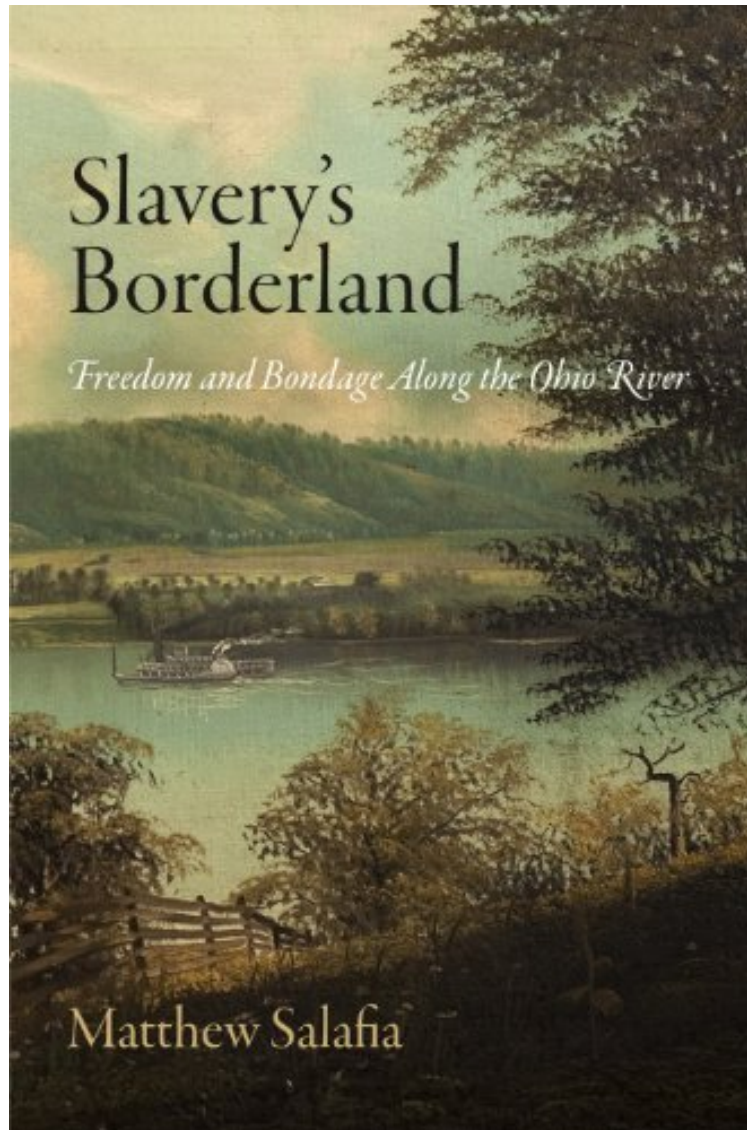


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Matthew Salafia

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Matthew Salafia : Slavery's Borderland: Freedom and Bondage Along the Ohio River (Early American Studies) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Slavery's Borderland: Freedom and Bondage Along the Ohio River (Early American Studies):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. insightful history of the early Ohio ValleyBy hmf22Slavery's

Borderland is a wide-ranging history of the Ohio River Valley (Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana) from prehistoric times--Salafia spends several pages on the geology of the region--to the eve of the Civil War. As the title implies, slavery is a prominent theme, but Salafia also examines black and white anti-slavery movements and other aspects of the region's political culture. He asks when and why the Ohio Valley became a coherent cultural region in the minds of the people who lived there, and why the Ohio Valley did not break up during the succession crisis in 1861. A terrific work of scholarship, probing yet very readable.

