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
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 onto 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.

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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.

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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

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<td>ALP</td>
<td>The Papers of Abraham Lincoln, Library of Congress</td>
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<td>CG</td>
<td>Congressional Globe</td>
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<td>CWL</td>
<td>The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (Basler)</td>
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