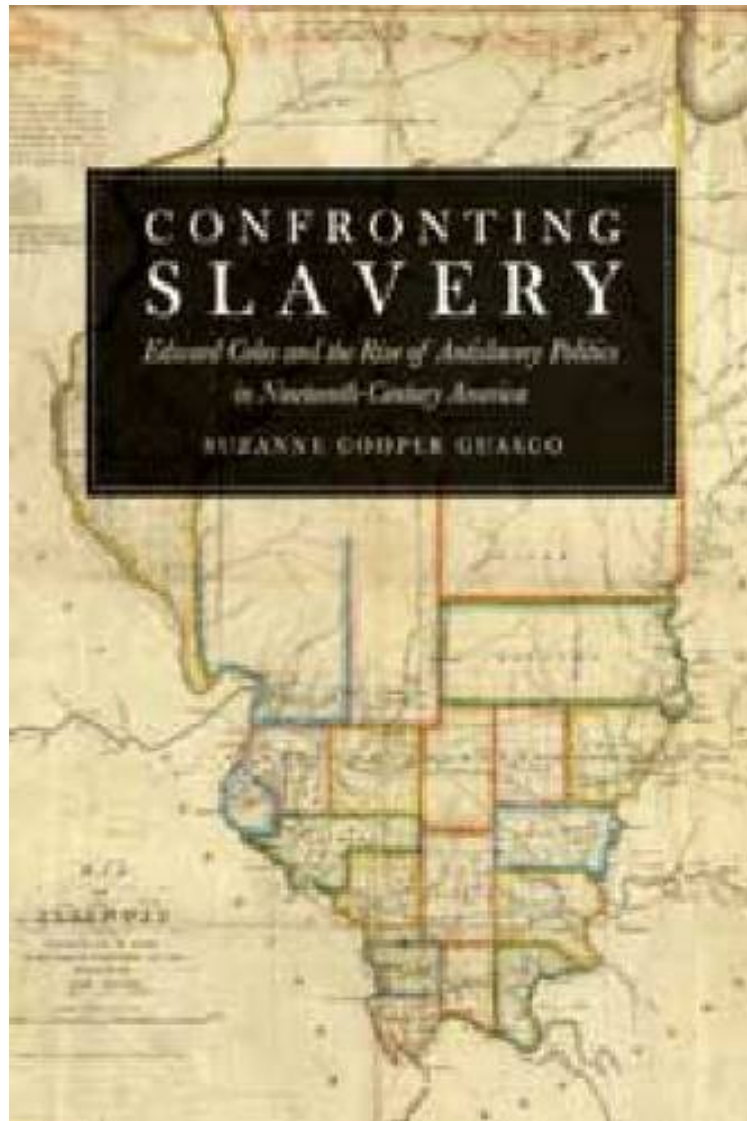


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Confronting Slavery: Edward Coles and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in Nineteenth-Century America

Suzanne Cooper Guasco

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Suzanne Cooper Guasco : Confronting Slavery: Edward Coles and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in Nineteenth-Century America before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Confronting Slavery: Edward Coles and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in Nineteenth-Century America:

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Excellent biography of Illinois' second governor, Edward Coles, and