In 1787, the Northwest Ordinance made the Ohio River the dividing line between slavery and freedom in the West, yet in 1861, when the Civil War tore the nation apart, the region failed to split at this seam. In *Slavery's Borderland*, historian Matthew Salafia shows how the river was both a physical boundary and a unifying economic and cultural force that muddied the distinction between southern and northern forms of labor and politics. Countering the tendency to emphasize differences between slave and free states, Salafia argues that these systems of labor were not so much separated by a river as much as they evolved along a continuum shaped by life along a river. In this borderland region, where both free and enslaved residents regularly crossed the physical divide between Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, slavery and free labor shared as many similarities as differences. As the conflict between North and South intensified, regional commonality transcended political differences. Enslaved and free African Americans came to reject the legitimacy of the river border even as they were unable to escape its influence. In contrast, the majority of white residents on both sides remained firmly committed to maintaining the river border because they believed it best protected their freedom. Thus, when war broke out, Kentucky did not secede with the Confederacy; rather, the river became the seam that held the region together. By focusing on the Ohio River as an artery of commerce and movement, Salafia draws the northern and southern banks of the river into the same narrative and sheds light on constructions of labor, economy, and race on the eve of the Civil War.

"Matthew Salafia brings the growing literature on the variety within American slavery and the 'many Souths' into conversation with the rich literature on the Old Northwest, and adds to all of these the uniqueness of slavery in the Ohio valley and its relationship with servitude across the river. By placing the river at the center, *Slavery's Borderland* transcends not only state histories but also regional histories."—Matthew Mason, Brigham Young University "[This book] is engagingly written, the individual stories are compelling, and Salafia weaves them all together to give readers a real sense of time and place. *Slavery's Borderland* deserves a wide readership for it offers much insight into how racism became embedded in American culture."—American Historical "Rather than seeing the Ohio River as a flowing borderline separating slavery from freedom, Salafia's work revises historians' well-worn assumptions to explore how cross-river connections sustained a region economically and—at least among whites—socially during the first half of the nineteenth century. . . . How long will it be before we have a reconsideration of the entire borderland between slavery and freedom from the colonial period to the post-Civil War era? Salafia's book has given the field an approach—and a regional start—for how that work might be done best."—Journal of the Early Republic "Slavery's Borderland directs our attention from states defined by arbitrary political borders to fluid regions defined by networks of people interacting within a shared landscape. Avoiding the usual tendency to emphasize differences between slave Kentucky and free Ohio and Indiana, Matthew Salafia shows systems of labor evolving along a continuum that straddled the Ohio River. A fresh and long overdue perspective."—Andrew Cayton, Miami University

About the Author Matthew Salafia is coordinator of the University Honors Program and teaches at North Dakota State University. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Introduction Listening to the River In Uncle Tom's Cabin, Eliza Harris clasped her child as she darted toward the river's edge. Then "with one wild cry and flying leap, she vaulted sheer over the turbid current by the shore on to the raft of ice beyond . . . she leaped to another and another; stumbling, leaping, slipping, springing upwards again. . . . She saw nothing, felt nothing, till dimly, as in a dream, she saw the Ohio side, and a man helping her up the bank." Eliza risking her life to cross the Ohio River personified the sentiment "liberty or death." On the southern bank slave catchers tried to pull Eliza back to slavery; on the northern bank someone helped her toward freedom. However, without the ice sheets the Ohio River would have been impassable. Eliza leaped across a solid, albeit unstable, divide between slavery and freedom. Yet Harriet Beecher Stowe's border was fleeting because Eliza leaped across chunks of ice that disappeared from under her feet. Indeed outside of fiction the Ohio River remained an unstable divide between slavery and freedom throughout the antebellum period. In 1787 the Northwest Ordinance made the Ohio River the dividing line between slavery and freedom in the West; yet when the Civil War broke the country in two in 1861, this region failed to split at this seam. This book traces the history of the Ohio River borderland from its natural and human origins, through its political definition in the early republic, to maturation during the antebellum period, and to its surprising resilience during the sectional crisis. As residents on both sides of the river struggled to accommodate it as at once a dividing line and a unifying economic force, they defined this borderland by its inherent contradictions. Rather than marking a line that slavery could not penetrate, the Ohio River muddied distinctions, and residents used that ambiguity to try to hold the region together even against the threat of civil war. * * *

The Ohio River Valley was a peculiar place in antebellum America. North of

