

famous southern regions. Berlin uses a similar strategy to introduce each of the "generations."

While invigorating reading of new scholarship and Berlin's mastery of his method ensure the power of chapters on plantation and revolutionary generations, the book's most innovative chapters are its last. Berlin's configuration of the first half of the nineteenth century as the "migration generations" fuses together the saga of western development, the internal slave trade, the Underground Railroad, and the transformation of northern states from societies with slaves to freedom grounds. Berlin identifies the internal slave trade that peopled the southwestern territories as a "Second Middle Passage." He reviews its horrors while insisting on the primary contribution of enslaved peoples to the building of Mississippi, Louisiana, and points west. The movement west cost black people heavily when the ameliorative qualities of coastal plantation life devolved into the sunup to sundown workday of cotton and sugar production. In response, blacks centered their hopes on family life and a selective African American religion. The chapter recounts well how the internal slave trade affected the older southern coastal societies. Most evocative is the discussion of the construction of free black society amid harsh racism and historic amnesia about slavery in the North. Here, Berlin contends that "the continued influx of black "southern fugitives, refugees, and deportees to the North constantly renewed the memory of slavery" (p. 235). Anxiety over recapture or kidnapping united northern blacks with those who remained enslaved and ignited the political activism of the antebellum period. This black civic culture was based upon memory and hatred of slavery, deep understanding of the republican messages of the American Revolution, and the never-ending hopes for the jubilee of freedom. A brief but cogent epilogue unpacks how African Americans shaped the Civil War experience. Mine is but a partial recounting of the complexity and thoroughness of Berlin's superb scholarly reach. This is the best synthesis and predominant interpretation of the ensnared histories of African American life and slavery.

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GRAHAM RUSSELL GAO HODGES

*Jane Grey Swisshelm: An Unconventional Life, 1815–1884.* By SYLVIA D. HOFFERT. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. 255p. Illustrations, notes, note on primary sources, index. \$39.95.)

In her new biography of Jane Grey Swisshelm, historian Sylvia D. Hoffert has matched her subject's unusual life with an unconventional biography. Despite Swisshelm's reputation as one of the most influential and controversial women of the mid-nineteenth century, few historians have attempted to unravel the apparent contradictions in the behavior of this caustic, and to some observers, unlikable

journalist and reformer. Other than her published autobiography and a collection of edited letters, there are no other full-length biographies. Both "ashamed and proud" of Swisshelm, local historians of Wilkesburg, Pennsylvania, noted in 1940 that, "All her life she has been creating disturbances and doing 'queer' things" (p. 161). As editor of the *Pittsburg Saturday Visiter* (1847–54), Swisshelm was renowned for her trenchant political commentary and outspoken support for abolition and women's rights. Her words were so potent in the partisan arena of frontier Minnesota that political enemies destroyed her press. In recent years, Swisshelm's reputation has been largely shaped by her contentious reform work. While she maintained great sympathy for the enslaved, she demanded the removal or extermination of the Dakota from Minnesota. Repeatedly defining herself as an outsider, she failed to cooperate with leaders of the woman's rights movement and publicly criticized their ideologies and tactics.

Shifting her angle of vision away from reform, Hoffert chooses instead to present Swisshelm's life as a case study in "the construction of individual gender identities" (p. 7). Swisshelm's "quest for a public life" (p. 201) provides numerous opportunities for Hoffert to reveal the way gender ideals shaped social relations in the nineteenth century. Using a topical approach, Hoffert disentangles the rich tapestry of Swisshelm's story, analyzes the colorful threads of her existence, and reweaves the cloth to make her whole again. Chapters on religion, marriage, property, work, politics, reform, and class lead readers forward and back in time as Hoffert reveals Swisshelm's character. To some extent Hoffert sacrifices a clear development of Swisshelm's growth over time, but for the most part she succeeds in avoiding repetition, keeping her narrative focused on her subject and providing rich historical context.

The result is both a biography of a remarkable woman and a fine social history. Raised in a family of Scottish Covenanters, Swisshelm entered a loveless marriage, fought diligently to gain control over family property, deserted her husband after having one child, and eventually became divorced. All the while she channeled her commitment to doing "God's work" and her prodigious intellectual abilities into making a living by uprooting injustice with her combative pen, first in Pittsburgh and later in Minnesota and Washington, DC. As she uncovers Swisshelm's ability to "break down barriers" (p. 196), Hoffert exposes the gendered world of the men and women she encountered along the way. Her analysis of Swisshelm's negotiations over property, workplace relations in the printing business, and her involvement in partisan politics provides fresh insights into the ways women could maneuver in the public sphere.

Foremost a journalist and champion of the oppressed, Swisshelm proved that a woman could wield political influence with her pen, both as an outside reformer and as a partisan. The latter role set her apart from most leaders of the woman's rights movement, whom Hoffert detailed in her earlier work. In Swisshelm's story, she reconstructs the social and political world in which female activists

operated. Whether as a reformer or a partisan, Swisshelm's political power was limited by her need to maintain female respectability and financial resources. In the end, Hoffert concludes that Swisshelm was both contained by her world and a shaper of it, for she left a legacy of public, professional activism for the next generation of women.

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MARILYN SCHULTZ BLACKWELL

*Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Antebellum Culture of Curiosity.* By DAVID CHAPIN. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004. viii, 257p. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$80; paper, \$24.95.)

Something in David Chapin's new book brings to mind a historical version of DNA, a double helix composed of the lives of the arctic explorer Elisha Kent Kane and his paramour Margaret Fox, the Spiritualist medium. Intertwined in the public mind by virtue of their ardent affair, and perhaps marriage, the two shared a penchant for aggressive self-promotion and for seeking fame by placing themselves on display before a public fascinated with exotic and unknown terrains (Kane presenting the arctic, Fox the afterlife). They were, Chapin argues, epitomes of the "Culture of Curiosity" that flourished in antebellum America, in which vestigial appeals to Enlightenment ideals of moral betterment through scientific knowledge were commingled with the new world of mass culture and commercial profit through public amusement. The "performance of mystery" for which Kane and Fox were renowned earned them both the fame they eagerly sought, but, ironically, also brought them a level of public scrutiny that caused each great discomfort. Kane, as Chapin suggests, struggled with his proximity to the baser forms of mass entertainment as he increasingly became an entertainer, rather than the scientist and educator he wished to be. Yearning for middle-class respectability, Chapin argues, Fox similarly discovered that as her fame and independence grew, her social status as a respectable woman became increasingly tenuous.

Yet in his most perceptive and original observation, Chapin argues that like DNA, these intertwined lives were not simply parallel, but antiparallel, for as similar as they were, Kane and Fox represent alternate poles in American society that reveal a great deal about the rapid transformations affecting antebellum culture. The dynamic relationship that Chapin sketches for Kane and Fox, and the dynamic culture of which they were part, hinges on the tension between the disparities in gender and class, publicity and privacy, education and ambition. Chapin's engaging narrative offers a refreshing new perspective on American culture at midcentury and a skillful depiction of the emerging tension between