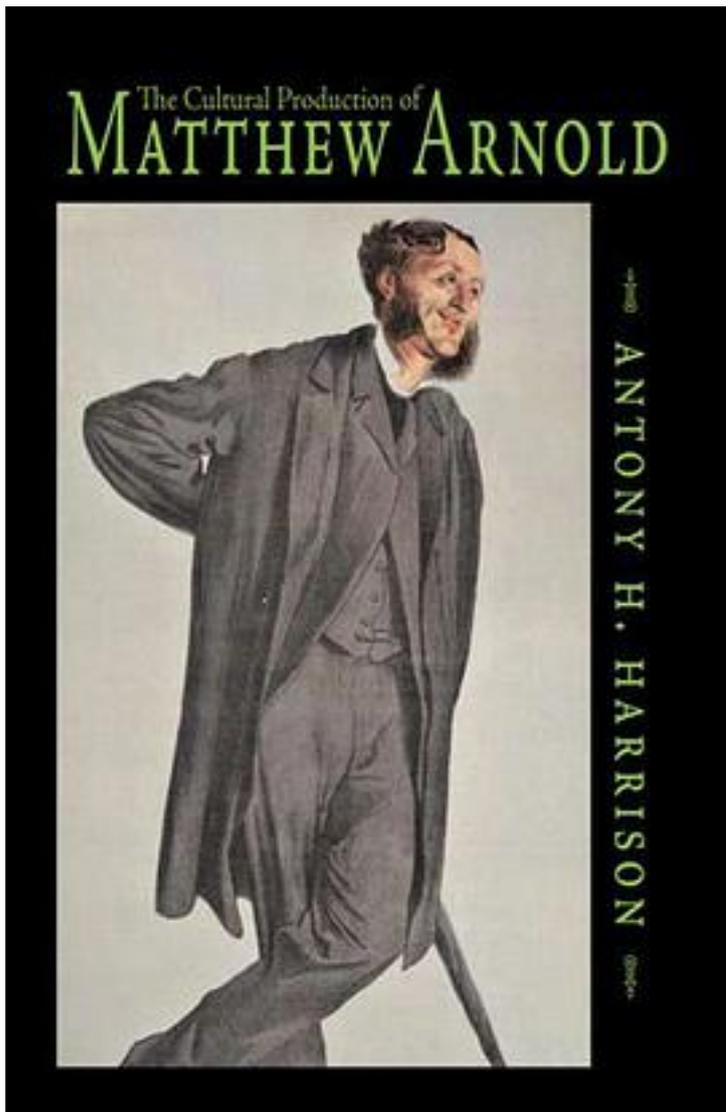


# The Black Laws



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Beginning in 1803, and continuing for several decades, the Ohio legislature enacted what came to be known as the Black Laws. These laws instituted barriers to blacks entering the state and placed limits on black testimony against whites. Stephen Middleton tells the story of this racial oppression in Ohio and provides chilling episodes of how blacks asserted their freedom from the enactment of the Black Laws until the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment. The fastest-growing state in antebellum America and the destination of whites from the north and the south, Ohio also became the destination for thousands of southern blacks, free and fugitive. Thus, nineteenth-century Ohio became a legal battleground for two powerful and far-reaching impulses in the history of race and law in America. One was the use of state power to further racial discrimination and the other was the thirst of African Americans, and their white allies, for equality under the law for all Americans. The state could never stop the steady stream of blacks crossing the Ohio River to freedom. In time, black and white leaders arose to challenge the laws and by 1849 the firewall built to separate the races began to collapse. The last vestiges of Ohio's Black Laws were repealed in a bill written by a black legislator in 1886. Written in a clear and compelling style, this path-breaking study of Ohio's early racial experience will be required reading for a broad audience of historians, legal scholars, students, and those interested in the struggle for civil rights in America. Stephen Middleton is a member of the history department at North Carolina State University. He is the author of *Ohio and the Antislavery Activities of Salmon P. Chase*, *The Black Laws in the Old Northwest: A Documentary History*, and *Black Congressmen During Reconstruction: A Documentary Sourcebook*.

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