the Ohio River, southern migration and economic connections with the southern economy gave the region a southern bent, and cultural historians often put the cultural division between North and South somewhere north of the Ohio River. Historians of slavery have demonstrated that slavery at the top of the South was different from that of the Deep South. As a result white Kentuckians' lukewarm commitment to the institution became a source of conflict with their more southerly neighbors. In 1861 as northerners and southerners alike geared for war, Kentuckians refused to secede and actually declared their neutrality. In this book these stories are brought together to demonstrate that while the lower North was uniquely southern and the upper South was uniquely northern, the result was a region defined by its blend of influences. So that the peculiarities of this region can be understood, this study historicizes the border itself. Placing the areas north and south along the river at the center of the interpretation contributes to a new history of the Ohio River Valley that looks for regional coherence across state borders. Historians, political scientists, and cultural and literary critics have argued that where geographical borders fail to contain and define human interactions, residents create a unique third country in between called borderlands. Out of their interactions, residents of these borderlands create regions defined by their hybridity. Studies have demonstrated that borderlands are complicated zones of cultural and physical confrontation and accommodation where interactions shape policies. When national leaders made the Ohio River the boundary between slavery and freedom, they reshaped residents' movements and interactions in the region. The movements encouraged by this river border informed local residents' understanding of the region and their place in it. Movement was normative in the Ohio River Valley, and as a result it was a place where dichotomies could not apply; instead residents defined the region as a borderland. In most historical treatments, the rise of the new American nation was the beginning of the end for the Ohio River Valley borderland. But historians base this argument on a historically specific definition that ties the borderland to the colonial period. By this definition, borderlands were "the contested boundaries between colonial domains," and the creation of nationally recognized state borders turned borderlands into "bordered lands." In the case of the Ohio River Valley, however, this definition overstates the ability of borders to divide. Americans on both sides of the Ohio River shared common social and cultural backgrounds, and yet a border divided them. Residents and settlers had to accommodate that division, and in so doing they created social and cultural differences between free and slave states. But the reality was that the interaction between the flow of the river and residents' attempts to define it as a border made the geographical divide between slavery and freedom an abstraction that was both decisive and elusive. I have tried to follow the contours of residents' mental mapping of the region. I have not made the history of this region fit my model of a borderland; quite to the contrary, this region was a borderland because residents defined it that way. When first created in 1787, the northern and southern limits of this borderland extended into the interiors of the states. Over the course of the antebellum period, economic and social changes shrank the borderland to the counties that bordered the Ohio River, because those who lived along the river continued to define themselves by their relationship to this border. While they may not have seen themselves as very different in 1800, by 1861 Ohioans and Indianans believed that they were quite different from their slaveholding neighbors in Kentucky. If they imagined themselves as different from one another, borderlanders also defined their region as unique from the rest of the country. By the 1850s sectional conflict pushed northerners and southerners apart, but residents of the Ohio River borderland denounced sectionalism on both sides and emphasized their own ability to coexist across a divisive border. This was not a region without conflict, but residents never gave up on the idea of living half slave and half free. It was a place where confrontation coexisted with accommodation, and where disunity highlighted similarities. This simultaneous existence of contradictory impulses characterized the Ohio River borderland. In this study I have limited my definition of the Ohio River borderland to areas of Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio. While there are comparisons to the border between Pennsylvania and Maryland where appropriate, this is not a study of the entire border between slave and free states in America. The Mason-Dixon Line surely shared some characteristics with the Ohio River border, but just as certainly they were not identical. Perhaps most important, Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky were divided by a river rather than a line of latitude. The fact that these states shared access to the Ohio River and with it a lane of commerce that connected the region with markets as far south as New Orleans made residents more likely, and perhaps more willing, to foster harmonious relations with their neighbors across the slave/free border. Illinois is also absent from this study, but not because Illinois did not share similar characteristics with its free-state neighbors. Much excellent work has been done on Illinois's history with slavery, while less has been done linking the