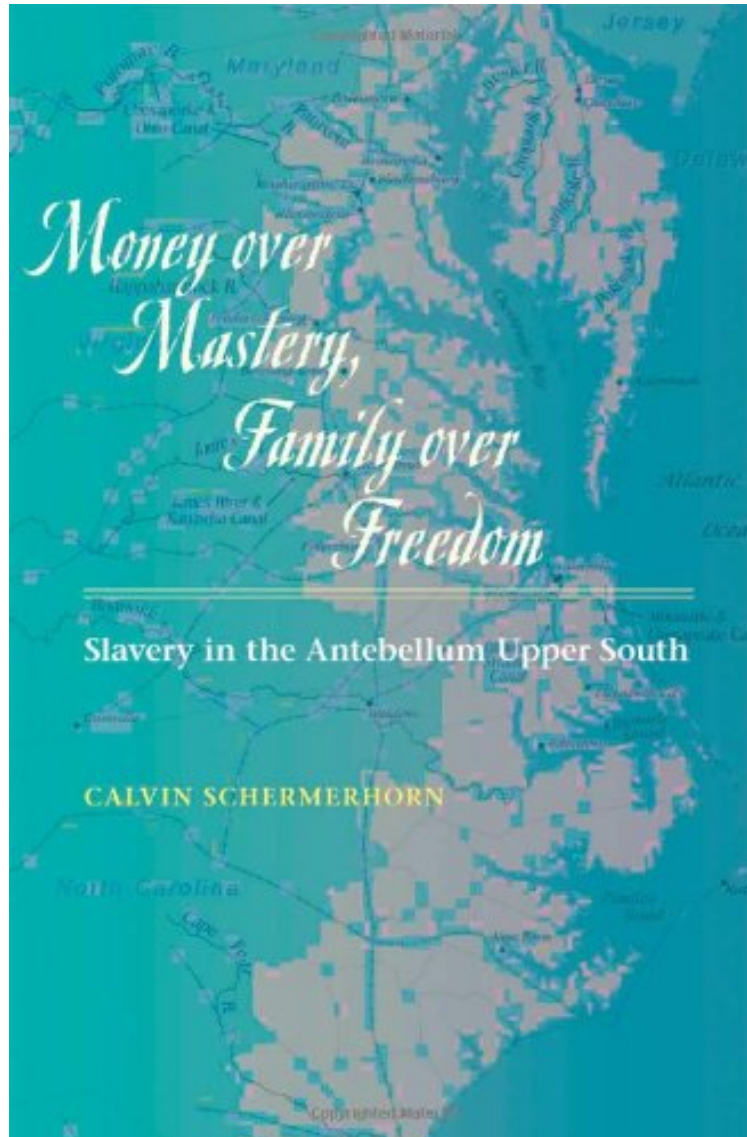


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Money over Mastery, Family over Freedom: Slavery in the Antebellum Upper South (Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia)

Calvin Schermerhorn

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0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Glenn L. NortonGood read

Once a sleepy plantation society, the region from the Chesapeake Bay to coastal North Carolina modernized and diversified its economy in the years before the Civil War. Central to this industrializing process was slave labor. *Money over Mastery, Family over Freedom* tells the story of how slaves seized opportunities in these conditions to protect their family members from the auction block. Calvin Schermerhorn argues that the African American family provided the key to economic growth in the antebellum Chesapeake. To maximize profits in the burgeoning regional industries, slaveholders needed to employ or hire out a healthy supply of strong slaves, which tended to scatter family members. From each generation, they also selected the young, fit, and fertile for sale or removal to the cotton South. Conscious of this pattern, the enslaved were sometimes able to negotiate mutually beneficial labor terms to save their families despite that new economy. Moving focus away from the traditional master-slave relationship in a staple-crop setting, Schermerhorn demonstrates through extensive primary research that the slaves in the upper South were integral to the development of the region's modern political economy, whose architects embraced invention and ingenuity even while deploying slaves to shoulder the burdens of its construction, production, and maintenance. *Money over Mastery, Family over Freedom* proposes a new way of understanding the role of American slaves in the antebellum marketplace. Rather than work against it, as one might suppose, enslaved people engaged with the market somewhat as did free Americans. Slaves focused their energy and attention, however, not on making money, as slaveholders increasingly did, but on keeping their kin out of the human coffles of the slave trade.

"This elegantly written and engaging monograph is required reading for students of nineteenth-century North Carolina history." (Sean Condon *North Carolina Historical*) "There is much to admire in Schermerhorn's book... A compelling, finely grained study." (Max Grivno *Journal of American History*) "[A] valuable study... Anyone interested in slavery and the antebellum South will profit from reading it." (Frank Towers *Journal of the Early Republic*) "*Money over Mastery, Family over Freedom* displays exhaustive research, a well-crafted argument, and is a valuable addition to antebellum slave historiography." (Brett J. Derbes *H-CivWar, H-Net*) "Elegantly argued and sharply written *Money over Mastery, Family over Freedom* convincingly shows the centrality of enslaved men and women to the transformation of the coastal upper South's commercial life and the ways they mitigated this modernizing project." (Ted Pearson *Journal of Southern History*) About the Author Calvin Schermerhorn is an assistant professor of history at Arizona State University.