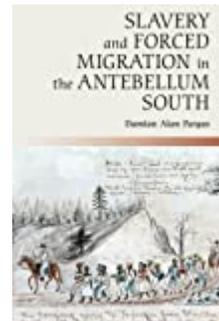


Damian Alan Pargas. *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 296 pp. \$29.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-107-65896-7.



Reviewed by Robert Gudmestad (Department of History, Colorado State University)

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Commissioned by Claus K. Meyer (Mahidol University International College)

Damian Alan Pargas has written an interesting and important book about forced migration in the United States. Unlike many other scholars who have emphasized the workings of the domestic trade or its importance in southern society, Pargas closely examines the lives of the enslaved Americans who became bound up in interstate movement. Put another way, this is a history of the interstate slave trade through the eyes of the enslaved. The author charts the different experiences of the slaves, discusses the ways in which they rebuilt their lives after their forced migration, and examines the consequences for the formation of their identities. Throughout the work, Pargas is careful to discuss how slaves tried to assert their agency over the reallocation of their bodies. The upshot of Pargas's book is that slave identities, orientations, and loyalties were fluid and not fixed because the experience of slavery demanded so.

Pargas divides forced migration into three distinct types—the interstate trade, movement within a state's borders, and the shift from a rural to an urban setting. Each of these three types receive attention in each of the book's chapters, although to varying degrees. Like other historians of forced migration, Pargas devotes more attention to the interstate movement of slaves than to the other types. He is right to do so, as these migrants made

up the bulk of slave movement in the Old South. The book itself progresses from sale and the experience of removal to adjustment to work at the destination, perceptions of regional differences in slavery, and the social assimilation in the new locale. The book's structure is clear and reasonable. Pargas, moreover, firmly moors his research and conclusions in the relevant scholarship. While he agrees with scholars of the domestic slave trade such as Walter Johnson, Steven Deyle, and Michael Tushman, he challenges many of Eugene Genovese's and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's conclusions. For instance, Pargas argues that the importance and ubiquity of the domestic slave trade undercuts Genovese's concept of paternalism (pp. 8-9). The effort to interlock with other scholarship enhances the book's value to those who are relatively new to studies of forced migration.

After a useful background chapter on the domestic slave trade, Pargas demonstrates that, for many enslaved Americans, sale and forced migration was the central event in their lives. Sales were, perhaps, the starkest demonstration of slavery's dehumanization and Pargas effectively shows how slaves rejected this commodification. He is careful to distinguish between agency and success. Slaves deployed their limited power but usually could not influence their sale in a meaningful way.

In local sales, slaves had some ability to manipulate circumstances in order to keep families together. Slaves enmeshed in interstate movement, however, had more limited options. Faced with the imminent destruction of their families, some took drastic steps and deployed—beyond pleas—threats, flight, and suicide. Those slaves who moved to urban areas were often optimistic that they would have increased autonomy. This chapter is an effective illustration of how Pargas emphasizes the different experiences of the various migrants.

The process of movement itself was much more difficult for interstate migrants, as were the processes of assimilation into work patterns and the new community. Learning the new skills required on cotton and sugar plantations was often arduous, and even adapting to new demands, expectations, and tempos exacted a price. In one of the more interesting portions of the book, Pargas demonstrates that slave migrants often felt like outsiders. More importantly, other slaves often treated them as such. This notion challenges the concept of a monolithic slave community and neatly shows how Pargas connects forced migration to larger issues in the historiography of slavery. Migrants often found that the workplace, normally the field, and the locale of worship were the two most common sites for assimilation. Par-

gas makes a convincing case that work and religion were two of the most important ways to define slave life. For interstate migrants, it took longer to develop new family connections. In contrast, intrastate and urban migrants often tried to retain previous social ties while developing new ones, a tricky endeavor.

The book's structure, while admirable, also creates some weaknesses in the monograph. The distinction between the various types of forced migration sometimes leads to redundancies. (See pp. 168-169 and pp. 184-185 on overwork for one such example.) There are also a few occasions where the author's distinctions become too generalized to be useful to scholars. Pargas notes for instance that some newcomers built relationships—within relatively short amounts of time. He continues by writing that—other local migrants integrated far more slowly— (p. 240). It also seems that the author does not account for change over time in any significant way. The South was a much different place in 1860 than it was in 1815. These points of criticism do not, however, undermine Pargas's achievement. The author consulted an amazing array of primary sources, is familiar with the relevant scholarship on forced migration, and has written an essential book for understanding slavery in the antebellum South.

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