South. They grabbed up the his-

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GALLAGHER REVIEW

torical romances published in the decades leading up to the Civil War by the popular South Carolina novelist William Gilmore Simms and, after Appomattox, the novels and short stories by the Virginia writers Thomas Nelson Page and John Esten Cooke, among others. These writings were influenced by and perpetuated the romantic tradition exemplified by the works of Sir Walter Scott. The success of the plantation novel, with its depiction of genteel Southern society, inspired countless imitators, shaping the image of the South for the rest of the country.

Although Gallagher's subject is not the literary traditions that produced the popular stereotype of an idealized South populated by ladies fair and chivalric knights to whom personal honor and social order were paramount, it is readily apparent that this paradigm, implanted in the culture by 1861 and promoted in literary works

after the war, not only provided an artistic parallel to the pronouncements of Lost Cause essayists and historians, but also, indeed, had preceded them and influenced their own perceptions of the society in which they lived. These writers' assumptions conformed to the literary landscape in which they lived and matured, and in their hands Robert E. Lee and other Southern military figures became living embodiments of a heroic tradition almost medieval in nature. Early in the twentieth century, it was convenient for filmmakers to transfer these symbols and their familiar message into an exciting new medium.

Since the release of *Glory*, the Emancipation Cause tradition has held sway, with only the production of *Gods and Generals* (2003) harking back to the familiar pattern of previous films. Meanwhile, contemporary Civil War paintings and sculptures continue to mine Lost Cause themes, profitably concentrating on images of the heroic South while consigning the triumphant North to a distinctly secondary position. Union Cause advocates had reason to celebrate in 2003, however, when, despite protests, a statue of Abraham Lincoln and his son Tad was erected at Richmond's historic Tredegar ironworks.

Civil War buffs and film enthusiasts alike will find much of interest in this engaging study of how contemporary art reflects on and contributes to the continuing struggle to interpret and understand the meaning of the American Civil War.

—reviewed by Donald W. Gunter,
assistant editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography



Michael Ayers Trotti. *The Body in the Reservoir: Murder and Sensationalism in the South*. Chapel Hill: Univer-

sity of North Carolina Press, 2008. ix + 301 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-8078-3178-6. \$59.95 (hardcover); ISBN-13: 978-0-8078-5842-4. \$24.95 (softcover).

This well-written account of several sensational murders and their associated trials focuses on Richmond, Virginia, between the Civil War and World War I. Michael Ayers Trotti is the third historian to write an important book about crime and Virginia during that time; Suzanne Lebsack's *Murder in Virginia: Southern Justice on Trial* (2003) and Richard F. Hamm's *Murder, Honor, and Law: Four Virginia Homicides from Reconstruction to the Great Depression* (2003) explore issues of race, class, honor, and the law in Virginia by examining murders and duels and their consequences. Add to them James M. Campbell's *Slavery on Trial: Race, Class, and Criminal Justice in Ante-*

bellum Richmond, Virginia (2007), which treats antebellum Virginia law and slavery, and suddenly the library shelves contain excellent scholarship that unravels how various groups of Virginians dealt with and reacted to deadly crime.

Trotti's study goes further. His book is also about the popular culture associated with violence and with sensationalism. It is very much a book about how journalism, particularly technological and commercial changes in newspaper publication, as well as popular tastes and expectations, transformed the ways in which people learned and thought about crimes of violence and the people who committed them. At the heart of the change was sensational newspaper coverage—what came to be called, during the time Trotti considers, “yellow journalism.”

Trotti draws important lessons

from the dramatic differences between the manner in which murders, trials, and executions were reported in the 1860s and the manner in which they were reported in the 1910s. Whatever claims to better taste or more refinement white ladies and gentlemen in antebellum Virginia may have once made, during the first half-century after the Civil War they became just as crass as they believed people were everywhere. In that regard, the changes in newspapers and in the public's taste for sensational journalism indicate how very different old Virginia and its inhabitants had become by the twentieth century.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* **VI**

Call for Reviewers

The “Virginia Reviews” column has been an important part of *Virginia Libraries* since it was undertaken by the Library of Virginia's Publications Department in the early 1990s. It was begun by Sandra Treadway, the current librarian of Virginia, in response to a suggestion from Peggie Rudd, now the Texas state librarian. John Kneebone was the first editor of “Virginia Reviews,” and he has been succeeded by Julie Campbell and eventually Sara Bearss. The reviews have maintained a very high standard of scholarship over the years, and have allowed us to publish the work of many talented LVA staff members.

We have recently learned that staff reductions will force LVA to eliminate the production of “Virginia Reviews” as an assignment for the publications staff. This is disappointing because we will lose a reliable, well-written feature that could be useful to almost every reader our journal reaches; however, it does present the opportunity to broaden the participation in the book review column we will be developing in 2009. Therefore, we are invit-

ing potential reviewers to contact both Lyn C. A. Gardner (cgardner@hampton.gov) and Cy Dillon (cdillon@ferrum.edu) with proposals for reviews or simply to say you are willing to submit reviews in the future.

While we want potential reviewers to make themselves familiar with the length, diction, and style of the reviews from this and past issues, we also want to extend the scope of the books reviewed in *Virginia Libraries* beyond historical works to include fiction, poetry, and nonfiction works set in Virginia or by Virginia authors. The editors plan to include children's books, young adult literature, and even graphic novels that are candidates for library collections around the Old Dominion. At this point, we are not yet able to offer review copies, but we hope that our readers, as librarians, will have access to most new publications.

Become a participant in the acquisitions decisions of the Virginia library community. Become a reviewer for *Virginia Libraries*. **VI**