kindness, and even chastity (41). One cannot help but wonder whether contemporary Americans *could* reach consensus on these ideals, as attractive as such consensus might be. It is certainly true that an honor code would not suffer from the sectarian divisions that beset the Christian faith. But what about sectarian divisions within the realm of moral opinion?

Still, the first step toward any positive change is to think it out. Johnson charts a course in her book gracefully and thoughtfully, building on the work of other scholars rather than engaging in petty squabbles, taking measured positions, and making well-reasoned arguments. She also readily acknowledges difficulties with her ideas. The promulgation of an honor code might be seen to run afoul of commitments to individual rights, privacy, and, above all, equality. A code of behavior on the basis of which we praise and blame is a code that distinguishes some people from others. But perhaps she is right to remain undeterred. For it may be that it is only by allowing ourselves to draw some moral distinctions—only by acknowledging, in other words, some limits on our freedom and our equality—that we can sustain the freedom and equality that we have.

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Forrest A. Nabors: *From Oligarchy to Republicanism: The Great Task of Reconstruction*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2017. Pp. 420.)

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This book applies the insights of Aristotelian political science to the coming of the Civil War and the era of Reconstruction. Accordingly, a political regime in all of its complexity is the basic unit of analysis. Forrest A. Nabors's introductory condensation of this concept directly from Aristotle's *Politics* into two paragraphs of crisp English prose is itself a worthy achievement. From this point of departure, the war's approach and aftermath are reframed as a struggle between the oligarchic South and republican North. We are familiar with the latter as the American Founders' modern version of a republic: a regime based on the equal natural rights of all, in which the majority rules through settled laws that limit power for the sake of those rights. Nabors argues convincingly that in the antebellum period the South abandoned the republican founding and devolved into an oligarchy in the Aristotelian sense. It was a regime in which a rich minority ruled for its own advantage, and in which

all lesser ranks (white and black), as well as all basic social arrangements, served the wealthy few in one way or another. The oligarchy's premise was the natural superiority of the ruling elite (thus, natural human inequality). Viewed from this perspective, the task of the young Republican Party was to save the Founders' republic from the advance of southern oligarchy. The task of the postwar Reconstruction was to remake that oligarchy into a republic on the Founders' model, attempting finally to deliver on the Constitution's "guarantee" of republican government clause (Article IV, section 4).

The author forgoes both a narrative of the action of Reconstruction and debates in the massive scholarly literature on the subject. Instead, in part 1, primary source evidence is presented from the three Congresses that met between 1863 and 1869. The aim is to let the Republicans of Reconstruction say in their own words how they understood the South as an oligarchy and how they saw their own task as converting it into a republic. The oligarchy-republic dyad is no mere heuristic device or reconceptualization. Nabors amply documents the use of these words and concepts in the historical record, and often they were used with the depth and nuance one would expect from earlier generations better educated in the classical tradition. Sometimes, however, historical actors used the less pejorative term "aristocracy" to describe the southern system, or else named it with some variant of "slavery." Nabors reasonably and defensibly reads these usages in their contexts to stand for the idea of oligarchy. Irrespective of its manner of expression or of other cross-cutting forces, the oligarchic principle was the basis of southern society. Indeed, Nabors observes that although oligarchy depended on slavery and benefited from racism, it was more fundamental than both. Part 2 of the book moves from recounting Reconstruction Republicans' understanding of the situation to the author's own testing of whether the antebellum South is accurately described as an oligarchy. Synthetic analyses of education, property relationships, and government structures show each to have been geared toward the interests of the wealthy elite, though an exhaustive delineation of these factors is impossible within the scope of a single volume.

Nabors is aware of but dissatisfied with recent historical literature that documents the idea of a pervasive "slave power" in the politics of the era. He argues that previous scholars have not taken this view seriously enough or gone deeply enough to encounter the master principle of southern oligarchy in its full compass. Moreover, he argues, Republicans saw this overarching fact in principle—not as some fevered conspiracy. In the final chapter, Nabors unfolds from the endurance of the oligarchic principle after Reconstruction a series of profound reflections on race relations. He clarifies why the majority of poor whites could not ally with former slaves against the oligarchic overlords who had dominated them both. From the perspective of the poor white majority, now that sovereignty was finally up for grabs, "the prospect of being forced to share [it] with a mass of people whom they

perceived to be born to serve was a new form of an old denial of their American birthright, as seen through their oligarchic lenses" (323). Tragically, oligarchic supremacy was reconstituted when the supremacy of the rich white minority became simple white supremacy, thus wrecking the attempted republican remaking of the South for a hundred years. This section of the book argues insightfully that oligarchy poisoned social interactions in the South far more deeply than racism. It was oligarchy that first had to be destroyed before there could be a republican society in which race relations had even a chance to improve.

