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# Families in Crisis in the Old South: Divorce, Slavery, and the Law

*Loren Schweninger*

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**Families in Crisis in the Old South: Divorce, Slavery, and the Law** Loren Schweninger
In the antebellum South, divorce was an explosive issue. As one lawmaker put it, divorce was to be viewed as a form of "madness," and as another asserted, divorce reduced communities to the "lowest ebb of degeneracy." How was it that in this climate, the number of divorces rose steadily during the antebellum era? In *Families in Crisis in the Old South*, Loren Schweninger uses previously unexplored records to argue that the difficulties these divorcing families faced reveal much about the reality of life in a slave-holding society as well as the myriad difficulties confronted by white southern families who chose not to divorce.
Basing his argument on almost 800 divorce cases from the southern United States, Schweninger explores the impact of divorce and separation on white families and on the enslaved and provides insights on issues including domestic violence, interracial adultery, alcoholism, insanity, and property relations. He examines how divorce and separation laws changed, how married women's property rights expanded, how definitions of inhuman treatment of wives evolved, and how these divorces challenged conventional mores.

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