



# The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War

*William W. Freehling*

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William W. Freehling is one of America's leading historians. His groundbreaking works on slavery and the years leading up to the Civil War have earned him numerous awards and prizes. His first book, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836*, was hailed as one of the most significant studies of the pre-Civil War era, and earned him the prestigious Bancroft Prize and the Allan Nevins Prize for history. And his Owsley Prize-winning *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*, was praised by the *Washington Times* as "A triumph of historical research and art."

This provocative collection of essays, all of them new or thoroughly revised, synthesizes thirty years of Freehling's writing and reflection on the nature of slavery and the causes of the Civil War. He offers a fascinating look at subjects such as the nonradical nature of the American Revolution, as seen in the Founding Fathers' chary manner in promoting the antislavery cause. He illuminates the problematic concept of a "paternalism" which supposedly harmonized liberty for slaveholders (those who could protect themselves) with protection for slaves and impoverished whites (those who would allegedly fail as free men). Freehling then considers slaveholders' attempts to reconcile slavery with democracy and thus formulate a coherent world view, especially as seen in the strained ideologies of John C. Calhoun, George Fitzhugh, and James Henley Thornwell. In an important new interpretation of slave resistance, such as the Denmark Vesey uprising of 1822 (which sought to undercut this paternalistic reconciliation of democracy and slavery), he describes rebellious slaves' success in casting doubt on the compatibility of democratic and authoritarian realms, and fugitive slaves' success in provoking Civil War and emancipation. Stressing the need for a new synthesis of American history both chronologically and topically, Freehling explains why the Civil War came, relating it to the American Revolution and the reasons why the Confederacy lost the Civil War. Likewise, the nature of slavery as a social institution is connected with the nature of pre-war politics and to the outcome of wartime military encounters.

Enhanced with brief introductions, the essays lay out the design of a new multicultural history of the United States, one which emphasizes the way African Americans, white women, and white men condition each other and foster social and political change.

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