Slow Art: The Pleasures of Trompe l’Oeil

Trompe l’oeil invites us to undeceive ourselves of the fiction before us, and in so doing, it posits that the senses can detect and explain deception.

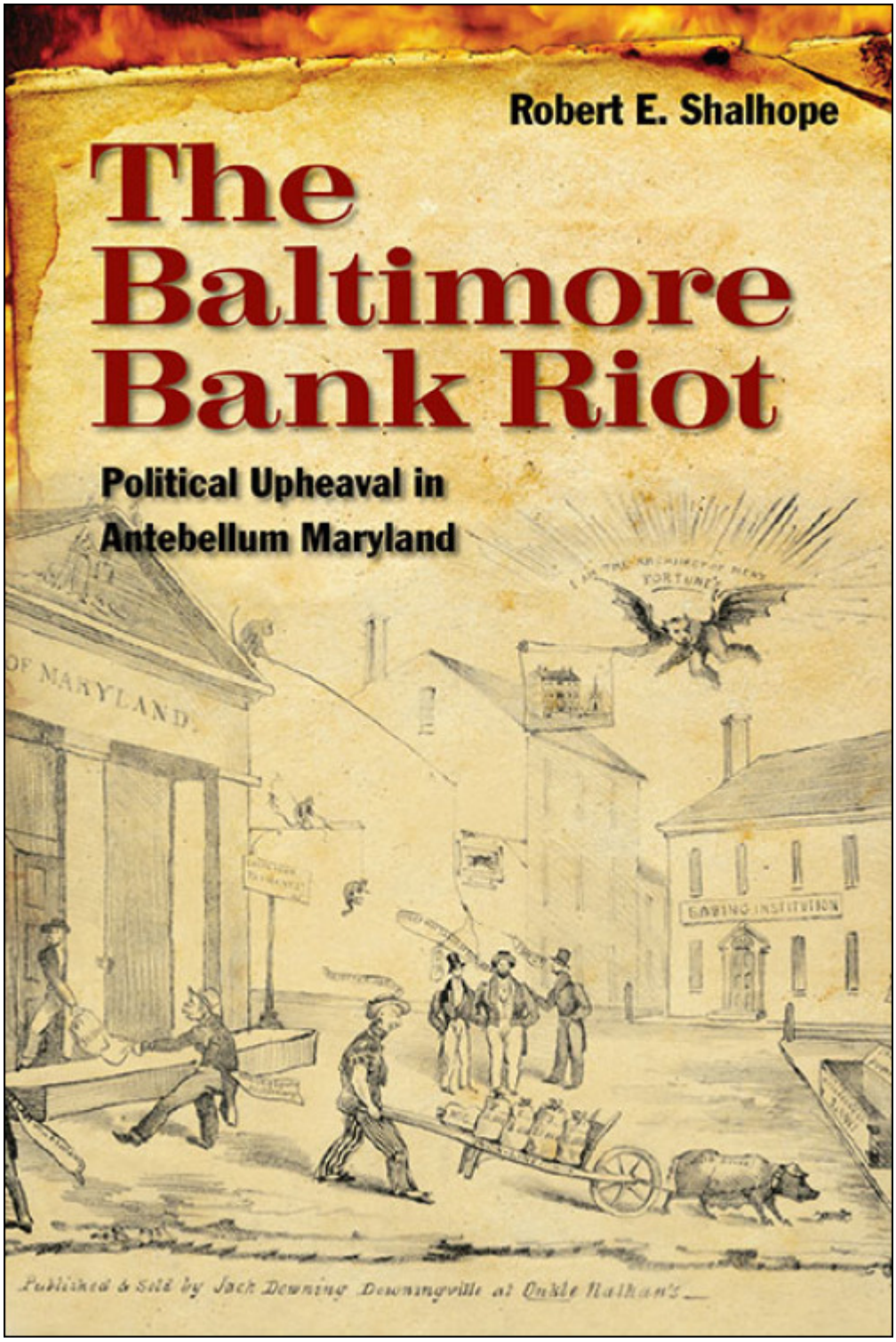
Sarah Johnson’s Mount Vernon

How could I tell that story for people who lived and died more than a century ago?

