

doctrines of the lower South. Indeed, he concludes the study with an in-depth profile of a Kentucky antislavery advocate, Rev. John G. Fee, whose stance was far more radical than that of his better-known peer, the colorful emancipationist Cassius M. Clay.

Without question, Tallant's work brings Kentucky's internal slavery struggle into sharp focus. Yet greater use of public records, particularly judicial records and the official papers of Kentucky's antebellum governors, would have further enriched this excellent study. Some scholars may question certain aspects of Tallant's study. For instance, while Kentucky's role in the interstate slave trade is discussed in human terms, the economic impact of the traffic is not addressed. Nevertheless, *Evil Necessity* is a valuable contribution to scholarship that not only sheds light on the slavery controversy but effectively sets the stage for Kentucky's subsequent role as a largely pro-Union, proslavery state during the Civil War.

James M. Prichard
Kentucky State Archives
Frankfort, Kentucky

Beyond the River: The Untold Story of the Heroes of the Underground Railroad. By Ann Hagedorn. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. 333 pp. \$25.00, ISBN 0-684-87065-7.)

The history of escaping slaves has always involved the difficult task of separating fact from fiction. The journalist Ann Hagedorn enters this challenging field with impressive determination and the finely honed skills of a professional reporter. She literally relocated to Ripley, Ohio, a place that spawned a number of Underground Railroad legends, and then diligently combed through the local archives. She conducted the grunt work of historical research and has produced an inspiring testament to the allure of investigating the past.

She did not, however, produce an interpretive gem. Hagedorn's persistent boosterism often undermines her narrative judgments. In her account, Ripley and the local abolitionist John Rankin always seem to be at the epicenter of a national movement that she never quite defines or explains. Hagedorn performs a service by detailing Rankin's mostly forgot-

ten story, but she fails to provide the context demanded by her sometimes breathless claims. The author takes at face value, for example, the dubious tale of how the Underground Railroad supposedly got its name, attributing the origins to an escaping slave who disappeared near Ripley, leaving a bewildered slave catcher to wonder if there was "an underground road" there (pp. 12, 60).

The irony is that Hagedorn has pulled together material for a much more sophisticated account. This book adds to the emerging interpretation of the Underground Railroad as a relatively organized interracial network that existed across the border states and helped spark the coming of the Civil War. This perspective, evident in recent studies by scholars such as Gary Collison and Stanley Harrold, departs in subtle ways from what had become the standard modern view first outlined by Larry Gara in his seminal work, *The Liberty Line* (1961).

Gara's insight was to put the fugitive at the center of the Underground Railroad story, reminding readers that most escaping slaves left on their own and at grave risk to themselves. Traditional accounts, based on the recollections of white abolitionists, had tended to marginalize the role of these ex-slaves. Yet Gara's revisionism had the effect of unduly diminishing the accomplishments of those who aided the fugitives. Recent scholarship has refocused on the agents themselves, attempting to acknowledge their achievements without engaging in the hyperbole and subtle racism of many post-emancipation accounts.

Hagedorn's book provides useful illustrations of this successful interracial network through vivid profiles of Rankin and his sons; John B. Mahan, a white operative arrested and briefly imprisoned in Kentucky; the free black "conductor" John Parker; and several others. But in her zeal to convey drama, Hagedorn again overlooks some important details. She neglects to consider the inconvenient fact that besides Mahan, who was acquitted, there were almost no arrests and hardly any violence directly affecting her subjects. The well-known Rankin—who placed a lantern in his home for all runaways to see but somehow managed to avoid imprisonment—lived until his early

nineties. What does this say about the dangers of attacking slavery from within the northern states? The best answer is that some stories from “beyond the river” still remain “untold,” or at least unexplained.

Matthew Pinsker
Dickinson College
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Uncertain Encounters: Indians and Whites at Peace and War in Southern Oregon, 1820s to 1860s. By Nathan Douthit. (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2002. viii, 248 pp. Paper, \$22.95, ISBN 0-87071-549-6.)

Professor Emeritus Nathan Douthit has closely read the sources pertaining to the Rogue River war of 1855–1856, “one of the earliest and most destructive wars against Indians west of the Mississippi River” (p. 1). The closest research libraries to his home in Coos Bay, Oregon, are in San Francisco and Eugene, so it has taken time. But Douthit had advantages, too. Local historians, some of whom have spent years in research on their own topics, generously shared the product of their labors. A longtime association with other Oregon professors, including Theodore Stern and Stephen Dow Beckham, gave Douthit access to their counsel. Finally, the staff of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* assisted Douthit by editing, peer reviewing, and publishing three of his articles in the 1990s, all of which helped to clarify his thoughts. The end result is the book under review, a precise, slightly narrow study that runs from the fur trade to Indian removal to the Siletz and Grand Ronde reservations—the equivalent of the Trail of Tears for the Pacific Northwest.

Douthit’s theme is easy to accept. Today anyone can see from the evidence that the thirty years of Indian-white contact that began with the arrival of the Hudson’s Bay Company in the 1820s was heading toward a confrontation, one that the whites were sure to win. But at the time the miners and settlers in the Rogue River region were not so confident of their survival. If life in southern Oregon could have been plotted on a graph, one would have seen spiraling spikes and deep valleys, as both the Indian and white communities had peace

and war factions. This complex amalgam of political, social, and economic ties, or middle ground interrelationships, forms the core of this book. In a sense, the Indians who lived along the Rogue River were not, in fact, “rogues” at all. So the book is about peace as well as war, though it is difficult to overlook the data that shows 425 or so Indians killed by whites between 1851 and 1856, and 182 whites murdered by Indians during the same period. The title of the book is well chosen. Read it again. “Uncertain encounters” is exactly what the author portrays. The actual Rogue River war does not appear until chapter 6 and then is limited to only thirty pages. Douthit concludes his story by making an important point. The Indian-white relationship that took place prior to the Rogue River war may have ranged from tumultuous to tenuous, but it nevertheless formed a framework that prevented the war from becoming one of extermination. It could have been worse.

This is a thoughtful, mature, reasoned piece of research and writing. At one point, the southern Oregon pre-Civil War experience follows the “middle ground” pattern established by Richard White, and at another point it becomes a second Trail of Tears, so it has context with national movements. But in other ways it is unique, and in that lies this book’s value.

Robert Carriker
Gonzaga University
Spokane, Washington

Taming the Elephant: Politics, Government, and Law in Pioneer California. Ed. by John F. Burns and Richard J. Orsi. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. xii, 288 pp. Cloth, \$65.00, ISBN 0-520-23411-1. Paper, \$29.95, ISBN 0-520-23413-8.)

Few state governments had a more difficult founding than California’s. Established in the midst of the gold rush, the national debate over slavery, and the collapse of the Whig party, California’s political infrastructure seemed destined to be controversial in every detail. Nor were California residents likely to be helpful. Hispanic residents knew little of the political culture of the United States, gold

Copyright of Journal of American History is the property of Organization of American Historians and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.