

River's story illuminates so many other stories central to the region's and nation's history. Many scholars of the Mississippi treat the river as important in and of itself, a *sui generis* geographical and historical phenomenon that is important simply because of its size and centrality to the continent. Of course, that is true; it would be hard to imagine a history or geography of the region that did not take the Mississippi fundamentally into account. Stepenoff's "smaller" stories, which originate from a particular place or a particular type of work, make very clear how much the river and its corridor of influence have to say to historians of such seemingly disparate subjects as race, class, labor, or gender. Her work provides material for scholars and others interested in how communities work, whether local influences trump national patterns, or how much influence individuals have on particular events, as opposed to the context of their place and time.

Ultimately, that is perhaps the greatest value of Stepenoff's book: she invites readers to look more closely at subjects they may have a passing familiarity with, and, by doing so, to see connections to ideas and things that they had not thought of as associated with the Mississippi River at all. Hers is not at all the "last word" on the Mississippi River, but rather the first word on a host of subjects that are touched by the river.

Remember Me to Miss Louisa: Hidden Black-White Intimacies in Antebellum America, by Sharony Green. Early American Places. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2015. xvii, 199 pp. Illustrations, chart, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paperback.

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The title of this brief work suggests the need to explore the little-known bonds of affection between slaves or freedpeople and their current or former white owners. The locus is Cincinnati, the midwestern border city with the largest number of African Americans in the antebellum period, where many unmarried mothers settled with their children born of unions with white masters. Many of these were "fancy," attractive, fair-skinned women whose children were deemed, in the language of the day, "mulatto," often able to "pass" as whites.

Green wants us to examine not only the well-known matrifocal trend in black families but also the role of white males in the equation. She asserts, "The historical record shows that there was often reciprocal regard, warmth, and even caring in settings where whites and blacks

became trading partners, shipmates, servants, allies, or lovers" (9). Often—as in the case of Ava White and her former owner, Rice Ballard—they and their children were freed and settled in the Queen City, miles distant from owners' white families. Not all white men were exploitative or consistent in their relations with their female slaves. What former enslaved people did to secure their freedom and support was less important "than what white men permitted of themselves" (9). How black women and their children felt about that was probably shaped by the way they understood male-female and parent-child relations as well as master-slave relations.

Such interracial unions, although stigmatized over time, often led southern white men to invest emotionally and financially in the lives of enslaved women and children. This thesis is supported by detailed examination of the black families of three white planters—Samuel Townsend, Rice Ballard, and John Williams. All three families would settle in Cincinnati. Their prosperity depended not only on their actions but also on their head start as freedpeople, the locus of their settlement, the attitudes of the community, and luck.

This study is organized into four chapters and an epilogue. Chapter one surveys the "hidden life" of the planter. The second and third explore, in turn, the perspectives of white wives and "favored" black women. The last examines the world of the progenies, before and after the Civil War. In the epilogue the author stresses that historical study has paid too much attention to racial oppression and not enough to the intimacies created between white owners and black women, especially those who were fair-skinned. Those women "emerged as both victors and victims, immoral and upright, enslaved and indeed free *with* white men's help" (132). It is easier to describe relations as rape and more difficult "to say it was love or something approaching that" (132).

The author has provided a provocative and well-researched investigation of a topic that needs much more attention by students of American history. The traditional view of racial exploitation of black women by white slaveowners certainly is simplistic, but whether her examination of just three case studies in one city suffices to redress the balance remains to be seen. The book's audience is narrowly academic, as demonstrated by the absence of a narrative approach and the unfortunate tendency to rely on abstract jargon. Too often speculative words like *may*, *probably*, *possibly*, *suggests*, and *evidently* (see pp. 24–25, for instance) weaken her arguments. Context—time and space—seem lacking. But this is a stimulating work that should encourage examination of how and why mixed-race families came to settle in other midwestern cities.