In Praise of Hearsay

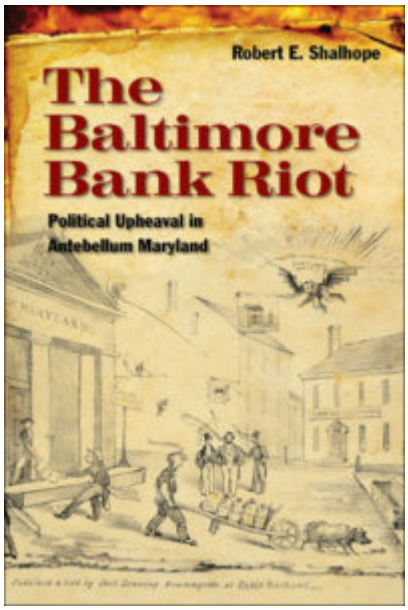
“[I]f justice—holding the guilty accountable—is actually a social priority, is it not possible that knowledge of a defendant’s past might further that end?”

Money Matters



In a three-day period in August 1835, Baltimoreans engaged in a tumultuous riot that killed five people, injured twenty others, and caused extensive property damage. As Americans slowly climb out of the Great Recession, the Baltimore Bank Riots remind us of the deep historical roots of Americans' animosity toward banks. Historian Robert Shalhope, who has written numerous books and articles on Jeffersonian republicanism, the Second Amendment, and Jacksonian party development, provides a persuasive account of one of the most influential political events of the antebellum era. Shalhope's monograph joins other recent

books by Richard Kilbourne Jr., Stephen Mihm, and Richard Ellis, all of which portray the seamier elements of antebellum banking. Overspeculation, excessive leveraging, and fraudulent pyramid schemes—all of which have been blamed for our current financial crisis—were alive and well in the 1830s. As Shalhope explains, *The Baltimore Bank Riot* is a morality tale where "good people suffer at the hands of scoundrels whom they believe to be good people" (12).



Robert E. Shalhope, The Baltimore Bank Riot: Political Upheaval in Antebellum Maryland. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009. 208 pp., $50.00.

With thousands of investors bankrupt, including many who lost their entire life's savings, public outrage boiled over.

With a close reading of Baltimore's leading newspapers, combined with political cartoons, broadsides, legislative committee reports, obscure pamphlets, and intimate knowledge of the existing historical literature, Shalhope argues that the riot stemmed from three principal causes: general anti-bank sentiment, a belief in popular sovereignty, and growing outrage over the frauds associated with the closing of the Bank of Maryland (2-3). The questions raised by the riot and its legal aftermath helped transform political parties in Maryland from loose factions centered around personalities to a diametrically polarized two-party system.

As the two parties developed coherent ideologies, they responded to local conditions in Maryland and adopted contrasting interpretations of popular sovereignty and the legacy of the American Revolution. Jacksonian Democrats, hailing the Lockean social contract and the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson, embraced the people's right to revolt. They "envisioned an egalitarian, democratic society" and believed that government should be continually responsive to the people (4). Whigs, on the other hand, emphasized

social stability and favored a market-oriented society. One needed law and order to protect republican institutions from tyranny (116). Only a powerful state with strong institutions could protect private property, which, in turn, secured investment, commerce, and prosperity. These ideological differences shaped Maryland politics for the next thirty years, particularly during a state constitutional crisis in 1836 and Maryland's flirtation with secession in 1860.

Shalhope begins by discussing the origins of Maryland's anti-bank sentiment with particular attention to how the Bank of Maryland's directors engaged in shady financial schemes. The bank's main directors—Evan Poultney, Hugh McElderry, David Perine, John Glenn, and Reverdy Johnson—organized a "club" where they could embezzle customers' deposits to pay for Bank of Maryland stock at inflated rates (33). The club then used this stock as collateral to invest in the newly created General Insurance Company. In addition, club members opened up numerous branches of the Bank of Maryland in several states and speculated in $500,000 worth of Tennessee state bonds. As homeowners today ruefully realize, this type of risky leveraging works so long as the underlying capital continues to appreciate. But when the Second Bank of the United States restricted credit in late 1833, forcing smaller banks to call in loans, the Bank of Maryland quickly became insolvent. The financial house of cards collapsed.

With thousands of investors bankrupt, including many who lost their entire life's savings, public outrage boiled over. During the three days of rioting, angry mobs ransacked houses, lit bonfires in streets to destroy expensive furniture, and fueled further frenzy by consuming copious amounts of fine wine. On the third day of rioting, a counteroffensive led by General Samuel Smith quieted the flames. While prosecutors achieved convictions for a few of the mob's leaders, the trials for the bank's directors had more far-reaching consequences. These trials ignited fierce political debates between popular sovereignty on the one hand, and social stability on the other.

The Baltimore Bank Riot should appeal to both academics and laypeople alike. By qualifying his theoretical assumptions up front, Shalhope strengthens his intellectual credibility. He emphasizes language and ideology in party development, but stresses that his model applies only to Maryland. Moreover, Shalhope recognizes that republicanism and the market revolution—historically, two popular, though dichotomous, analytical paradigms that describe the antebellum era—do not suffice to explain local political complexities. For instance, both parties held a variety of views on national economic issues such as tariffs, internal improvements, banks, and land sales (9). The book's prose is also highly readable, and Shalhope does not burden the reader with esoteric jargon.

Readers should pay close attention to Shalhope's methodology, particularly his nuanced portrayal of social relations. No substantial differences in wealth existed between Democratic and Whig Party leaders, leading Shalhope to conclude that the "search for meaning in the language and ideas … takes on even greater

significance," and that public literature "is essential to any attempt to analyze the emergence of political and social persuasions" (3-4). Careful not to dismiss socio-economic conditions or take language at face value, the author, nonetheless, finds that the rioters' behavior is best explained by the language, ideas, and discourse available to them through public literature.

Baltimoreans in the 1830s, he says, may have been aware of class distinctions, but they were not class *conscious*. Rioters did not target wealthy individuals across the board, but only those who were involved in the bank scandal (61). Yet it is clear that one's social standing mattered a great deal in Shalhope's narrative. Jacksonian editorials constantly derided Whigs as "monied aristocrats." In some trials, the testimony of a "gentleman" was enough to jail some suspects without substantive evidence (76-77). The trials, moreover, reflected a concerted effort on the part of Baltimore's gentry to reassert their power, prestige, and respectability. While there are subtle differences between privilege and class, authors from a different methodological persuasion might look at the same evidence and reach different conclusions. Shalhope correctly points out that Maryland's Democrats were not anti-capitalist; they only "wanted the market open to all so that they, too, could prosper" (7). Touting the banner of equal rights, Jacksonians rejected corporate monopolies that afforded economic opportunity to a privileged few. But at other times, Shalhope says that Jacksonians held "traditional," "communal" values and were, perhaps, even pre-modern (3). The evidence Shalhope presents for this characterization is sparse and he could have more clearly defined the terms *traditional* and *modern*.

Shalhope, perhaps, overstates his characterization of public opinion by relying heavily on anonymous pseudonyms from newspaper editorials. He argues that anti-bank language from *Niles' Register* and the *Baltimore Republican* fueled visceral anger among many Baltimoreans (26) and that editorials in the aftermath of the trials had a strong influence on public opinion (94-96). While newspaper readership was high, proving this direct causal link is difficult. To his credit, Shalhope also analyzes bank-related public meetings, citizens' memorials, and other literary devices of political culture. But he does not explore precisely *why* antebellum newspapers used anonymous pseudonyms and engaged in such vituperative rhetoric. This was, after all, the era of the party press, and newspapers were the key mechanism that connected party leaders with average voters. Editors also had a monetary incentive to publish violent language. Their success was not only dependent on increasing voter turnout, higher subscription rates, and building a party structure, but newspaper editors, through financial necessity, had to seek out political patronage and printing contracts. Publishing extreme commentary could help achieve this objective. Furthermore, pseudonyms such as "A Creditor" and "Junius" were often, in fact, masking editors or elite politicians, not subscribers. In doing so, editors created the illusion of public support for their views and purported to speak for public opinion. In the absence of reliable polling, public sentiment in the antebellum era is difficult to gauge.

The book's concluding chapter may raise issues for historians of the Civil War. Between 1838 and 1860, slavery, immigration, class animosities, and debates over popular sovereignty in the western territories reconfigured the two-party system, with large slaveholders gravitating toward the Democratic Party (158-159). Yet Shalhope also claims that the "dramatically restructured Democratic Party espoused the same principles presented so forcefully by Samuel Harker and his fellow Democrats during the fall elections of 1836" and that the debate over secession in Maryland "rested upon precisely the same ideological beliefs that sustained the Whig and Democratic persuasions of 1836" (160-161). Drawing a parallel between calls for secession and earlier Jacksonian appeals to popular sovereignty is problematic. The author also indicates his sympathies when he says that with secession repulsed, "popular sovereignty had truly become a political fiction" (163). Throughout the book, Shalhope seems to lament the failure of Democratic appeals to the social contract, as well as the increasing power of state authority promoted by Whigs.

All things considered, however, the book is a must-read. Not beholden exclusively to the back-room wheeling-and-dealing of elite politics, nor the quotidian qualities of daily life, Shalhope successfully integrates political, intellectual, and social history. His chapter on the riot is especially exciting, giving readers a sense of the grass-roots political activism that pervaded antebellum America.

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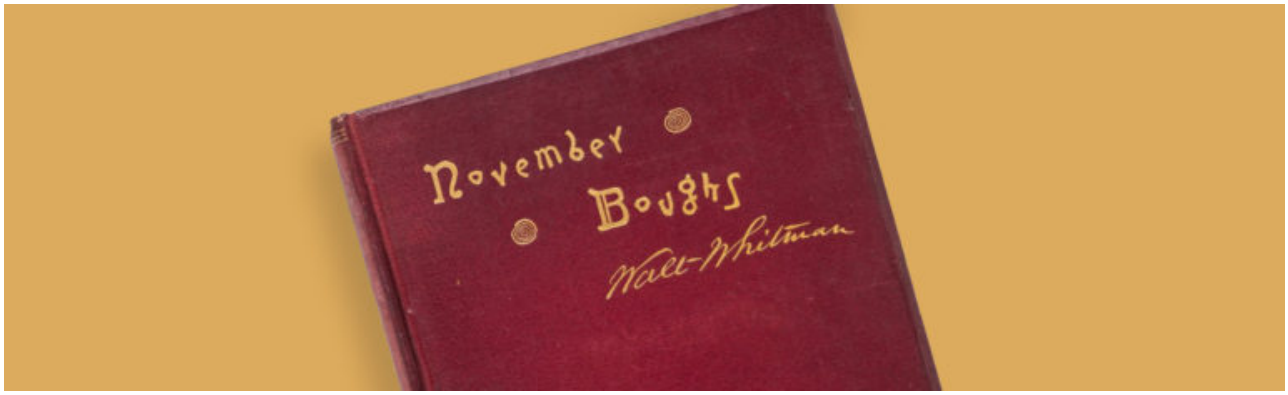
Stephen Campbell is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and author of "Hickory Wind: The Role of Personality and the Press in Andrew Jackson's Bank War in Missouri, 1831-1837," *Missouri Historical Review* (2007). His dissertation project analyzes Andrew Jackson's Bank War with special attention to newspaper editors, political patronage, and bank loans.

Whitman and Disability: An Introduction

The pathways our contributors seek are divergent and take myriad forms. As Whitman would have preferred, they describe contradictory perspectives and incommensurable ontologies. And yet, they find common ground in the alternative mobilities they take to reach their destinations.

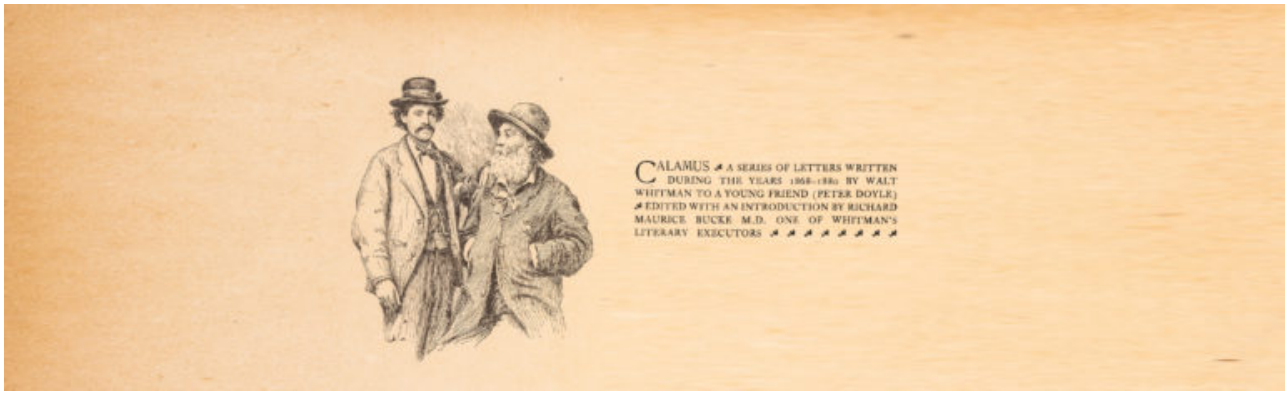
“Now I Chant Old Age”: Whitman’s Geriatric Vistas



Far from signaling the diminution of interpretive ability or affective capacity, old age here is linked to critical acumen.

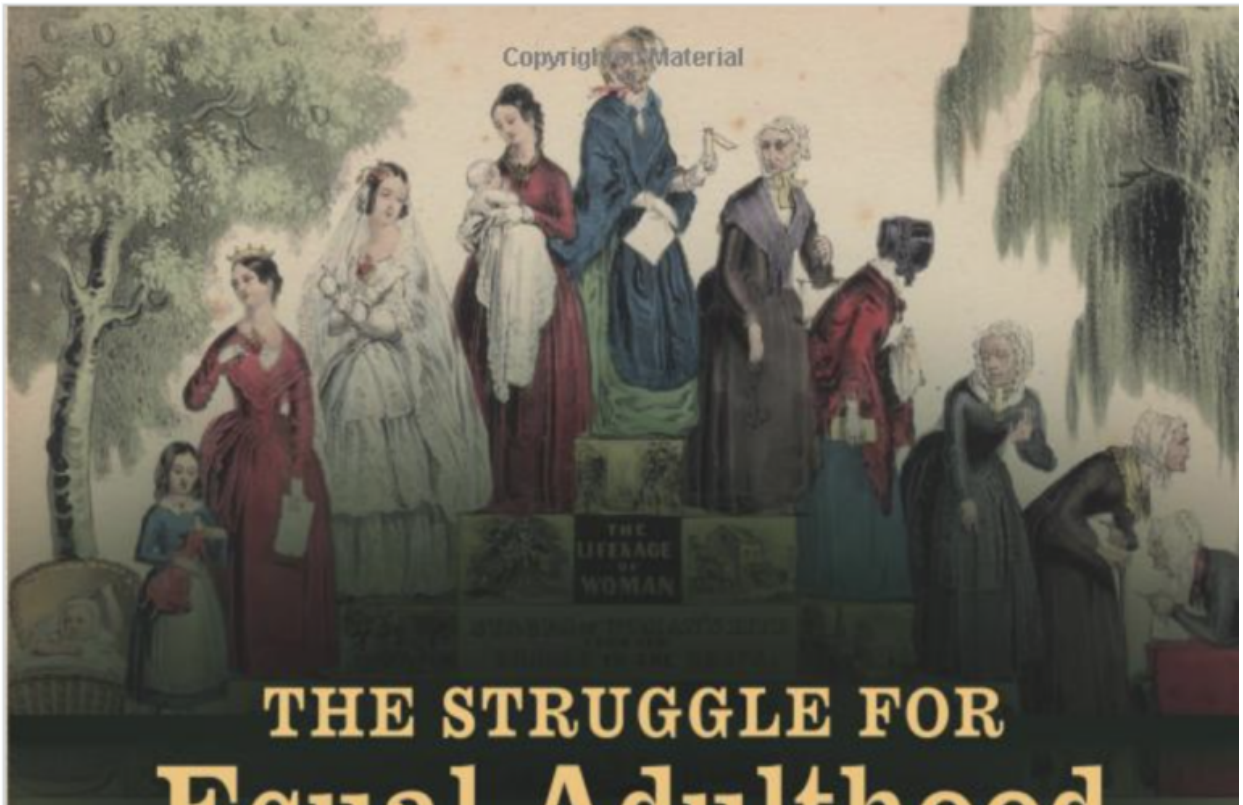
Convalescent Calamus: Paralysis and Epistolary Mobility in the Camden