The last chapter also shows that numerous early interpreters of the Civil War and Reconstruction recognized the South as an oligarchy that needed to be republicanized. However, this "Republican school" was short-lived. The salient moral question of relations between the races became the focus of scholarship, effacing the previous concern with the deeper question of oligarchy versus republicanism. This is a reasonable explanation of why the book's theme disappeared and must be recovered, but it occasionally skews the author's vision. For example, two leading constitutional historians of Reconstruction—Michael Les Benedict and Herman Belz—are briefly tutted for statements that do not wholly square with the oligarchy-republic dynamic. This is a rare instance in which the author's zeal for his own novel thesis generates a superficial dismissal of others, as if there were nothing more to be learned from these seminal historians. Here it is perhaps best to acknowledge this misstep and charitably invoke Richard Hofstadter's observation that "if a new or heterodox idea is worth anything at all it is worth a forceful overstatement."

Nabors closes this excellent Aristotelian reframing of the meaning of the Civil War and Reconstruction with an enduring lesson for the American republic: it is challenged continuously to know its principles and stiffen its spine in the face of antirepublican forces. As he relates so well in the example of the antebellum and Reconstruction eras, modern republics too frequently have tolerated such forces (and therefore some have perished). "If republics tolerate corrigible oppression within or without their borders on the mistaken idea that our principles of justice require this kind of toleration, they embolden weak threats and permit them to gather strength and become formidable." This mistake invites "greater injustice and their own overthrow" by allowing "enemies of liberty to exploit liberty in order to defeat liberty" (304). Only a good political education in the true principles of the regime, the kind of education informing this book and guiding its arguments, can help citizens and statesmen to see and address threats to republican liberty before they become dangerous. While this book may not immediately upend layer upon layer of Reconstruction historiography, it has demonstrated that Aristotelian political science elucidates the deepest questions of the period because it is truer to the nature of the political than any other

approach. For this reason, *From Oligarchy to Republicanism* compels attention from all serious students of the subject.

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Michael F. Holt: *The Election of 1860: "A Campaign Fraught with Consequences."* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017. Pp. xv, 256.)

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Draining the swamp is not a new impulse in American politics. According to Michael F. Holt, Republicans' successful 1860 campaign was a crusade against corruption, not slavery. In *The Election of 1860: "A Campaign Fraught with Consequences,"* Holt offers a nuanced and challenging reassessment of conventional views of the 1860 presidential election. This four-way race on the eve of the Civil War did not, for instance, comprise two separate campaigns, waged between Constitutional Unionist John Bell and southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge in the Slave States and between northern Democrat Stephen A. Douglas and Republican Abraham Lincoln in the Free States. Most of the parties campaigned nationally. Nor did Republicans nominate Lincoln because he was more "moderate" than the likes of William Henry Seward. And, most importantly, Republicans did not win because they activated a moral majority of northern voters opposed to slavery and its expansion. Playing to the conservative center, Republicans instead made the election a referendum on corruption. Deemphasizing the divisiveness of slavery as a political issue in the 1860 campaign, Holt's argument has implications for our understanding of Civil War–era politics beyond this pivotal election.

Holt's take on the election dovetails with his scholarship on antebellum politics more generally, especially his contention that slavery was not the sole issue driving politics. Nativism and anti-Catholicism, Holt assures readers, were also viable issues, and he concludes that Republicans deemed Lincoln the more "available" nominee partly because he was not an outspoken critic of conservative nativists, whose votes Republicans needed. "Honest Abe" was also the ideal candidate for a party seeking to distinguish itself from the notorious corruption of the current Democratic administration. The new Constitutional Union party joined Republicans in campaigning against Democratic malfeasance. Holt's attention to all four parties, especially the often overlooked Constitutional Unionists and Breckinridge Democrats, including that proslavery party's northern supporters, is refreshing.