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Hanging Captain Gordon: The Life and Trial of an American Slave Trader

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regardless of their English connections. The originality of Kenney's foreign policy is at best debatable. His great dilemma was less a dilemma than a test of character, a test on which he earned a gentleman's "C." At the same time, Leaming puts an intriguing human face on the fabled "special relationship" between the United States and the United Kingdom. Readers seeking a more thorough biography might prefer Robert Dallek's *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (2003), but *Jack Kennedy* is no mere celebrity biography.

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Saul, Norman E.
Friends or Foes?: The United States and Soviet Russia, 1921-1941
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas
434 pp., \$40.00, ISBN 0-7006-1448-6
Publication Date: April 2006

This is the fourth volume in Professor Norman E. Saul's magisterial study of American-Russian relations since 1763. Saul, a professor of history at the University of Kansas, has garnered a number of prestigious awards for his earlier work and this should be no exception. It is based on massive research in a wide variety of sources (Russian as well as American), is clearly written, and offers interpretations that may be argued but never dismissed. One can only hope for his continued good health until he completes this daunting project.

What stands out about this book is its comprehensiveness. Partly, of course, it covers diplomatic relations between the two nations from the debate over recognition of the Soviet Union during the 1920s and early 1930s to the extension of Lend-Lease aid after the German invasion of 1941. Even here, Saul ranges far beyond official exchanges to include the many actors who sought to influence the course of events. Politicians, journalists, intellectuals, and a host of others figure in his account. He treats all with admirable even-handedness. His account of the American Relief Administration and its efforts to alleviate famine in Russia is particularly valuable.

Friends or Foes? also is a model of economic and cultural history. Many American businessmen viewed Russia as an underdeveloped nation that could provide enormous opportunities and profits. The difficulties in making capitalistic enterprise work in a command economy are fully explored. Some projects proved mutually beneficial, many others collapsed or were abandoned because of irreconcilable differences. There were many cultural exchanges as well: from the triumphant appearances of Isadora Duncan to Russia's "roaring twenties" during which African American jazz groups became

extremely popular. Interestingly enough, jazz was "ideologically correct" to some Soviet officials who saw it as a protest against American oppression of black people.

Students of American-Russian relations should have all four of Saul's volumes on their shelves as a basic reference tool. *Friends or Foes?* alone can be read with great profit by anyone interested in the subject.

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Soodalter, Ron
**Hanging Captain Gordon:
The Life and Trial of an American Slave Trader**
New York: Atria Books
318 pp., \$26.00, ISBN 0-7432-6727-3
Publication Date: February 2006

Ron Soodalter completed a forty-year journey with the publication of his book, *Hanging Captain Gordon*. His interest in the Civil War-era execution of Nathaniel Gordon began during his undergraduate years. Subsequent time spent pursuing advanced degrees in American folk culture and education, and careers as a museum curator, artist, and musician, delayed further work on the topic until recently. In February 1862, Nathaniel Gordon became the only slave trader executed by the U.S. government. As Soodalter explains, the 1808 federal law that banned the slave trade did not halt business on the Atlantic Ocean and slave traders arrested for violating it unfailingly went free. No one had any reason to believe the Gordon case would be different. Soodalter convincingly argues that several factors came together at an inopportune time for Gordon. The new prosecutor, an ambitious Republican named E. Delafield Smith, successfully obtained the death penalty for Gordon after a second trial. Despite pleas from numerous parties to reconsider the slave trader's punishment, a determined President Abraham Lincoln upheld the ruling.

According to Soodalter, the decision to make Gordon an example is largely inexplicable and "much of the impact of Gordon's execution was perceptual rather than practical" (242). The author does not intend for his book to be a biography of Nathaniel Gordon but instead a discussion of the slave trade's tragedies. He explores Gordon's fate against the backdrop of the slave trade itself. However, the segments of the book regarding Gordon seem lost in these moments of context, which themselves offer little new information. Soodalter fails to intertwine the context and the Gordon case study together in a way that clearly links his arguments. Thus, the book is essentially an article about Gordon expanded to include various general discussions about the slave trade.

Soodalter went to great lengths to research Gordon's family. For example, his investiga-

tion offers previously unpublished information regarding the lives of Gordon's wife and child following his death. Unfortunately, these interesting points do not offset the lack of sources from Gordon, his wife, or Lincoln. Soodalter's attempts to describe their emotions or reactions are often liberal conjecture. He also relies almost solely on New York newspapers for his primary source accounts. This issue becomes even more problematic with Soodalter's failure to consider any other major newspapers, especially from proslavery states, to assess a national reaction to the Gordon case. The few references to Richmond newspapers are negligible and quoted mostly from secondary sources. Finally, Soodalter's lengthy, ardent afterword regarding the current state of international slave trading colors the way one evaluates his perspective throughout the work. This book may succeed as a page-turner for nonacademic readers interested in a dramatic human-interest story, but ultimately falls short in breaking any new ground.

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Kionka, T. K.
**Key Command:
Ulysses S. Grant's District of Cairo**
Columbia: University of Missouri Press
229 pp., \$39.95, ISBN 978-0-8262-1655-7
Publication Date: May 2006

As the subtitle indicates, this book is chiefly about two subjects, the sleepy village, nestled in mud, at the southern tip of Illinois, and the emerging officer, Ulysses S. Grant, who arrived in Cairo to assume command of the southern Illinois district in 1861. The narrative shows how Cairo was transformed in the first two years of the Civil War, before Grant headed south, into a boomtown packed with budding corruption, and how the officer cut his teeth on one challenge after another, meeting every one head on. Grant, as the Civil War would make clear, was never fazed by various forms of mud, and Cairo, situated in low swamps, attracting opportunistic lowlifes, had plenty to offer.

Ancillary to this central narrative we find John A. Logan, a political power in southern Illinois who dreamt at the war's outset of carving off a new state, South Illinois, and leading it into the Confederacy. You may need to look at a map to become aware just how far south southern Illinois and Cairo are. The area was within easy reach of ambivalent Missouri, and of the South. The South coveted it, and the North was determined to defend it.

Grant was the man for the job, and Logan, once he realized that he was headed for treason if he tried to cross Grant (53, 139), and then failed to persuade Lincoln to replace Grant with himself (143), seems to have rec-

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