his lifelong campaign against slaveryBy Reg AnkromHistory for too long has disregarded the life's work of Edward Coles, the second governor of Illinois whose campaign from 1822 to 1824 stopped Illinois from becoming a slave state. Suzanne Cooper-Guasco's excellent research and lively writing style has given Coles the attention he deserves in the best treatment of him to date. Coles came from a wealthy and well connected Albemarle County, Virginia, family. He was a neighbor of Thomas Jefferson. He became personal secretary to President James Madison and a Madison appointee to Russia. Eventually, Coles had to find a job. Having bought land in Illinois, he learned on a second trip there that the federal register's office in Edwardsville was vacant. President Monroe appointed him to it. Cooper-Guasco explains Coles's early and lifelong conviction against slavery. She also gives us an insight into Coles's frustrations and failures in trying to end it. In 1814, for example, Coles asked Ex-president Jefferson to lead a crusade for the gradual end of slavery. Jefferson declined and wished the younger Coles well with the attempt. When enroute to Illinois in 1819, Coles freed the 17 slaves he had inherited. Cooper-Guasco tells us Coles sought to prove "free blacks could be productive members of society." Coles provided land and training, and they were successful farmers. In fairness, she points out that Coles had advantages not available to all pioneer farmers--like labor and improved land. But Coles's experiment was a success, so notable that even Madison complimented him on it. Cooper-Guasco provides a perfect irony, however, writing that "Madison only regretted that Coles could not 'change their colour as well as their legal condition.'" When applying for entry into the Union in 1818, Illinois territorial legislators, nearly all of them from Southern states, sought to enter as a slave state. Eastern congressmen, however, reminded them that slavery was prohibited in the Northwest Territory, in which Illinois was situated. Estimating they could change that once in the union, Illinois legislators submitted a free state constitution--with slavery-like provisions for indentured servitude. Cooper-Guasco calculates that Illinois was a free state in name only. When in 1821 pro-slavery Illinois Supreme Court Justices Joseph Phillips and Thomas C. Browne announced for governor, Coles's anti-slavery friends promoted his candidacy. With Phillips and Browne splitting the pro-slavery vote, Coles was elected. Cooper-Guasco gives the reader the sense that in his inauguration address Coles tried to lull or numb legislators before bringing "the issue of slavery squarely before the legislature." After themes of harmony and public improvements, Coles instructed legislators that the Northwest Ordinance clearly sought to abolish slavery. Yet slavery continued to exist in Illinois, he said. It was time to get rid of it. The speech split the legislature, which called for a constitutional convention to address slavery. Coles believed the only thing a convention would accomplish would be the legalization of slavery in Illinois. He called on his network of friends, including Nicholas Biddle, to fight the convention. Destruction of his properties, hanging him in effigy, and personal attacks in public and press failed to stop Coles, whose better organized opposition beat slavery back--and ended any chance of his re-election. Coles never again achieved such success as did his campaign to end slavery in Illinois. Cooper-Guasco's wonderful book demonstrates, however, that his Illinois campaign importantly advanced abolition's cause.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An "unknown" American hero and great human being - Edward Coles !By Kindle CustomerThe story and information published in this book are great. The writing is not five-star prose. But so what? The book documents superlative events in American history, totally unknown to most Americans. I'm surprised Coles' story has not been made into a movie - truly great MAN. I've also bought the actual, physical book - three of them. Gave them as gifts.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy BatmanVery "readable" for an academic book.

Edward Coles, who lived from 1786-1868, is most often remembered for his antislavery correspondence with Thomas Jefferson in 1814, freeing his slaves in 1819, and leading the campaign against the legalization of slavery in Illinois during the 1823-24 convention contest.

"Suzanne Cooper Guasco ably illuminates the debate over slavery and race from the revolutionary era through the early Reconstruction years, bridging important historiographic gaps in the process." —The Journal of American History "Suzanne Cooper Guasco's elegantly written study of Edward Coles, second governor of Illinois, proves that his life story merits historians' attention. Cooper Guasco has a gift for selecting diverting examples, and she adeptly depicts how throughout his long public life Coles battled sectionalism, sought national unity, and tirelessly argued that the United States' founders opposed slavery." —Middle West "The book's major strengths lie in Guasco's recognition that Coles's life and antislavery politics span eras, regions, and ideologies that historians often examine in isolation, preventing them from seeing nineteenth-century social and political histories as deeply intertwined. She effectively makes the case for Coles's own trajectory, demonstrates the development of antislavery politics over several decades, and thereby brings Coles more fully into the historiography of antislavery." —Thomas Bahde, Ohio Valley History "Suzanne Cooper Guasco . . . tells Coles's story as a 'life-long confrontation with slavery.' Her account is fascinating, inspiring, and tragic all at once." —Richard Brookhiser, Claremont of Books