stories of Ohio and Indiana with those of its slaveholding neighbor. Interpreting this region as a borderland helps explain peculiarities about the lower North and the upper South by drawing them into the same narrative. First, this book explains why and how the Ohio River, an artery of trade, became the dividing line between slavery and freedom in the early American West. The natural history of the Ohio River made it a meeting place for the people who settled the Ohio Valley. The river defined hunting grounds for Ohio Indians, marked one edge of the French and English empires, and became the border between the American backcountry and Indian territory, all before it became the legal boundary between slavery and freedom in the United States. When members of Congress approved article 6 of the Northwest Ordinance, which banned slavery north of the Ohio River, they wrote a new definition onto an old border and left it up to local residents to interpret the meaning of that border. As white Americans moved into the region, slaveholding Kentucky became a place where emancipation

seemed possible, and the Northwest Territory, the first region with free-soil origins, had a disguised form of slavery. The role of the Ohio River border in the settlement process sheds light on this apparent contradiction as well. Some settlers heading west hoped to make Kentucky a model of America's antislavery future. But Virginia's land claims extended north to the Ohio River, and so Kentucky was under the jurisdiction of Virginia. Settlers capitalized on enslaved labor to break the land and set up their homesteads. The enslaved population grew so rapidly that gradual compensated emancipation became impossible and immediate emancipation threatened social disruption. In addition the Ohio River border was a safety valve, because those who were disappointed with their opportunities in Kentucky moved across the river. The migration of white settlers across the river, in turn, both gave them access to bound labor and led them to reject chattel slavery. By making careful distinctions between servitude and slavery northern residents defined the Ohio River as the northern limit of the chattel principle, but they retained a system of bound labor. In the antebellum period, slavery expanded in Kentucky while the bound labor system in Ohio and Indiana rapidly disintegrated, but the region's peculiarity remained. The perceived "mildness" of slavery in Kentucky and the virulence of racism in Ohio and Indiana set these states apart from their respective regions. However, these peculiarities were closely related to the Ohio River border. The relatively small number of slaves in Kentucky led to assumptions that slavery there was weaker and milder than plantation slavery farther south. The ostensible "mildness" of Kentucky slavery carried over into historical perspectives. The turn in the historiography of slavery, beginning with Kenneth Stampp's *Peculiar Institution* in 1956, destroyed the image of slavery as a benevolent institution. Yet in their effort to capture the brutal essence of slavery, historians focused primarily on Deep South plantations, while the issue of "mildness" continued to plague historians of Kentucky. Marion B. Lucas uncovered the unique social configuration of slavery in Kentucky, including small slaveholdings and the prevalence of slave-hiring. The very uniqueness of slavery in Kentucky led Lucas to conclude that slavery in Kentucky was not mild. Lucas argued, "Slavery in Kentucky may not have been, typically, as harsh as in the Deep South states. Yet the examples of abuse in the Commonwealth doom the system to condemnation, demonstrating what an awful thing slavery was." Rather than letting the mildness debate frame the argument, this study places the lived experience of slavery in a borderland context, demonstrating the role of location, power, and politics in the institution of slavery. In this case the peripheral location of slavery and its close ties with free labor in the region gave the institution vitality and strength despite the modest numbers of enslaved African Americans. Following Ira Berlin's lead, historians have demonstrated that the conditions of slavery in the upper South differed from those in the cotton plantations of the Deep South. More recently historians have pointed to the ways in which the proximity of slavery influenced the laboring lives of free African Americans, particularly in Maryland. Following in this tradition but extending it across state lines, this project demonstrates that the borderland context created a unique labor system for both free and enslaved African Americans on both sides of the Ohio River. Slavery along the Ohio River was unique, not only because it was at the top of the South but also because the Ohio River economy linked borderland slavery with borderland free labor. African Americans' ability to cross the border as runaways and travel along the river as workers highlighted the similarity between bound labor and wage labor along the river. In fact, one of the stunning anomalies of the Ohio River Valley was the similarity between the work regime of racial slavery and that of wage labor on the borderland. In reality, in antebellum America, African Americans could be capital, labor power, and laborers, and the Ohio River brought them all into juxtaposition. Enslaved and free African Americans experienced characteristics representative of both slavery and freedom, as along the Ohio River wage labor and chattel slavery became points on a capitalist continuum rather than mutually exclusive categories for African Americans. The mobility inherent in this borderland labor system contributed to the persistence