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The Pursuit of a Dream

Janet Sharp Hermann

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Janet Sharp Hermann : The Pursuit of a Dream before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Pursuit of a Dream:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Montgomery familyBy Kindle CustomerJoseph Davis, the older brother of Jefferson Davis, sold the Hurricane Plantation south of Vicksburg to Ben Montgomery...his black plantation manager because he was trained and educated by Joseph and he felt he was the best man to make a success of the farm. His choice was good but floods over ran the farm from the Mississippi River. This meant that the Montgomery family could not make payment. This resulted in a long legal battle after Joseph's death by the Davis family...and the courts finally gave the land to Joseph's great grand daughter (born out of wedlock). Once the author accumulated all this information to write this book...she realized what a remarkable person Joseph Davis was and she wrote the book about Joseph Davis...giving us another snapshot of life in Pre-War Mississippi.3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Reconstruction ReconstructedBy Mark LevineJoins the ranks of books such as Willie Lee Rose's Rehearsal for Reconstruction and Melvin Patrick Ely's superb Israel on the Appomattox as case studies of near-utopian experiments in the midst of the madness of the Civil War and so-called Reconstruction.I recently read (yeah, really read, cover to cover) the fifth volume of the documentary history of reconstruction ably put together by Ira Berlin and his team and successors, and what struck me the most was the absolute lack of foresight on the part of the "radicals", including Lincoln.Now Lincoln did not get to "see" or implement Reconstruction, but he appears to have left nothing of his thoughts (to Sumner, to Johnson, to us) about what a slave-free America would look like, as if he could not contemplate such a thing.The "Redeemers" surely had a thought on what that would be, just a minor variation on

slavery itself (and so it played out). What Professor Hermann has done here is shown an alternative, nearly visionary approach, with the visionary himself being the unlikely Joseph Davis, and the agents the remarkable Montgomery's. How can a document such as The Emancipation Proclamation get written without serious thought to its consequences? Emancipation and the assimilation of freedmen became as a result a pretty chaotic mess--- much more attention paid to the secessionists' future than to the freedmen's--- and this is no slur upon the black reconstructionists, who did their best, but--- much more significantly--- did SOMETHING for which they and all other former slaves were, deliberately and calculatedly but sometimes inadvertantly, completely untrained, a situation never remedied except in noble experiments like Davis Bend and by noble men like the Montgomerys.

This fascinating history set in the Reconstruction South is a testament to African-American resilience, fortitude, and independence. It tells of three attempts to create an ideal community on the river bottom lands at Davis Bend south of Vicksburg. There Joseph Davis's effort to establish a cooperative community among the slaves on his plantation was doomed to fail as long as they remained in bondage. During the Civil War the Yankees tried with limited success to organize the freedmen into a model community without trusting them to manage their own affairs. After the war the intrepid Benjamin Montgomery and his family bought the land from Davis and established a very prosperous colony of their fellow freedmen. Their success at Davis Bend occurred when blacks were accorded the opportunity to pursue the American dream relatively free from the discrimination that prevailed in most of society. It is a story worthy of celebration. Janet Hermann writes here of two men--Joseph Davis, the slaveholder and brother of the president of the Confederacy, and Benjamin Montgomery, an educated freedman. In 1866 Montgomery began the experiment at Davis Bend. *The Pursuit of a Dream*, published in 1981, received the Robert F. Kennedy Award, the McLemore Prize of the Mississippi Historical Society, and the Silver Medal of the Commonwealth Club of California. "Historical writing at its best . . . her research is impressive and is presented in balanced, ironic prose." --David Bradley, *New York Times Book Review* "A marvelous story for all readers with a taste for the ironies, the ambiguities, and the surprises of history." --C. Vann Woodward Janet Sharp Hermann, a freelance writer and historian, is the author of *Joseph E. Davis: Pioneer Patriarch* (University Press of Mississippi).

"Historical writing at its best"--David Bradley -- *New York Times Book Review*
The story of a utopia created by Mississippi freedmen on a white man's former plantation.
From the Inside Flap
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