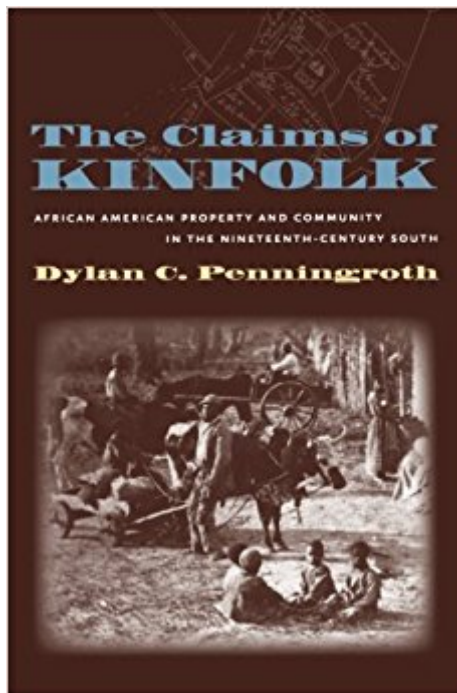




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# The Claims Of Kinfolk: African American Property And Community In The Nineteenth-Century South



## Synopsis

In *The Claims of Kinkfolk*, Dylan Penningroth uncovers an extensive informal economy of property ownership among slaves and sheds new light on African American family and community life from the heyday of plantation slavery to the "freedom generation" of the 1870s. By focusing on relationships among blacks, as well as on the more familiar struggles between the races, Penningroth exposes a dynamic process of community and family definition. He also includes a comparative analysis of slavery and slave property ownership along the Gold Coast in West Africa, revealing significant differences between the African and American contexts. Property ownership was widespread among slaves across the antebellum South, as slaves seized the small opportunities for ownership permitted by their masters. While there was no legal framework to protect or even recognize slaves' property rights, an informal system of acknowledgment recognized by both blacks and whites enabled slaves to mark the boundaries of possession. In turn, property ownership--and the negotiations it entailed--influenced and shaped kinship and community ties. Enriching common notions of slave life, Penningroth reveals how property ownership engendered conflict as well as solidarity within black families and communities. Moreover, he demonstrates that property had less to do with individual legal rights than with constantly negotiated, extralegal social ties.

## Book Information

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"The Claims of Kinfolk makes a fine, original contribution to comparative nineteenth-century African

American history. I'm particularly grateful for Penningroth's economic analysis of slave property "in materia as well as cultural and personal terms. He opens up our narrow assumptions about the lives of enslaved and emancipated people, in both the New and Old Worlds. (Nell Irvin Painter, Princeton University author of ("Southern History across the Color Line")"The Claims of Kinfolk" makes a fine, original contribution to comparative nineteenth-century African American history. I'm particularly grateful for Penningroth's economic analysis of slave property "in materia" as well as cultural and personal terms. He opens up our narrow assumptions about the lives of enslaved and emancipated people, in both the New and Old Worlds. (Nell Irvin Painter, Princeton University author of ("Southern History across the Color Line")What did it mean, Penningroth asks, for people who were property to have property? The answers to this deceptively simple question utterly transform our understanding of the meaning of property in the South, the history of family and community in slavery, and the centrality of African history to American history.(Walter Johnson, New York University, author of "Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market")"An important new look at the economic framework of slavery and the transition to freedom."""Historian""Provides a provocative analysis of African-American property. . . . Breaks new ground and enlivens old debates. . . . Will require historians to rethink their assumptions about the social and economic history of the South and African Americans in the nineteenth century." -- "Georgia Historical Quarterly"

Penningroth makes important contributions to our understanding of the slaves' informal economy. . . . [A] stimulating study.--Journal of Southern HistoryPenningroth applies an intellectual framework laden with insights gleaned from African Studies and anthropology, making this book an ambitious exercise in interdisciplinary scholarship and comparative history.--American Historical ReviewA pioneering study. . . . Skillfully researched and cogently presented, Penningroth's book broadens our understanding of property as a key element in the lives of African American slaves and freed-persons.--Law & History ReviewAn important new look at the economic framework of slavery and the transition to freedom.--HistorianThis fine work of scholarship challenges and complicates notions about slavery, reminding us of the diversity and resilience of the people subject to its debilitating effects.--Maryland Historical MagazineAn original study that will have a significant influence on future scholarship.--Journal of American HistorySpecialists in African American studies will greatly appreciate this provocative study of property holding among enslaved African Americans.--Journal of African American HistoryWhat did it mean, Penningroth asks, for people who were property to have property? The answers to this deceptively simple question utterly transform

our understanding of the meaning of property in the South, the history of family and community in slavery, and the centrality of African history to American history.--Walter Johnson, New York University "Moving beyond the generalities that have plagued historians' understanding of both African societies and African American history, Dylan C. Penningroth crafts a significant contribution to the literature on nineteenth-century black life in the United States. Fusing an African Studies approach with an innovative method for understanding the complexities of black families, communities, and social relations, Penningroth's *Claims of Kinfolk*

I bought this book after meeting the author and discussing his work with him. It's a great book. It won a well-deserved McArthur Genius Award for Penningroth. His work is based on original research into documents in the National Archives that have been overlooked for decades. He uses the records of property claims made by slaves after the civil war to learn about the African-American family. Very readable, too.

Besides being a major new window onto African-American history, this book recasts our understanding of property and its relationship with state power--reminding us that ideas about property come "from below". a stellar achievement!

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