of virulent racism in Indiana and Ohio. Historians have argued that white racism in the old Northwest was a legacy of migration by upland southerners. But while origin can explain the initial racism of white settlers, it fails to account for the persistence of white racism throughout the antebellum period. White Indianans and Ohioans put their racism on display because it served a specific social and political function along the border. White residents of the borderland learned that the border between slavery and freedom was nearly impossible to police, whereas racial boundaries were easier to enforce. Thus politicians legislated, and residents enforced, racial boundaries to mask the similarities between free and slave states. This obfuscation of the geographical division between free and slave states for African Americans lent stability to the region because the link between race and status followed African Americans across the Ohio River border. For example, enslaved blacks viewed the region as a borderland where racial barriers to freedom and the similarity between work regimes on both sides of the river served as reasons not to risk an escape attempt. Beyond simple opportunity, fugitive slaves from Kentucky recalled that they determined the desirability of escape through a reasoned evaluation of how a potential change affected their lives. The very factors that prompted former slaves to escape also allowed them to endure their bondage. In this way white Americans' subversion of the freedoms of African Americans limited the conflict between white neighbors across the border. The link between race and the division between slavery and freedom helps explain the final, and perhaps most vexing, peculiarity of the borderland: Kentucky's failure to join the Confederacy. Despite the fact that the Ohio River divided slave and free territories, when hostilities erupted in 1861, the region failed to split at its seam. The nature of antislavery and proslavery thought along the Ohio River underlay the resilience of the borderland. The social conditions of the borderland, specifically the

domestic slave trade, informed both white and black Americans' antislavery actions. In response to the dominance of the slave trade, free and enslaved African Americans tried to protect themselves from commodification. In contrast, white Americans moved along and across the river in order to take advantage of both legitimate and illicit river commerce. Their freedom of movement encouraged a diversity of opinion on the border, because, unlike black Americans, they did not face an imminent threat to their personal safety. White northerners attempted to defend their states from intrusions by outsiders but recognized Kentuckians' legal right of reclamation. Kentuckians defended their rights to reclamation but imagined that a gradual and peaceful process of emancipation would eventually free them from the necessary evil of slavery. White residents clashed, often violently, over how to control African Americans' movements, but they agreed that the border regulated the movement of free and enslaved African Americans by limiting it. Thus the border became increasingly politically important throughout the 1830s and 1840s but at the same time limited the appeal of disruptive radical antislavery sentiment. By 1850 white and black abolitionists became convinced that the fluidity of the border between free and slave states undermined their causes and therefore aimed to polarize the river's borders. As white abolitionists spoke of disunion and black abolitionists of collective resistance, conservative antislavery prevailed along the border. Similarly the radical sectionalism espoused by the fire-eaters of the Deep South found little traction in Kentucky, because Kentuckians believed that an unstable border between states within a union was better than a hostile border between enemy nations. Thus the logic of sectionalism, whether from a pro- or an antislavery perspective, simply did not make sense to residents who had long defined their region by the presence of the border between northern free soil and southern slavery. But the absence of radical pro- and antislavery ideas does not alone explain the power of unionism along the border. As the country careened toward civil war in the 1850s, residents along this border denounced radicalism and actively worked to continue the region's tradition of compromise and accommodation. In the 1850s local residents and politicians increasingly celebrated the uniqueness of the borderland. Perhaps more than anything else, local residents' definition of the Ohio River Valley as a borderland helped hold the region together. The border gave them a shared sense of purpose because it linked their futures. They did not ignore conflicts with their cross-river neighbors, nor did they seek to paper over their differences. Instead they stressed that their conflicts yielded accommodations, and their ability to coexist despite their differences set them apart from the rest of the country. Their Ohio River borderland was not a third country in between; it was the ultimate representation of the American Union. Thus when the Civil War erupted, the majority of white residents remained firmly committed to maintaining the river border because they believed it best protected their freedom. * * * The Ohio River border made the social and political aspects of slavery inseparable, and so neither a strictly social nor a strictly political history can explain this region's many peculiarities. This study, therefore, focuses on moments when the social and political history of the region intersected. For example, the region's failure to split in 1861 suggests that