It took eight years to write, but only a few weeks for gratifying reactions to start flowing in. Professor of Law and Government Mark A. Graber's latest book, *Dred Scott and the Problem of Constitutional Evil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), has garnered major notices for quality and uniqueness of thought.

Graber grapples with the issue of pledging allegiance to a constitutional text and tradition saturated with concessions to evil. In order to form a “more perfect union” with slaveholders, late eighteenth-century citizens fashioned a constitution that plainly compelled some injustices and was silent or ambiguous on other questions of fundamental right.

“I was inspired by a sense that too much that had been written on slavery didn’t focus on what would have happened if *Dred Scott* had been decided properly—the whole world would have been different,” says Graber.

“I was interested in what it means to be in a constitutional society. I was also inspired by Iraq, by the idea that a constitution is not for creating a perfect society but one where people get along—not to create a paradise, but to get people to stop killing each other.”

Comments from university colleagues were wide-ranging, including one from Thomas M. Keck, of the Syracuse Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs: “The most interesting and original book on American constitutionalism that I have read in years.”

—Ruth E. Thaler-Carter

**Confronting a Legacy of Violence**

Sherilyn Ifill knows the front lines of race relations, from her own anti-apartheid demonstrations as a student to a career working as an advocate for disenfranchised minority and low-income communities. The lifelong interests of the UMLaw professor converged this winter when she published her book *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-First Century* (Beacon Press). Coverage in numerous media outlets, from the Baltimore Sun to WYPR’s “Marc Steiner Show” and WNYC’s “Brian Lehrer Show” speak to the book’s wide-reaching appeal.

The former NAACP counsel started out more than five years ago compiling what she thought would be, as she told the Sun, an “encyclopedic book of lynching.” A more compelling story emerged with a renewed focus on the last two recorded lynchings on the Eastern Shore, that of Matthew Williams and George Armwood in the 1930s. Her book moves from divisive events (such as a controversy over a Frederick Douglass statue in Easton) into analysis of the effects of the tradition of silence and closing ranks, and its ensuing—and poisonous—isolation. It deals with the fact that no one has ever been convicted in the estimated 5,000 racial hangings across the country. She may have grown up in New York, but she found major lessons in the civil rights crises on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Building on her early anti-apartheid passion, the professor is still inspired by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (see South Africa story on pg. 22), and the healing that can come from confronting historic crimes. She weaves these concrete ideas for change with powerful storytelling, creating a volume solid on research and inspirational to a wide audience.

—Kathy H. Ely