

“UP TO FREEDOM”: SLAVERY, EMANCIPATION, AND THE MAKING OF FREEDOM
IN HOWARD COUNTY, MISSOURI, 1860 TO 1865

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation of the social history of slavery and freedom in Howard County, Missouri with an eye toward the social and familial relationships of the enslaved, their existence in slavery and their role in making freedom. Life under slavery and the work of making freedom in Howard County were experienced and developed relationally. The social and kinship connections of the enslaved, so crucial in surviving slavery, were essential in navigating a wartime freedom movement, and foundational in making freedom meaningful in the aftermath of the Civil War. Slaves themselves linked the small farms of Howard County into a network of social and kinship relationships over and above the intentions and imaginations of their masters. In the chaos of the Civil War routes to freedom were decidedly gendered. Chapter One explores patterns of slaveholding at the local township level and by mapping patterns of slaveholding and communities of the enslaved. Chapter Two explores the gendered nature of emancipation in Missouri by examining the recruitment of United States Colored Troops and the work of the remaining population—mostly women—who could not exchange military service for certificates of freedom. Chapter three explores the work of making a livable and meaningful freedom by examining the surnames of slaves and former slaves as crucial tools for claiming autonomy, belonging, and place.