only the combination of social and political forces was sufficient to propel residents toward civil war. The historiography on the Civil War causation divides between social and political explanations. Historians who favor political explanations, most prominently Michael Holt, define the Civil War as a politicians' war. While admitting that slavery caused tensions, they suggest that without the political disruptions of the 1850s the Civil War would not have occurred when it did. In contrast, historians who favor social explanations, such as Eric Foner and more recently Bruce Levine, make the argument that the differences between the North's free-labor society and the South's slave-labor society made war inevitable. Kentucky's failure to join the Confederacy and the opposition to Lincoln in the southern counties of Ohio and Indiana demonstrate that war was neither inevitable nor the result of the breakdown of the two-party system. Instead, along the Ohio River, social and economic accommodations defined the limits of political differences even over slavery. The argument that conflicts over slavery, even violent ones, fostered a tradition of compromise and accommodation ostensibly puts this narrative at odds with other histories of slavery violence in the antebellum period. Historians of southern culture have argued that violence suffused southern society and was essential to their sense of honor. John Ashworth argued that the differences between the North and the South were rooted in the inherent violence of the master-slave relationship as opposed to the boss-worker relationship. Similarly William Freehling argued that southerners' belief that a powerful minority can, and should, dominate the majority set them at odds with northerners. Arguably these differences should be most pronounced along the border, where Kentucky slaveholders repeatedly attempted to bend Ohioans and Indianans to their will. Indeed borderlanders repeatedly clashed, especially over fugitive reclamation and the kidnapping of free African Americans. Yet these conflicts never descended into war. Was there armed conflict? Yes, certainly there was. Ohioans went to war with Michiganders over their state border, but they never did so with Kentuckians. Both sides blustered a lot, but the casualty list was relatively low, especially when compared with appropriately named "Bleeding Kansas." Thus repeated examples of violent conflict that did not result in outright interstate war or national intervention allowed borderlanders to make their history an example of coexistence. Recently the historian Stanley Harrold argued that years of conflict over the border between slavery and freedom propelled Americans toward the Civil War. Similar to David Grimsted's argument for the oppositional systems of violence that developed in the North and the South, Harrold cited violence as the key to heightened sectional tensions in the 1850s. The fighting, according to Harrold, convinced northerners that they had to defend their freedom from intrusions and convinced southerners that slavery was under

attack. These real and perceived threats erupted in the Kansas Territory in the 1850s, as the border war transitioned into a civil war. While Harrold argued that constant conflict made accommodation impossible, I argue that constant conflict made accommodation necessary. Residents had to find a way to curb their differences because of the centrality of the Ohio River to the local economy and social stability. The diverse mixture of free and slave labor in their state left white Kentuckians less vulnerable and defensive than cotton planters in the Deep South and convinced them that slavery was somehow milder in their state than farther south. Their belief in the mildness of slavery in Kentucky led antislavery northerners along the river to view Kentucky as a state where gradual and peaceful emancipation was possible. Perhaps because they continued to define themselves in relation to the border, neither Ohioans nor Indianans nor Kentuckians ever stopped looking to the federal government as the last resort to resolve interstate conflicts. In contrast, South Carolinians lost faith in the federal government and indeed looked at the Lincoln administration as the problem. Therefore the Union was a threat to their unique sectional interests. Ohioans, Indianans, and perhaps especially Kentuckians believed that the Union best served their interests. Thus they could fight over slavery, but they never lost faith in the Union. My primary entry into the social and political history of borderland slavery was through the words and actions of fugitive slaves. Fugitive slaves were not representative of the enslaved population, because so few slaves actually made the escape. However, fugitive slaves had to transform themselves from slaves into free persons, and in so doing they crossed shared social boundaries between slavery and freedom. After the passage of the Northwest Ordinance, enslaved blacks tried to use the Ohio River as a pathway to freedom and tested the limits of free soil in the early West. As these cases repeatedly came before the courts, they forced white residents to articulate the meaning of the border by making distinctions between servitude and slavery. During the antebellum period, advertisements for fugitive slaves revealed the changes wrought by the emerging steamboat economy. These advertisements explained enslaved African Americans' strategies of escape, which involved blending into the existing free-black population. White residents north of the Ohio repeatedly expressed their concern that they were being inundated with fugitive slaves from Kentucky, and white politicians repeatedly