



From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation

By Amy Dru Stanley

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This book explores the centrality of contract to debates over freedom and slavery in nineteenth-century America. It focuses on the contracts of wage labor and marriage, investigating the connections between abolition in the South and industrial capitalism in the North and linking labor relations to home life. Integrating the fields of gender and legal, intellectual and social history, it reveals how abolitionists, former slaves, feminists, laborers, lawmakers and others drew on contract to condemn chattel slavery and to measure the virtues of free society.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Amy Dru Stanley's *From Bondage to Contract* is a transformative reinterpretation of American public life in late nineteenth century America, a triumph of the historical imagination and a profound reflection on contractualism as a moral and political discourse. Stanley's subject is contractualism at its moment of triumph, after slave emancipation. And her narrative explores points of tension and conflict in the moral universe in which 'freedom of contract' apparently reigned supreme: labor relations, marriage reform, begging and vagrancy, and prostitution. Her contractualism is never a conceptual monolith; *From Bondage to Contract* delineates many differing and competing contractualist responses to the radically changed moral and economic universe that late nineteenth century Americans confronted." Hendrik Hartog, Class of 1921 Bicentennial Professor of the History of American Law and Liberty at Princeton University

"Brilliantly researched and skillfully argued, this is a work that transcends genres and subdisciplines, one that historians of gender, of labor, of poverty, legal historians, historians of political thought, public choice theorists, not to mention everybody who identifies as a liberal or a libertarian, will have to confront." Hendrik Hartog, Class of 1921 Bicentennial Professor of the History of American Law and Liberty at Princeton University

"Stanley analyzes how Americans 'reconsidered the meaning of freedom after slavery's downfall,' emphasizing the 'ambiguities of wage labor and marriage in a society that counted itself free because it had replaced bondage with contract.' Throughout, Stanley seeks to show how perceptions of the problems of the postemancipation South shaped the tone and content of public discussions on all of the above issues. This cleanly written study contributes to intellectual, labor, and women's history. Upper-division undergraduates and above." Choice

"[Stanley] has written a beautiful narrative describing the many shades of meaning that have been heaped on the term 'contract' over the years in the context of slavery, wage labor, vagrancy, prostitution, and coverture. She displays a masterful knowledge of the literature about contract in these widely differing situations and fully explores various types of contractual relations, as well as the tensions between alternative views of contract. She is indefatigable in pointing out the inconsistencies committed by various pundits in their often self-serving use of the term." Journal of Economic History

"[This] study reveals the centrality of contract theory to nineteenth-century debates about slavery, free labor, and marriage." The Historian

"...highly original, surprising and informative...a rare find...particularly rich in detail..." Daniel Hamilton, H-Net Reviews

"Amy Dru Stanley has produced an important contribution to the understanding of the place and position of women and slaves within American society during the nineteenth century." Solomon K. Smith, Southern Historian

"Amy Dru Stanley has written a fascinating and complex account of the various ways in which northern reformers applied notions of contract law to social problems that emerged in post-Civil War America." The North Carolina Historical Review

"Grounded in form scholarship based on extensive research, the author does not overstep the bounds of what can be gleaned from the sources...Stanley is to be commended further for an excellent job of dealing with complex ideologies and presenting them in such an accessible manner. Aimed at a scholarly audience, this book will appeal to a wide group, including labor and gender historians, as well as scholars of Reconstruction and industrialization." Historian, Sharon A. Roger Hepburn, Radford University

"...excellent and provocative study..."

About the Author

Stanley is affiliated with the University of Chicago.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Andrew Sessions:

Reading a publication tends to be new life style within this era globalization. With reading you can get a lot of information that will give you benefit in your life. Together with book everyone in this world may share their idea. Books can also inspire a lot of people. A great deal of author can inspire their particular reader with their story or perhaps their experience. Not only situation that share in the textbooks. But also they write about the information about something that you need example. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your kids, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors these days always try to improve their expertise in writing, they also doing some study before they write to the book. One of them is this From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation.

Jerome Chisolm:

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