
Carl Ekberg's witty and erudite *Stealing Indian Women* adds to a growing list of publications on Indian slavery, a topic pioneered by Leitch Wright in his classic *The Only Land They Knew* (1981) and followed by James F. Brooks' *Cousins and Captives* (2002) and Alan Gallay's *The Indian Slave Trade* (2002). Ekberg surveys Indian slavery in the Illinois country from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century under French and Spanish regimes.

The book fittingly begins with the search for the origins of slavery in the French colonies. In diplomatic negotiations, Indian war captives were offered to representatives of New France, and these gifts could not in good grace be refused. Siouan-speaking tribes raided the sedentary Pawnee, among others, and by 1700 "Panis" became the generic name for Indian slaves originating west of the Missouri River.
Because of the fur trade, imbalanced gender ratios, and the geopolitical rivalries among nations, numbers of Indians, both free and slave, populated the Illinois communities of Kaskaskia, Ste. Genevieve, and St. Louis throughout the eighteenth century. In the 1725 census for the Illinois country, Indian slaves comprised 13 percent of population, compared to roughly twice that number of black slaves. In the 1770s, Indian slaves comprised 17 percent of St. Louis’s population, a figure all the more remarkable in that the Indian slave trade had been banned. Under the Spanish colonial regime, the slave trade “continued in a twilight zone of illegality” (p. 54).

Ekberg’s impressive knowledge about the Illinois settlements and his careful and exhaustive research carries the book, though his sources on Indian slavery are meager before the Spanish regime (1762-1803). Ekberg’s observations about the contrasting aspects of black and Indian slavery are particularly illuminating. In the Indian slave population, females and children outnumbered adult male slaves, while African slaves were generally adult males. Indian slaves were used in a variety of ways—as domestics, hunters, boatmen, and interpreters—and were more equally distributed in the community, while Africans were more exclusively field laborers and were owned by elite families. Indian slaves had half the value of black slaves.

As domestic servants, Indian slave women were constantly vulnerable to sexual assault, yet Ekberg assesses the institution of Indian slavery in the Illinois country as a relatively benign institution in which the status between free and slave was ambiguous and fluid. Concubinage and slavery blurred into one another, and the debates over the legality of Indian slavery were intertwined with the knotty problem of métissage, he argues. The line between white and red, and “free and slave within the Indian population of early St. Louis was often very murky” (p. 75). Indian slaves were likely to be “Gallicized,” and emancipated slaves were assimilated into the Illinois communities as Christians and citizens. If slavery can be described as a social relationship as well as a legal status as property, in the Illinois country the social relationships come to the foreground. This message is particularly conspicuous in Part II of the Stealing Indian Women, a case study of an incident in 1773 in which a métis woodman named Céladon abducted two Indian slave women. (This vignette supplies the book with its title.) The slaves in this dramatic tale enjoy freedom to travel and to mix casually with others on terms of equality. Richly contextualized within the social history of Ste. Genevieve, a community with a multiethnic, geographically mobile population, the story of Céladon and the woman he kidnaps and woos, provides
a rare window into race relations, human motivation, social norms, and the law. It is a good read.

Unfortunately, the book lacks a bibliography.

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