tried to control the legal and illegal immigration of African Americans. Their fears and actions originated in fugitive slaves' ability to transgress the geographical and visual boundary between slavery and freedom. On this borderland the actions of the enslaved powerfully undermined politicians' attempts to maintain interstate harmony. In turn, the politics of border-making shaped African Americans' lived experience of slavery. Narratives of Kentucky slaves provided another vital source base. Former slaves used their narratives to secure their freedom, which forced each to construct a popular and unambiguous story. The slaves' desire for freedom was the foundational convention of the narratives. There was not any room for ambiguity because creating a dichotomy between slavery and freedom confirmed the righteousness of freedom over slavery. Rhetorically separating slavery and freedom turned the narratives into epic battles for liberty. The form of a narrative allowed the narrator to mute the emotions associated with bondage. In their narratives former slaves used the slave/free dichotomy to control their anger, fear, apprehension, love, and attachment and turn them into indictments of slavery. I approached these narratives looking for breakdowns of the slave/free dichotomy. Those moments reveal enslaved African Americans' perceptions of the complexity of human bondage in the diverse labor system of the borderland. Three challenges to the slave/free dichotomy recur in the fugitive slave narratives. First, former slaves forcefully argued that racial prejudice in the North undermined their freedom. Writers made this link explicitly in order to advocate for blacks' civil rights. Testimonies from free African Americans, as well as court records, confirmed the racial limitations of freedom. These descriptions of racial barriers in the narratives suggest that enslaved and free African Americans in the borderland believed that race limited their experience of freedom in America. Fugitive slaves' descriptions of the interchangeability of slave labor and free labor along the border was the second challenge to the slave/free dichotomy. Enslaved ministers traveled into free states, barbers lived on their own in Louisville, and fugitives worked toward freedom as hired laborers in free states. In their narratives, formerly enslaved blacks indirectly critiqued the limitations of the emerging free-labor economy by making slave labor and free labor virtually indistinguishable. Their ability to slip between free labor and slave labor revealed the interconnected Ohio River economy and how race influenced economic opportunity. Even free labor was not truly free. Fugitive slaves built on the themes of racial limitations to freedom and the blending of slave labor and free labor to make their third critique of the slave/free dichotomy. Often fugitives described moments when they had opportunities to escape but ultimately decided to remain where they were. Their specific reasons varied, and in some cases they may have overstated their chances to escape. However, this theme of standing at the precipice of freedom recurred in virtually every narrative by a Kentucky slave. Taken as a whole, they demonstrated that former slaves weighed the benefits of freedom against its limitations before they fled. They perceived the practical differences between slavery and freedom, and in so doing they critiqued freedom in the borderland, because freedom was not always worth the risk. Not only that, but the insecurity of freedom in the borderland meant that they could not leave the chains of bondage on the Kentucky bank. The centrality of fugitive slaves to the history of the borderland highlights the relationship between border crossing and border creation. Theorists have argued that people on the margins have challenged the legitimacy and power of borders by crossing them. Their ability to cross the border, they suggest, highlights the inherent hybridity of borderlands, and cultural hybridity is the natural antithesis to the unnatural, imposed political border. Some

theorists, such as Gloria Anzaldua, argue that national borders subvert preexisting, primordial cultural identities; therefore the way out of oppression is to embrace multiculturalism. According to this understanding, the hybridity found in borderlands makes them fundamentally more tolerant than other cultural paradigms. While I embrace the theory that borders are areas of cultural creativity, this interpretation of borderlands replaces one understanding of difference (national) with another (multicultural) without exploring the process involved in the creation of cultural differences, in particular the nature of border crossing. Borderlands are not utopias of accommodation and hybridity. Residents have to adapt their definitions of the border to facilitate coexistence. Along the Ohio River, coexistence involved the regulation of border crossing. The Ohio River economy required mobile labor to function. Free and enslaved African American laborers worked on steamboats plying the river; enslaved blacks worked among free laborers in free states on yearly contracts; and others simply ran errands across the river on a regular basis. Fugitive slaves worked amid this world of mobility and thus challenged the power of the border. However, in response, white residents of the borderland policed racial boundaries to control the inherent instability of the slave/free border. They used culturally constructed racial boundaries to remap the border between slavery and freedom. Thus the dynamic interplay among nature, social relations, and local politics made this region a borderland defined by both creativity and intolerance.

