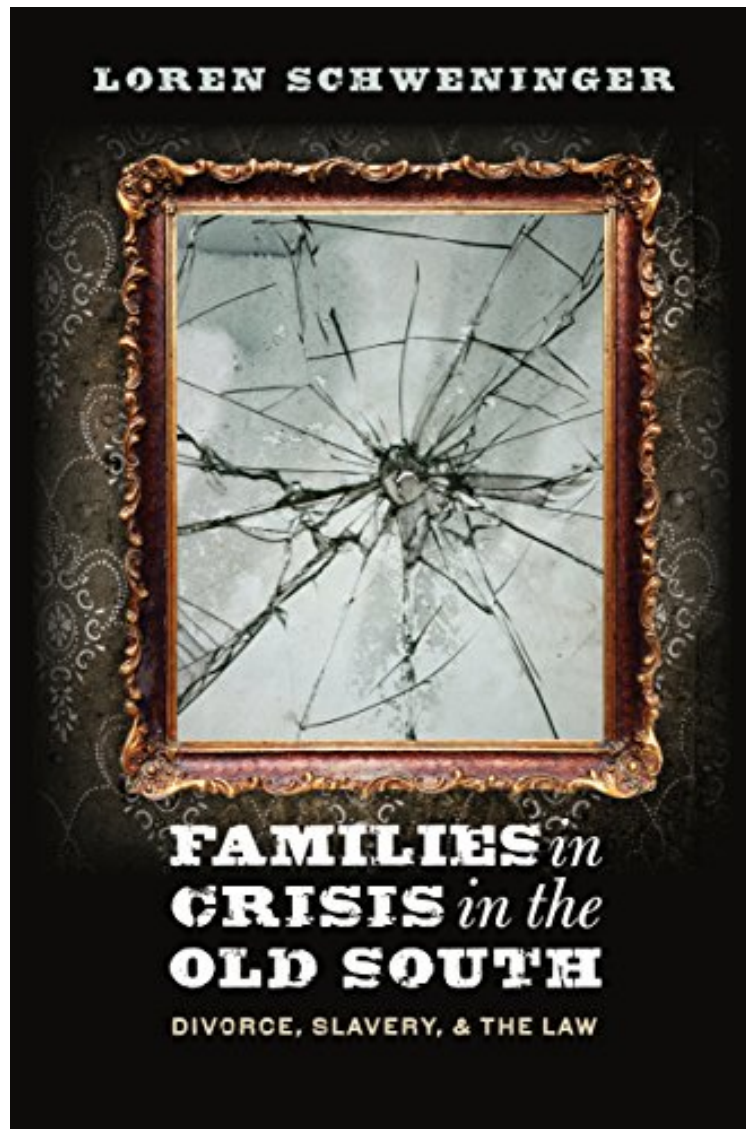


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Families in Crisis in the Old South: Divorce, Slavery, and the Law

Loren Schweninger

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Lindsay M KeiterExcellent analysis of the interplay of the dynamics of slaveholding culture and the law.

In the antebellum South, divorce was an explosive issue. As one lawmaker put it, divorce was to be viewed as a form of "madness," and as another asserted, divorce reduced communities to the "lowest ebb of degeneracy." How was it that in this climate, the number of divorces rose steadily during the antebellum era? In *Families in Crisis in the Old South*, Loren Schwenger uses previously unexplored records to argue that the difficulties these divorcing families faced reveal much about the reality of life in a slave-holding society as well as the myriad difficulties confronted by white southern families who chose not to divorce. Basing his argument on almost 800 divorce cases from the southern United States, Schwenger explores the impact of divorce and separation on white families and on the enslaved and provides insights on issues including domestic violence, interracial adultery, alcoholism, insanity, and property relations. He examines how divorce and separation laws changed, how married women's property rights expanded, how definitions of inhuman treatment of wives evolved, and how these divorces challenged conventional mores.

Those who wish a wider perspective on Southern divorce during the antebellum period will warmly greet Schwenger's new book. . . . The book's rich detail and careful analysis greatly enhance our current understanding of marital breakdown in the Old South.--*Journal of Interdisciplinary History*A well-written book that adds to what is known and is recommended for libraries and anyone with an interest in the subject area.--*Arkansas Historical Quarterly*Presents the most comprehensive examination of the legal history of [divorce], drawing from nearly eight hundred divorce cases in fifteen slave states. . . . A meaningful contribution to our understanding of the Southern family, law, and slavery.--*Journal of American History*Tells many compelling stories. . . . Shows how the institutions of marriage and slavery perpetuated patriarchy and defined both household relations and property in the Old South.--*Louisiana History*Families in Crisis in the Old South offers much to those interested in law and society, gender and marriage, and race and slavery.--*Civil War Book* A compelling read.--*Slavery Abolition*Poses some important challenges to previous assumptions about sex, class, and race in the Old South. . . . Schwenger's study will be quite useful to scholars of southern law, slavery, and women's history.--*North Carolina Historical* Schwenger masterfully provides readers with an "understanding [of] divorce, alimony, slavery and the law in the Old South". . . . Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates and above.--*Choice*Riveting. . . . A valuable addition to southern historiography.--*Journal of Southern History*[An] intensively researched book. . . . Schwenger describes cases in clear, concise prose and he includes helpful tables summarizing his findings.--*American Historical* Dazzling in its sweep and depth, Schwenger's study of divorce, slavery, and the law provides a window into an entire matrix of household and social relations. Gender, race, and property relations are considered across class lines, all within the South's institutions of marriage and slavery.--Victoria E. Bynum, author of *The Long Shadow of the Civil War: Southern Dissent and Its Legacies*Original, insightful, and gripping. With meticulous research, lively examples of divorces and judicial controversies, and captivating prose, Schwenger explores the problems that southern devotion to patriarchy perpetuated.--Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Richard J. Milbauer Professor Emeritus, University of Florida, and author of *Southern Honor, Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners*, and *The Shaping of Southern Culture*About the AuthorLoren Schwenger is Elizabeth Rosenthal Excellence Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and is coauthor, with the late John Hope Franklin, of *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South*.