When it comes to demystifying slave law in Louisiana, Vernon Palmer is practically peerless. It’s probably because he is equally comfortable in the weeds of lived experience as he is poring over the pages of classical learning. These masterful essays on the Code Noir’s origins, plus Louisiana’s 150-year interplay between custom and legal practice, belong on the shelf of anyone with the faintest curiosity about human bondage and the laws fashioned to make it work.

Vernon V. Palmer’s probing investigation into the world of an unexpected series of French lawmakers offers a new and insightful response. This book is a must read for anyone interested in the French legacy of slavery and law in the Americas.

Jean M. Hébrard
Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris

This elegantly written book will take a prime place among those that should be consulted on the institution of slavery and its lasting imprint on Louisiana. Professor Palmer’s important new book clarifies the subject of Louisiana slave law. Palmer’s comprehensive English translation of colonial Louisiana’s Code Noir of 1724 will be particularly useful to researchers. A practical feature is a timeline outlining the progression of slave law from colonial times through the end of slavery in Louisiana.

Georgia Chadwick
Director, Law Library of Louisiana

This comprehensive study analyzes the successive legal codes that framed life under slavery as the result of dynamic interactions among custom, doctrine, and experience. Professor Palmer makes it clear that the drafting and evolution of these codes reveals key structures of power and presumption, continually confronted by challenges to such formal rules by masters and by slaves themselves.

Rebecca J. Scott
co-author of Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation