

FREEDOM'S CRESCENT

The Lower Mississippi Valley is more than just a distinct geographical region of the United States; it was central to the outcome of the Civil War and the destruction of slavery in the American South. Beginning with Lincoln's 1860 presidential election and concluding with the final ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, *Freedom's Crescent* explores the four states of this region that seceded and joined the Confederacy: Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. By weaving into a coherent narrative the major military campaigns that enveloped the region, the daily disintegration of slavery in the countryside, and political developments across the four states and in Washington DC, John C. Rodrigue identifies the Lower Mississippi Valley as the epicenter of emancipation in the South. A sweeping examination of one of the war's most important theaters, this book highlights the integral role this region played in transforming United States history.

John C. Rodrigue is the Lawrence and Theresa Salameno Professor in the Department of History at Stonehill College. His book *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields* received the Kemper and Leila Williams Prize from the Louisiana Historical Association. He is also a co-editor of one of the volumes of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*. In 2016–2017, he served as the President of the Louisiana Historical Association.

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FREEDOM'S CRESCENT

The Civil War and the Destruction of Slavery in the
Lower Mississippi Valley

JOHN C. RODRIGUE

Stonehill College



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
 978-1-108-42409-7 — Freedom's Crescent
 John C. Rodrigue
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108424097

DOI: 10.1017/9781108539715

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First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Rodrigue, John C., author.

Title: Freedom's crescent : the Civil War and the destruction of slavery in the lower Mississippi Valley / John C. Rodrigue, Stonehill College, Massachusetts.

Other titles: Civil War and the destruction of slavery in the lower Mississippi Valley

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2023. | Series: Cambridge studies on the American South | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022034272 (print) | LCCN 2022034273 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108424097 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108539715 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: African Americans – History – 1863–1877. | Freed persons – United States – History – 19th century. | Slaves – Emancipation – United States – History – 19th century. | Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865–1877) – Mississippi River Valley. | African Americans – Mississippi River Valley – Social conditions – 19th century. | Slavery – Mississippi River Valley – History – 19th century. | Mississippi River Valley – History – Civil War, 1861–1865. Classification: LCC E185.2 R63 2023 (print) | LCC E185.2 (ebook) | DDC 973.7/14–dc23/eng/20220823

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022034272>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022034273>

ISBN 978-1-108-42409-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-43934-3 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-42409-7 — Freedom's Crescent
John C. Rodrigue
Frontmatter
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to Sylvia

It may look like boasting – but what I tell you is truth – I began to reflect how magnificent a thing it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in view of so wonderful a manifestation of God's power. I do believe that I blushed with shame when this idea crossed my mind. After a little while I became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I positively felt a *wish* to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make; and my principal grief was that I should never be able to tell my old companions on shore about the mysteries I should see. These, no doubt, were singular fancies to occupy a man's mind in such extremity – and I have often thought since, that the revolutions of the boat around the pool might have rendered me a little light-headed.

Edgar Allan Poe, "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Given that this book has turned out to be a much more ambitious undertaking – and has consequently taken far longer to complete – than I had originally intended, it is a pleasure finally to be able to thank all of the persons who have helped to bring it to fruition. I first began to develop the idea for this book while working on my previous one, *Lincoln and Reconstruction*. It occurred to me then that there was a larger story than I was able to tell at the time. Little did I know how much larger, and it took me a while to figure things out, but I thank everyone who was associated with that book for this one as well.

A chance encounter with David Moltke-Hansen at the 2016 annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians (OAH) in Providence, Rhode Island, first steered me in the direction of Cambridge University Press's Studies on the American South series. David had previously edited the series with Mark M. Smith, but it now was being edited, David informed me, by Mark and Peter A. Coclanis. I thank David for the suggestion (which never would have occurred to me). I cannot express my appreciation enough to Mark and Peter for all of their support, encouragement, and patience during these last few years, especially when the length of the manuscript was beginning to cause, as Mark so eloquently put it, "some heartburn."

I would like to express special gratitude to everyone I have had the privilege of working with at Cambridge University Press. Deborah Gershonowitz first assumed responsibility for this project, and she offered important advice and support during my early association with the press (in addition to enabling me to get to self-importantly say that "I have a meeting with my editor in New York"). Cecelia Cancellaro subsequently inherited stewardship of this project, and I especially appreciate her guidance, support, and saintly patience in bringing a long and unwieldy manuscript to completion. I also thank the anonymous outside reviewers of the original book proposal and, later, the manuscript for their challenging but helpful insights, questions, and – yes – criticisms, all of which made the book much better. As things got down to the wire, Victoria Phillips handled my innumerable questions with aplomb. Thanks to the members of the Press's outstanding production department – Melissa Ward and Vidya Ashwin and her team, especially copy editor Vinod Kumar – who made this book a truly global endeavor.

I had the opportunity to present parts of this work before various audiences over the years, much to my benefit. I had the special privilege of presenting an early version of the project in April 2015 before a symposium in honor of Ira Berlin at the University of Maryland, College Park. The reaction from the audience suggested to me that I might in fact be on to something, but I am especially grateful for the comments and responses from Steven F. Miller (my former colleague on the Freedmen and Southern Society Project [FSSP]), Lawrence N. Powell, Thavolia Glymph, Steven Hahn, and Ira himself. That gathering, for various reasons, truly was a highlight of my career. I had the opportunity to present the Tennessee dimension of this story at a conference at the University of Memphis in May 2016 marking the sesquicentennial of the 1866 Memphis massacre. I would like to thank Susan E. O'Donovan (another former FSSP colleague who was present at the Ira event) for refusing to take no for an answer when she invited me to participate in the conference. I also thank Susan and Beverly Greene Bond for putting together a brilliantly conceptualized program, and the other participants and audience members for their questions, suggestions, and positive vibes.

I gave a much-abbreviated version of the Louisiana story in my presidential address before the 2017 annual meeting of the Louisiana Historical Association (LHA) in Shreveport. I greatly appreciate the response to my address from LHA friends and associates far too numerous to name here, but I would especially like to thank my dear friends Chuck Shindo and Michael Fontenot for traipsing all the way up from Baton Rouge to hear my address, and Faye Phillips for all of her support throughout my academic career, dating back to when we first met in the spring of 1988 at the Louisiana State University special collections, as I was just commencing my dissertation research.

Louis Ferleger, another dear friend of more than thirty years and one of my most earnest advocates, made me the proverbial offer I couldn't refuse by insisting that I present before the American Political History Institute of Boston University's History Department. I thank Lou and Bruce J. Shulman, who administers the Institute, for the invitation to speak in September 2018. I also greatly appreciate the challenging questions and words of encouragement that I received from Nina Silber, Sarah T. Phillips, and the other contributors to our collegial discussion.

I had the great honor, along with Edward Ayers, of participating in the Distinguished Scholars Series at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana, in March 2019. I greatly appreciate the invitation from David D. Plater, author of a fine book on the Butler family of south Louisiana, to give the talk. I asked David what he needed me for if he already had Ed Ayers lined up, but he insisted, and for that I thank him. I would also like to thank Paul Wilson, Chair of the Department of History and Geography; Jay Clune, President of Nicholls State; Tom Becnel, retired faculty member in the Nicholls

history department; and the entire Nicholls State/Thibodaux community for their gracious hospitality. It is always nice to go back to Louisiana.

I presented an early version of this project at a Dean's Forum at Stonehill College. I would like to thank the friends, colleagues, and students who attended the presentation and who asked probing and challenging questions and offered helpful advice and suggestions. I also thank those of my Stonehill colleagues who offered encouragement and support during some trying times. Moreover, two separate sabbatical leaves (yet another indication of how long this project took) also provided me with the time, in both instances at critical junctures, to undertake significant but essential revisions of the manuscript.

I thank the staffs of the various archives I have visited over the years for their assistance and of the repositories from which I secured illustrations for reproducing them and for permission to use them. The Stonehill College library's interlibrary loan staff likewise provided invaluable aid in tracking down materials. Tom Willcockson created the excellent maps.

I unabashedly abused the friendship of Paul A. Cimbala (fellow Emory grad and New Jersey guitarist), Michael W. Fitzgerald, the aforementioned Lou Ferleger, and Joseph P. Reidy in taking them up on their gracious offers to read a ramshackle manuscript. I'd like to think our friendships have survived, but I owe each of them a tremendous debt of gratitude for offering advice and suggestions that greatly improved what I was trying to say. They really did make the book better, and there was simply no getting around the fact that I had to have sympathetic but discerning readers look at it. I hope to be able to repay the debt. Steven Hahn also read parts of the manuscript and provided sagacious advice, in addition to his general support and encouragement. Richard Frank (my uncle-in-law) graciously read the entire manuscript – the long version – and made a number of good catches.