Correspondence with Peter Doyle



In a majority of these letters, we find Whitman integrating a reflection on his uncertain state of health with an expression of his desire to be with Peter again.

Who’s Mature Enough to Govern?



THE STRUGGLE FOR Equal Adulthood

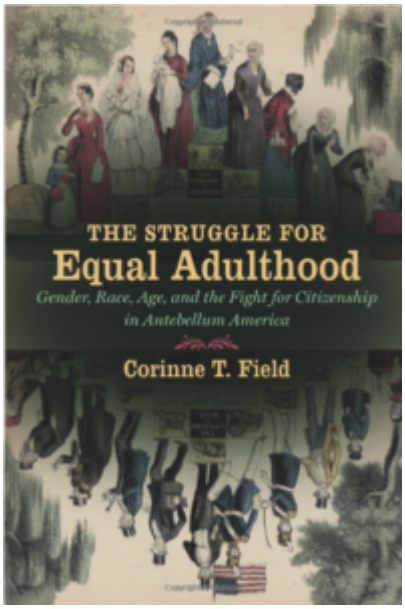
Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America

Corinne T. Field

Corinne T. Field, *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America.* Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 260 pp., $32.95.

If you are not currently convinced that age should be a historical category of analysis alongside gender, race, class, and disability, Corinne Field's new book should go a long way toward persuading you. *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America* advances the study of citizenship in the nineteenth-century United States by showing how the political significance of maturity and adulthood were at the center of women's and African Americans' efforts to expand democracy to its full meaning and potential.

Field's monograph follows a straightforward format. Each chapter uses a specific set of writings by leaders in the abolition, women's rights, or black rights movement to examine the connections between age, race, gender, power, and citizenship. Many of her subjects will be familiar to those interested in early American history—Abigail Adams, Mary Wollstonecraft, Frederick Douglass. Others—such as Pauline Wright Davis and Frances Harper—are worthy of introduction or further acquaintance. The prologue traces the origin of Anglo-Americans' association between maturity—embodied by white, middle-class men—and liberty during the Enlightenment. This grounds Field's project in the intellectual and political developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although debates about coming of age and political power exist throughout history, Field identifies the unique circumstances of the early United States as a fruitful period for considering the connections between maturity and democracy.



Granting the privileges of adulthood based on assumptions about race and gender allowed political leaders to celebrate equality while denying it to the majority of the population.

In the first chapter, Field shows how prominent female writers viewed the ideology of republicanism. The shift from birthright to consent as the foundation of political participation extolled the significance of maturity for white men's rational development from subjects to citizens. But women and African Americans remained "perpetual minors" in the eyes of the community and the state (22). By analyzing the work of Abigail Adams, Phillis Wheatley, and Mary Wollstonecraft, Field shows how women's inability to achieve intellectual and moral leadership as they aged became a critique of men's commitment to republican principles. By examining how these writers understood "that women could not make a transition to adulthood on the same terms as men," Field establishes the connection between maturity and liberty that was at the heart of America's democratic experiment (49).

