Book Reviews

Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and Their Legacy in Liberia Today*, New York: Gotham (2004), pp 1-305.

Ezekiel 18 proclaims the sins of a father will not be visited on his sons, but the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade is at least one example that the taint of one generation's errs are difficult to wash from their progeny. This mark is effectively presented in the highly readable narrative in *Mississippi in Africa* by Alan Huffman, which recounts the story of Africans sold into slavery in Mississippi and the effects of their later insertion in Liberia after being freed in the early 1800s. While not a complete academic rendition of the trials of slave trade or early America, the book is a fine introduction to many issues in past and present international conflicts, slavery, economic struggles, race relations, feminist studies, anthropology, nation-building, oral history, equity, property law, family law, and estates. It is a recommended starting block for educators to excite students about these various subjects.

Mr. Huffman goes to lengths not usually traveled by journalists to ensure a respectable degree of accuracy in his attempt to shed light on a story time and racial tension has distorted in the hands of decedents of slaves, slave-holders, and historians. Beginning from the dusty storage room of a rural Mississippi courthouse, Mr. Huffman files through boxes of court documents to tell the legal battle over Isaac Ross' will that provided, inter alia, for his 225 slaves to be freed after his death and approximately 5,000 acres of his prime Mississippi cotton estate sold to pay for their "repatriation" to Africa.

In those court proceedings, arguments still made in parts of our world come to life. Take the argument of one attorney opposing the will: "Slaves constitute a portion of the vested wealth and taxable property of the estate. . .

Without them [Mississippi's] lands are worthless. Would it not therefore be contrary to the policy of the state, to part with this vested wealth, this source of revenue, with that which alone renders her soil valuable . . . it would not be productive of mischief, and would it not be spreading a dangerous influence among the slave population of the country, for the slaves of the whole plantation to acquire their freedom, take leave of the country and make their departure, proclaiming liberty for themselves and their posterity? Would this not render the other slaves of the country dissatisfied, refractory, and rebellious? . . .." (pp. 55-56).

Countering these sentiments is the story of Issac Ross' daughter, who, after losing two brothers, two husbands, and her father, fought both male and female kin and her entire region of the nation in an effort to have her father's testamentary wishes carried out at home and abroad. Intriguing family stories

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are told throughout, including the unique life of one will contestant, Jane Brown Ross Wade Ross, who twice married into the Ross family by wedding her first cousin after being widowed and contested Isaac Ross' will along with her nephew. Further, Mr. Huffman appropriately emphasizes the voices not heard in the struggle to free the Ross slaves. This story is a prime example of the interrelation of politics, financial wealth, and social status, including the tabling of bills to keep slaves indentured and the absence of the slaves' voices in the decision to stay in the United States or be sent to Liberia.

In addition to guiding the reader through the family, regional, and probate issues of Isaac Ross' will, Mr. Huffman introduces the various organizations involved in the early emigration of slaves back to Africa, including those of the American Colonization Society and its state and local counterparts. There is a resounding relevance of this story to the later "Back to Africa Movement," lead in part by Marcus Garvey. In this colonization movement, the history behind modern Liberia's Mississippi, Louisiana, and Maryland regions, all of which are named for the origin of the freed slaves who were transplanted to the regions by colonization societies and post-Civil War efforts, come alive.

Among many other relevancies, making this story particularly relevant today to the efforts in Sudan, Iraqi, and the Middle East in general, the author discusses the impact of Britain's establishment of Sierra Leone, where current civil wars and corruption are in part due to the fragile attempts to establish a nation ruled by the law and ideas of outsiders. Then, Mr. Huffman provides a bird's eye view of the U.S. counterparts' modeling and building of communities in Liberia after those of Sierra Leon, starting in 1820, which placed in direct confrontation "returning slaves" with those natives who were possibly involved in their trade to the Americas. Simply consider the relevance of the President of the Massachusetts Colonization Society writing the Constitution of Commonwealth of Liberia in 1838. (pp. 48-49) Foreign religions, foreign ideals, and foreign social structures were forced on the people of Liberia, as they had been on the freed slaves when they were brought to the Americas, and lessons from these efforts resound still today.

Moreover, the freed slaves brought the beliefs and ideas of the Americas and the Northern Hemisphere to Africa, establishing communities that operated and looked like those of their former masters. In some of the more prosperous communities, these freed slaves lived in Georgian style mansions and several even enslaved the natives in systems similar to those in which they were once enslaved. As Mr. Huffman discovers in his journey, these enclaves of antebellum America now rest in the hot bed of conflict, have mostly been destroyed, and are avoided by even those who were born there. The resulting factions and wars continue today in the hands of such person as Charles Taylor, triggered in part by the racial and cultural differences of the implanted freed slaves, which Mr. Huffman discusses as he travels to Liberia to see and gather information from the descendants of the Mississippi slaves.

On his trip through Liberia, while met by physical roadblocks and threats, Mr. Huffman also faces the drab reality of a nation ravaged by war and poverty. When seeking information from local decedents of Mississippi slaves, he

repeatedly hears a similar recitation: "Most of the old people, they starve during the war. . . . Now you mostly have the youth, born since the early seventies. They don't know. We did not have time to sit and talk to the old people, and now they are mostly gone." (p. 211) Oral traditions left with the elders, enervating the stories passed down through families of their migration and settlement in Liberia. But, with great poise, Mr. Huffman brings to light as many stories as he can obtain, dodging cultural differences and blending his observations with an attempt to objectively find the story of Isaac Ross' slaves. Some of these stories come from letters sent by freed slaves back to their former owner in Mississippi; some are from recorded documents; and others are gathered firsthand from slave descendants in Liberia.

In total, *Mississippi in Africa* is an easy two-day read that serves as a great introduction to a story that most have forgotten, one which remains relevant today in a world of superpowers and continued juxtaposition between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. While it is not a complete discussion of any of the socio-political or legal concerns, *Mississippi in Africa* provides an intriguing history that should encourage any reader to dig deeper into the issues presented.

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Winston Harrington, Richard D. Mortgenstern, & Thomas Sterner (eds.), *Choosing Environmental Policy: Comparing Instruments and Outcomes in the United States and Europe,* Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future (2004). Paperback; pp. xii + 270.

The debate over the relative merits of the traditional "command and control" (CAC) approach and the allegedly more progressive economic incentive (EI) approach to environmental regulation has been prominent in American politics for the last two decades. The current Administration is clearly a proponent of increased use of economic incentives and reduced CAC regulation by the federal government. In the last few years, for example, the EPA has proposed a water pollutant trading program under the Clean Water Act, and the Bush Administration has repeatedly championed increased use of "cap and trade" economic incentive programs to reduce air emissions, including air emissions of mercury.

But is the choice of environmental policy instrument really a black-and-white choice? In other words, can regulators safely assume that CAC regimes are inherently more expensive for regulated entities and more administratively and informationally demanding to implement than economic incentive schemes, or that economic incentive instruments are inherently more efficient than more traditional regulatory approaches? The editors of *Choosing Environmental*