



Freedom's Promise: Ex-Slave Families and Citizenship in the Age of Emancipation

Elizabeth Regosin

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Emancipation and the citizenship that followed conferred upon former slaves the right to create family relationships that were sanctioned, recognized, and regulated by the laws that governed the families of all American citizens. Elizabeth Regosin explores what the acquisition of this legal familial status meant to former slaves, personally, socially, and politically.

The Civil War pension system offers a fascinating source of documentation for this study of ex-slave families in transition from slavery to freedom. Because the provisions made to compensate eligible Union veterans and surviving family members created a vast bureaucracy?pension officials required and verified extensive proof of qualification?former slaves were obliged to reproduce and represent the inner workings of their familial relationships.

Regosin reveals through both their personal histories and pension narratives how former slaves constructed identities as individuals and as family members while they negotiated the boundaries of "family" as defined by the pension system. The stories told by ex-slaves, their witnesses, and the government officials who played a role in the pension process all serve to provide us with a richer understanding of life for newly emancipated African Americans.



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