Against the backdrop of the Jacksonian enfranchisement of the "common man"—a white male adult who possessed "the structures of the mind and the qualities of the heart" to maintain the nation's liberty—Field examines "the political significance of chronological age" (53-54). Analyzing the writings of Frederick Douglass, David Walker, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, chapter 2 shows how these activists used the expansion of white male suffrage and the political empowerment of propertyless white men as a wedge to insert their call for expanded citizenship. If age, rather than wealth, was to be the measure of republican commitment, it should apply equally to women and African Americans as to white men.

Chapter 3 begins Field's investigation into the organized women's rights and antislavery movements that began in the 1840s and continued during the Civil War era. As activists within these interrelated movements advanced the citizenship claims of white women and African Americans, the significance of age and maturity revealed tensions within the alliance. Reform movement leaders challenged slavery and disenfranchisement by pointing to the emancipation received by white men at age twenty-one. But when it came to prioritizing white women's or African American men's advancement, activists fell back on stereotypes of maturity based on gender or race.

In chapter 4, Field explores popular ideas of life course, "the timing and sequence of transitions such as getting married and entering the workforce" (176 n.20), as a backdrop for activists challenging the boundaries of race and class that kept women and African Americans from achieving adulthood. Writers such as Pauline Wright Davis, Frederick Douglass, and Frances Harper worked to free African Americans from the state of perpetual dependence. They argued that fulfillment of one's potential on the life course could come only from the independence that white men took for granted. Here Field gives more weight to the economic conditions that produced gender and race inequality around the meaning of age. She also discusses the pseudo-science of racial difference that prompted many white Americans to view African-descended people as naturally inferior. This economic and intellectual context makes this chapter one of the

strongest in the book.

Chapter 5 follows the fate of the campaign for equal adulthood after the Civil War. During Reconstruction, the image of the valiant black soldier was pitted against the virtuous white mother in a battle over who was more qualified for citizenship. Women's rights and African American rights activists tried to keep their alliance focused on equal political and social opportunity regardless of race or gender at age twenty one, but white male politicians appeared to favor granting suffrage to black men based on their military contributions. So, white and black women offered their own arguments for enfranchisement based on competing conceptions of gender, race, and maturity. By the 1870s, the alliance of equal adulthood fractured into internal conflicts over whether men or women, blacks or whites, educated or uneducated could best chart the nation's future.

During Radical Reconstruction, the political rights of adult men—both black and white—were enshrined within the constitution. In chapter 6, Field discusses how this advancement for former enslaved men left women as perpetual minors. Instead of embracing adulthood as an equal standard for all people and viewing maturity as a universal experience, activists emphasized gender and race stereotypes to protect their group's rights and interests. Even as white women and African Americans gained incremental rights and opportunities, they were unable to unseat white patriarchy from its position of dominance.

The Struggle for Equal Adulthood shows us how democracy brought the promise of equality, but spread it unevenly through the nation. Granting the privileges of adulthood based on assumptions about race and gender allowed political leaders to celebrate equality while denying it to the majority of the population. Through the political power of maturity, democracy expanded the authority of young, propertyless white men and age requirements emerged as a solution to the arbitrary nature of aristocracy. Overall, Field gives us a deeper understanding of democracy in the nineteenth century by showing how activists recognized the privilege of adulthood built into the early American political system.

The significance of Field's scholarship extends well beyond the primary focus of her study of citizenship and politics. The power of adulthood includes not only formal political rights, but also opportunities for participation in the public sphere, recognition in the home, and respect in the realm of commerce. Using the perspective of age and maturity, Field's study of the politics of age removes the artificial boundary between the personal and the political, or the so-called private and public spheres. She shows how nineteenth-century activists "connect[ed] otherwise disparate demands for political rights, control of their own labor, sexual autonomy, cultural power, and family authority—all of which were things adult white men claimed for themselves but regularly denied children, men who were not white, and all women" (5). Maturity was the lynch pin of power in nineteenth-century America, and scholars can take the lessons from Field's study to many other topics in early American history.

Corinne Field makes an important contribution to early American history by

showing how maturity became a new way to enforce racial and gender hierarchy within the republican environment of the nineteenth century. Adulthood seemed like a democratic measure of power and civic participation, but it was subject to the less-visible discrimination based on stereotypes of who possessed maturity. With age as a category of analysis, scholars can see how patriarchy and white supremacy were entwined features of nineteenth-century democracy.

