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# The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights

*Robin Blackburn*

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**Robin Blackburn : The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Abolition: The Not So-Mighty ExperimentBy William KostlevyIn his intriguing AMERICAN CRUCIBLE Robin Blackburn makes the fascinating argument that "abolitionism was to be a major expression to shield society from unbridled market forces." (p. 24) In stark contrast to the views of fellow

historians of abolitionism such as Seymour Drescher and David Brion Davis, Blackburn has absolutely no regard for as he writes "an approach in the spirit of church history as a search for saints or with a goal for monumentalizing the past." (p. 488) While my own reading of the sources suggests that Blackburn is on to something in his insistence that abolitionists general lacked enthusiasm for the market economy, his utter contempt for white evangelical Christians and their morally informed critique of slavery seriously weakens this potentially important contribution to our understanding of the anti-slavery movement. In a work that even acknowledges that many evangelical domestics, especially Methodist women, played a role in the ending of slavery, Blackburn repeatedly trivializes their contributions and makes no meaningful attempt to understand them or their worlds. In a similar manner Blackburn celebrates slave agency and the role of African informed expressions of Christianity in resisting slavery but unlike the landmark work of Eugene Genovese we are left to speculate on the actual nature and content of that faith. He repeatedly insists that the anti-slavery movement in America was "a major preoccupation of a small minority such as those involved in the work of Oberlin College." (p.383) And further he notes that it sometimes had to compete for the attention of reformers with such dubious reforms as temperance or Sabbath observance. This of course is simply an attempt by Blackburn (through guilt by association) to reduce the cultural significance of institutions he despises. While no one would of course claim that a majority in the American north opposed slavery Oberlin College was by nineteenth century standards a large college associated with one of the most important evangelists and widely read authors of the time, Charles G. Finney. It is precisely among the folks associated with Oberlin (and numerous similar institutions that dotted the regions of the New England migration) that one finds the origins of the seemingly modern notion of racial equality. This is the point of the late Paul Goodman in his classic study *OF ONE BLOOD: ABOLITIONISM AND THE ORIGINS OF RACIAL EQUALITY*. In all Blackburn's cynicism about the possibility of meaningful social reform seems more appropriate for our own age of self indulgence than for an age of millennial expectation when even the hierarchies worshiped with such fervor in our modern temples of higher learning of race, class and gender were called into question. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By CustomerMagnificent read 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By wilbert lopez morenoExcellent

The American Crucible furnishes a vivid and authoritative history of the rise and fall of slavery in the Americas. For over three centuries enslavement promoted the rise of capitalism in the Atlantic world. The New World became the crucible for a succession of fateful experiments in colonization, silver mining, plantation agriculture, racial enslavement, colonial rebellion, slave witness and slave resistance. Slave produce raised up empires, fostered new cultures of consumption and financed the breakthrough to an industrial order. Not until the stirrings of a revolutionary age in the 1780s was there the first public challenge to the peculiar institution. An anti-slavery alliance then set the scene for great acts of emancipation in Haiti in 1804, Britain in 1833, the United States in the 1860s, and Cuba and Brazil in the 1880s. In *The American Crucible*, Robin Blackburn argues that the anti-slavery movement forged many of the ideals we live by today. The best treatment of slavery in the western hemisphere I know of. I think it should establish itself as a permanent pillar of the literature. Eric Hobsbawm From the Trade Paperback edition.

Robin Blackburn has already secured his position as Britain's pre-eminent historian of slavery. This new volume confirms that position. It is an important contribution to our understanding of the shaping of the modern western world. James Walvin, BBC History Magazine Blackburn describes emancipation in all its vexed, indeterminate grandeur, propelled by violent clashes, public debate, harrowing expositions, and the consolidation of new notions of freedom and equality. Greg Grandin, Guardian Blackburn writes authoritatively across centuries and continents. Joseph P. Reidy, Journal of American History Poses a challenge for the political future as well as a bold reappraisal of the historical past. Stephen Howe, Independent A marvellous book insightful and stimulating. Stanley Engerman, University of Rochester A magisterial history of transatlantic slavery. Ian Thomson, TLS From the Trade Paperback edition. About the Author Robin Blackburn is a Leverhulme Research Fellow based at the University of Essex in the UK. He taught as a visitor at the New School for Social Research in New York between 2001 and 2010. He is the author of many books, including *The Making of New World Slavery* and *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*.