* * * This narrative of the Ohio River borderland is broken into three sections. The first three chapters detail the origins and creation of the Ohio River border. Before humans began settling in the area, the drainage, soil, and climate of the Ohio River Valley defined the physical landscape as a coherent region, drawn together by the flowing waters of the river. Drawing the natural history of the river and colonial history into the narrative of the creation of the American republic, the first chapter explains why the American Confederation made the Ohio River the dividing line between slavery and freedom. Chapter 2 is an examination of how western settlers accommodated the new federal border on a river that remained an artery of movement between empires. As opportunity for advancement evaporated in Kentucky, white settlers pushed across the river and brought their bound laborers with them, but the federal government refused to interfere with slavery in the newly created Northwest Territory. As a result, Americans who crossed the Ohio River after 1787 crossed a border, but not all had the same idea of what that meant. As the southern Northwest Territory became the states of Ohio and Indiana in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the steady stream of migration across the Ohio River forced Americans to articulate how the river served as a divide. In Chapter 3 I argue that the establishment of the states of Ohio and Indiana made the Ohio River a divide between servitude and slavery, rather than between freedom and slavery. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 explain how white and black residents learned to accommodate the border amid rapid economic change. Chapter 4 traces the economic and social transformation of the region in the third decade of the nineteenth century. In the 1820s Americans' efforts to harness and capitalize on the economic potential of the Ohio River undermined the existing distinctions between slavery and freedom and led to closer associations between race and status. Chapter 5 links the social and economic changes wrought by the river economy with political conflicts over slavery. After the Missouri Crisis laid bare the divisiveness of the slavery issue, politicians promoted commerce and legislated race to quiet conflict along the Ohio River. The rise of politically, legally, and socially defined racial barriers led enslaved African Americans to interpret the region as a borderland. Based on this, Chapter 6 is an analysis of escape from slavery along the Ohio River. While it is true that more slaves escaped from the upper South than from anywhere else in the country, considering the proximity of free soil, their numbers remained small throughout the antebellum period. Enslaved blacks saw both racial barriers to freedom and the similarities between free and slave labor along the river as reasons not to risk an escape attempt because the stigma of bondage followed them into free territory. Chapters 7 and 8 outline the limits of antislavery and proslavery radicalism and the resulting resilience of the borderland during the sectional conflict that led to the outbreak of the Civil War. Chapter 7 links the development of pro- and antislavery sentiment with the movement induced by the Ohio River border. Because white residents stressed the importance of the border in regulating the movement of African Americans, they had little patience for radical pro- and antislavery views. In contrast, this regulation of border crossing radicalized abolitionists, both blacks and whites. Chapter 8 explains that borderlanders reacted against local and national radicalism by stressing their ability to coexist across a divisive border. While they disagreed and clashed, often violently, over the best means of regulating the border, white Americans on both sides of the river defined themselves by their relationship to the border. As a result they viewed their borderland as a reasonable and rational alternative to the growing sectional conflict elsewhere in the country. Despite being on the precipice of war in 1860, the region had cross-river social and economic connections that remained strong. When war finally came, the region split but not along the Ohio River. Kentucky split in two when the southwestern part of the state became part of the Confederacy, but the Ohio River borderland remained intact. The Ohio River was there before the border between slavery and freedom was drawn, and the river remained after the border's destruction following the Civil War. Therefore, perhaps as much as anything else, this narrative follows the Ohio River. Norman Maclean wrote that a "river . . . has so many things to say that it is hard to know what it says to each of us." This book is my effort to listen to the story of the Ohio River.