John Chapman’s life, which Kerri-
gan argues may have been a rejection
of the growing materialism of market
capitalism, tells us much about the
early republic. Kerrigan’s dogged
research and clear, lively writing
strip away the mythology to reveal
an impractical and unusual, though
fascinating, individual. Academics
and general readers will want to add
this title to their bookshelves.

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History at Iowa State University. His
book A Store Almost in Sight: The Eco-
nomic Transformation of Missouri from
the Louisiana Purchase to the Civil War
is forthcoming in early 2014.

Freedom National

The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865
By James Oakes
$29.95.)

Was President Abraham Lincoln—
author of the Emancipation Procla-
mation and leader of one of the
most significant social movements
in United States history—the “Great
Emancipator” or the reluctant abo-
litionist whose belief in the Con-
stitution and the supremacy of the
Union dictated an opaque policy and
contradictory concessions in an effort
to achieve peace? Such questions
have persisted since the time of the
Civil War. In Freedom National, James

Oakes paints a persuasive picture of
an ideologically determined president
whose policies, from the outset of the
rebellion, reflected the notion that the
Union could not be preserved with
slavery—the fundamental cause of
secession—intact.

Oakes argues that Lincoln’s actions
regarding slavery grew from Republi-
can ideological roots that far predated
the outbreak of sectional violence.
This rhetoric, he writes, stressed that
“the Constitution restricted slavery
to the states while committing the federal government to policies that would expand freedom everywhere it could . . . made freedom national, and that antislavery was therefore the only truly national politics” (p. 43). Slavery, Republicans believed, was a local institution defended by states’ rights, and while state laws could classify slaves as property, those same laws did not endow “slavery with the constitutional protection of fundamental property rights” (p. 45). Consequently, Oakes argues, when the southern states seceded from the Union, they “forfeit[ed] all the protection the Constitution guaranteed to Slavery” (p. 72). Ultimately, this ideology dictated Republican policy over during the war and into the Reconstruction period.

Although they may have appeared unclear or uncertain during the war, Lincoln considered his moves against slavery both constitutionally justified and congruent with long-held Republican beliefs about the government’s role in determining issues of slavery and freedom. As federal forces gained control over larger portions of the Confederacy, Lincoln and his generals were forced to deal directly with the institution of slavery. The measures they enacted—beginning with the First Confiscation Act and ending with the Emancipation Proclamation—reflected the fundamental premise of a constitutionally guaranteed “freedom in man.” Federal policy, in all cases, was a deliberate process spurred on by the sudden absence of state authority in large portions of the South. Union advances provided Lincoln and his supporters with the military justification for emancipation, and they acted quickly with a clear goal in mind. As the war progressed, Oakes argues, the average soldier, too, increasingly began to understand the destruction of slavery as a military, if not moral or ideological, necessity.

In his attempt to clarify the numerous contradictions in federal policy regarding slaves and slavery that occurred during the Civil War, Oakes provides an impressive analysis of Republican political ideology. This analysis, however, downplays the importance of local opposition to federal policy, depending instead on broad statements about the ideological tenets of Republicanism and Democratic opposition based on proclamations of generals and other high-ranking members of the military and including scant discussion of how ideology played into the actions of men in the ranks. While Oakes notes, for example, the open support given to the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation by Generals Grant and Sherman—professional military officers who understood that their duty was to obey the orders issued by their commander-in-chief—his top-down analysis appears to overlook the fact that Union armies were composed almost entirely of volunteers. Since nearly half of the population in the North had voted against Lincoln in the 1860 election, it is quite possible that it was preservation of the Union, not emancipation, that motivated
them to enlist. Would soldiers, if pressed, have articulated an understanding of the necessity of emancipation? Certainly there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that many would have, but the emphasis that Oakes has placed on this ideology will reignite the debate over the political and ideological motives of Northern citizens and soldiers.

Ultimately, the problems in Oakes's work are minor; they stem from the impressive scope of his project and from his attempt to reposition Republican ideology and policy within a historical narrative. As such, addressing the nuances of dissent would have been impractical within the framework of this project, but their absence offers an avenue for future research into the complex relationships between federal policy and local responses. In all, Freedom National is an excellent contribution to our understanding of the ideological motivations of northerners. It follows in the footsteps of works such as William C. Harris’s With Charity For All (1997), Eric Foner’s Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men (1995), Chandra Manning’s What this Cruel War Was Over (2007), and Gary Gallagher’s recent The Union War (2011), in illustrating just how complex the ideological tenets that drove the Union war effort remain even nearly 150 years after the last shots were fired.

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From Missouri
An American Farmer Looks Back
By Thad Snow

Thad Snow’s personal account of agricultural change in the first half of the twentieth century remains as instructive for readers today as it was when first published in 1954. An ordinary dirt farmer who was eventually drawn into the national scene in Washington, Snow shot straight from the hip, proving that a common man could indeed do uncommon things to influence government policies. His perspective on changes in American agriculture—including his pacifist beliefs, which are woven into the account as one-liners—provides a valuable addition to the more standard accounts that academics and officials have given of those same changes.

Thad Snow was born in 1881 in Greenfield, Indiana, where aspiring author James Whitcomb Riley was a friend. Choosing not to pursue a professional career, Snow turned to farming as a young man. In 1911 he