I thank Michael Vorenberg for his assistance on a couple of specific matters that made a big difference. He may not remember it, but James Oakes offered a reassuring endorsement when this book was barely a two-paragraph proposal.

Friends with whom I have discussed this project over the years also offered advice, suggestions, and encouragement, or just helped to keep me sane. They include Mike Ross (whose insistence that I include Alabama, since "people write songs about Alabama," I ultimately had to take a pass on); Scott Marler (whose excellent book on New Orleans helped me greatly); Andrew Slap; Mark Schantz; Paul Cimbala (again) and Elizabeth Vozzola; Rex Palmer and Claudia Rizzini; and Gloria and Ken Nykiel. Jim Roark, my dissertation adviser from back in the day and longtime friend, also read parts of the manuscript and was willing to talk endlessly – on those all-too-rare occasions we are able to get together anymore, and on the phone – about the project. In an entirely different realm of my existence, Jim Thorpe, Dave Betten, Don Distaso, Wayne Jarger, Tom Tozzi, and Tony Chibaro, as always, kept it real.

My friend John Merriman has served as an unindicted co-conspirator on this project. In the nearly forty years since we first met at Emory University in preparing for the fall 1986 semester, John has been a dear and true friend, a comrade, and an intellectual partner. Even though he now lives half a world away, our regular phone conversations have helped to shape my thinking on this book and on many other things. And once again, John generously gave of his time and worked his magic on the footnotes and bibliography. When it comes to historiographical or bibliographic matters, he can virtually read my mind. Any errors in “the notes and bib” are on me, but such virtues as they may have are owing to John’s selfless efforts.

I would again like to express my deepest appreciation to the late Lawrence Salameno and to Theresa Salameno for creating the professorship that I have been privileged to hold and for their support of Stonehill College. Despite Larry’s passing, I always had him in mind as my ideal reader and intended audience: someone who held an abiding passion for history and understood its importance, and who, though not an academic, could appreciate the finer points of serious, scholarly debate. I do miss Larry and our conversations about history, the Yankees, the cats, and other matters.

Several other friends and family members have sadly passed away in the years I was working on this book, two of whom I must mention. My father, John Rodrigue, was diagnosed with cancer in early 2017, just as I was preparing to give my LHA presidential address, and he passed a year later. A dear friend from my Louisiana days, Rex Stem, was taken much too soon. An April 2013 trip to northern California with my wife Sylvia – for the OAH meeting in San Francisco, to do a couple of days of research at Stanford, and to visit with Rex, Melissa, and their children Henry and Nathalie in Davis – remains a treasured memory. I miss these and all of the loved ones who have passed in recent years.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my family members, including my mother Maureen, my sisters Ann-Marie and Terry, my various in-laws, and my nieces and nephews Kelly, Glen, Jackie, Eddie, Abigail, and Emily, for all of their love and support. Thanks too to Granite, Zydeco, Mr. Friendly, Minnie, Maxx, and Shadow for greatly enriching Sylvia’s and my lives (and to Mr. Friendly and Maxx in particular for their thoughtful emendations while strolling across the computer keyboard).

The dedication of this book acknowledges a bond that I deeply treasure.

ABBREVIATIONS

Full citations for published material are provided in the Bibliography

ALP	The Papers of Abraham Lincoln, Library of Congress
CG	<i>Congressional Globe</i>
CWL	<i>The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln</i> (Basler)
Freedom: BME	<i>Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation. Series 2: The Black Military Experience</i>
Freedom: DS	<i>Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation. Series 1. Volume 1: The Destruction of Slavery</i>
Freedom: L&L-1865	<i>Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation. Series 3. Volume 1: Land and Labor, 1865</i>
Freedom: WGFL-LS	<i>Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation. Series 1. Volume 3: The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South</i>
LSU	The Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University
OR	<i>Official Records of the War of the Rebellion</i>
PAJ	<i>The Papers of Andrew Johnson</i>
UNC	The Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill