

allowing plots to grow almost exponentially, while the brutal and drawn-out executions of plotters only served to terrify those still under investigation to come up with information that might satisfy the courts. Whites had created a feedback loop, whereby whites terrified by the prospect of a bloody insurrection used terror tactics on the enslaved population to confirm their own worst nightmares.

Something that Sharples might have addressed in greater depth is the increasing willingness of whites in the West Indies to arm some of the enslaved in the face of external threats. Given their obvious terror during times of war, it seems contradictory that white Jamaicans created their “Black Shot” units at the same time.

One might take from this book that the enslaved never plotted, and were always the victim, but there were also some plots (perhaps best identified by preemptive voluntary confessions to unsuspecting whites) that then were blown out of all proportion by the ensuing investigation, ensnaring many innocent individuals. In a telling early observation, Sharples notes that actual slave revolts often bore little resemblance to the highly structured plots that whites fabricated in their heads.

This is undoubtedly an intelligently argued and well-researched book that shows clearly that the enslaved were much more likely to be victims of conspiracies rather than conspirators. It can be recommended for anyone interested in the slave societies of the anglophone world.

University of Warwick

TIM LOCKLEY

Journal of American Studies, 55 (2021), 5. doi:10.1017/S0021875821000918

Sarah Gilbreath Ford, *Haunted Property: Slavery and the Gothic* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020, \$99.00 cloth, \$30.00 paperback). Pp. 233. ISBN 978 1 4968 2970 2.

Sarah Gilbreath Ford’s *Haunted Property: Slavery and the Gothic* offers a richly nuanced and timely examination of how southern Gothic literature functions as a mechanism by which authors have interrogated the deep relationship between the American Dream of fulfillment through property and the horrors of slavery. Across its five chapters, the book focusses on a selection of influential, or otherwise instructive, southern texts that span from the mid-nineteenth to the early twenty-first centuries. Much of the book’s strength resides in how well it teases out instructive commonalities between texts while inviting interpretive leaps that span the landscape of southern literature.

In each chapter Ford reads key southern narratives within a Gothic interpretive context, teasing out evocative and often widely applicable considerations of how the Gothic mode reveals the disturbing and sometimes empowering nexus between the American Dream of property ownership and the nightmare of slavery. The first chapter, for example, examines how two mid-nineteenth-century slave narratives, Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Hannah Craft’s *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* (written c.1858 and first published in 2002), present their protagonists as striving to obtain the agency necessary to possess secure homes of their own, a goal repeatedly foiled by their own status as property. By focussing on the Gothic tropes inherent to these texts, Ford highlights how Jacobs and Craft present their literary personae as “heroines threatened by slaveholders and traders, who are cast as monstrous villains” (31). This conceit transforms these women into

“haunted property,” a condition that results in a form of spectral agency, the idea that “their gothic artfulness amplifies their power” (31).

Chapter 2 engages with the association of confidence games and the dehumanizing effect of slavery as presented in Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno* (1855), Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894), and Sherley Anne Williams’s *Dessa Rose* (1986). And chapter 3 examines the recurrence of scenes involving spectral African American women who haunt the homes of white families in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977), and Eudora Welty’s *Delta Wedding* (1946). Drawing upon examples of contemporary property law, chapter 4 argues that in Morrison’s *Beloved*, Sethe, by attempting to kill her children to spare them the horrors of slavery, actually enacts a claim of legal possession, which ultimately results in a form of spectral possession when *Beloved* returns to haunt her mother. Chapter 5 stands as one of the most evocative of the book, juxtaposing Octavia Butler’s postmodern novel *Kindred* (1979) with Natasha Trethewey’s volume of poetry *Native Guard* (2006) to argue that these texts – which variously imagine forms of literary time travel to the nineteenth century – allow those who were robbed of personhood to “tell their story ... transforming them from unclaimed bodies to kindred” (190).

At its core, *Haunted Property: Slavery and the Gothic* deftly argues that these southern texts illuminate how all of the horrors of slavery begin with the transformation of a person into property. Ford acknowledges that the brutality and the sheer inhumanity portrayed by these texts makes them at times repulsive and difficult to engage. Yet she also makes a strong case for us to do exactly that, to consider how these texts that so frankly scrutinize the atrocity of slavery “reveal the horrors of slavery, to uncover the dark potential of the pursuit of happiness” (28). Key to the book’s success is its ability to navigate a difficult terrain of deep cultural rifts and generational scars, casting a spotlight upon the real horrors at play upon the southern Gothic stage. Well argued, well written, and – most of all – much needed, *Haunted Property: Slavery and the Gothic* makes good on its promise to “reveal how the gothic acts as a magnifying glass to see more clearly how the American dream of obtaining property can become a nightmare of conflating people and property” (11).

Iowa State University

MATTHEW WYNN SIVILS

Journal of American Studies, 55 (2021), 5. doi:10.1017/S002187582100092X

Hilary McLaughlin-Stonham, *From Slavery to Civil Rights: On the Streetcars of New Orleans, 1830s–Present* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020, £19.95). Pp. 257. ISBN 978 1 8003 4855 4.

When we think of civil rights and public transportation, the image that comes to mind is probably that of Rosa Parks refusing her bus seat to a white passenger, and the ensuing Montgomery bus boycott. However, as Hilary McLaughlin-Stonham demonstrates in *From Slavery to Civil Rights: On the Streetcars of New Orleans, 1830s–Present*, battles for integration on city transportation are vast in both geographic and chronological scope. McLaughlin-Stonham’s book chronicles the fight for equality in New Orleans through the “theatre” of the streetcars, marking an important intervention in the scholarship.