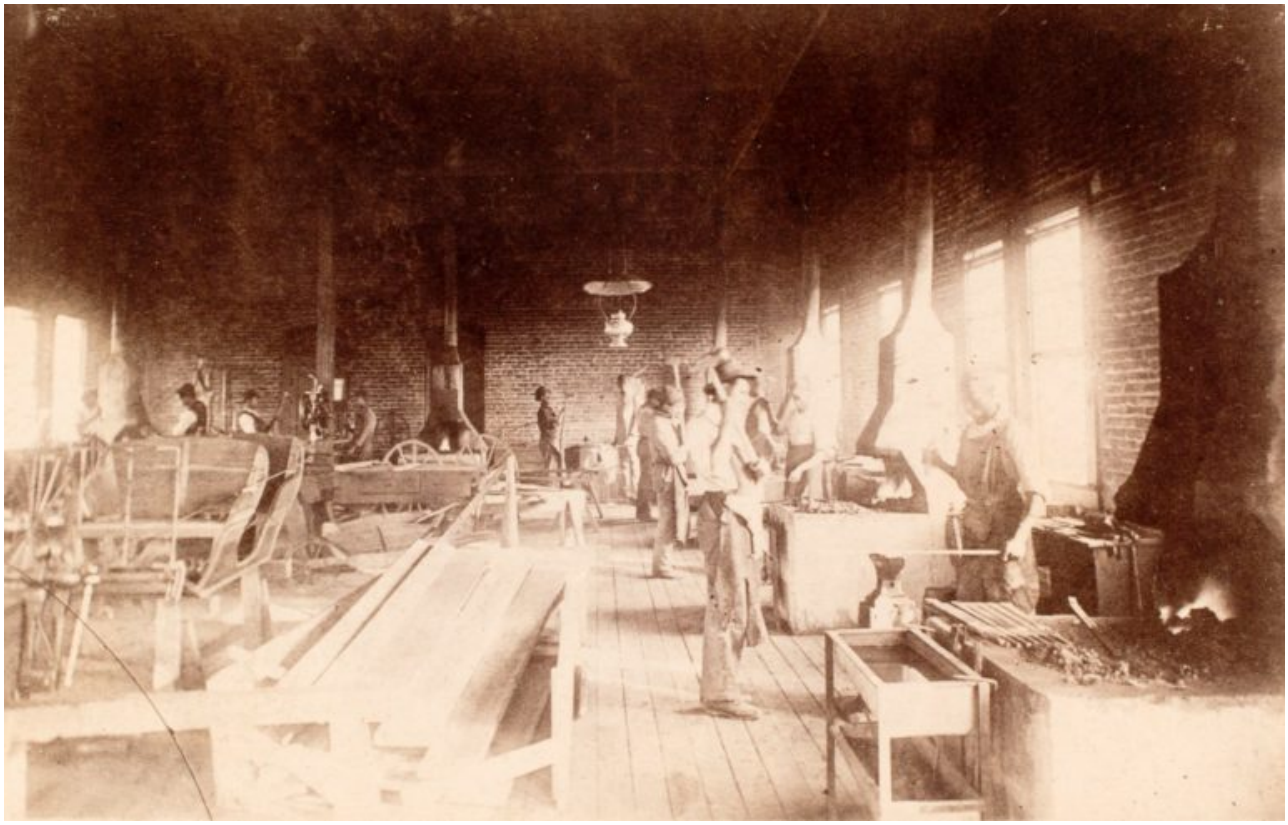
This article originally appeared in issue 15.3.5 (July, 2015).

Jane Fiegen Green studies how the experiences of young men and women laid the foundation for the mythology of democratic capitalism in nineteenth-century America. She received her PhD in history from Washington University in St. Louis in 2014.

Con Games: Past and present

Why are we so readily drawn to cons of all stripes?

Fires in the Hearth



Poet Afaa M. Weaver explores his ancestors’ ability to maintain loving structures despite the pressures of slavery.