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Eichhorn Looks for the Foundation of Revolutions in the Language of Enslaved Peoples

LSU Press to publish Liberty and Slavery in October

Baton Rouge— In *Liberty and Slavery*, Niels Eichhorn examines the language of slavery, a component he considers central to revolutionary struggles, especially those fought by European separatists in the first half of the nineteenth century. Tracing the European uprisings of 1830 and 1848 and the American Civil War in 1861, Eichhorn shows that separatism, broadly defined as a group's desire for self-determination manifested in the form of a breakaway state, was a widespread phenomenon during this period and that the secessionist aims of the Confederacy in the United States were by no means unique. By analyzing the language of slavery, which served to justify separatism in places like Poland and Hungary but not in Ireland or Schleswig-Holstein, Eichhorn provides additional insight into why European migrants in the United States sided with the Union rather than the Confederacy during the Civil War. He places the events in North America into a broader international framework, revealing an intricate picture of the uprisings in the first half of the nineteenth century, the identities of European migrants, and the significant complexities of trans-Atlantic migration studies.

Eichhorn's analysis begins with the separatist movements of 1830 in Greece, Belgium, and Poland, which, in many regards, laid a new foundation for similar rebellions later in the century. Turning next to the 1848 uprisings, he focuses on the vaguely interpreted revolts in Ireland, Hungary, and Schleswig-Holstein. Revolutionaries embraced or rejected the language of slavery, Eichhorn argues, to justify their rebellion and its larger goals. The failure of these insurgencies propelled a wave of revolutionary migrants across the Atlantic world. Those who journeyed to the United States settled mostly in the North, but all faced the challenge of adjusting to the new political and sectional divisions in their adopted home.

Ultimately, Eichhorn contends that European migrants to the United States were steeped in the language of slavery and separatism from their home countries and therefore sided with the Union when the sectional crisis culminated in the secession of the Confederacy and civil war in 1861.

Niels Eichhorn is assistant professor of history at Middle Georgia State University.

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Civil War / Slavery Studies

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