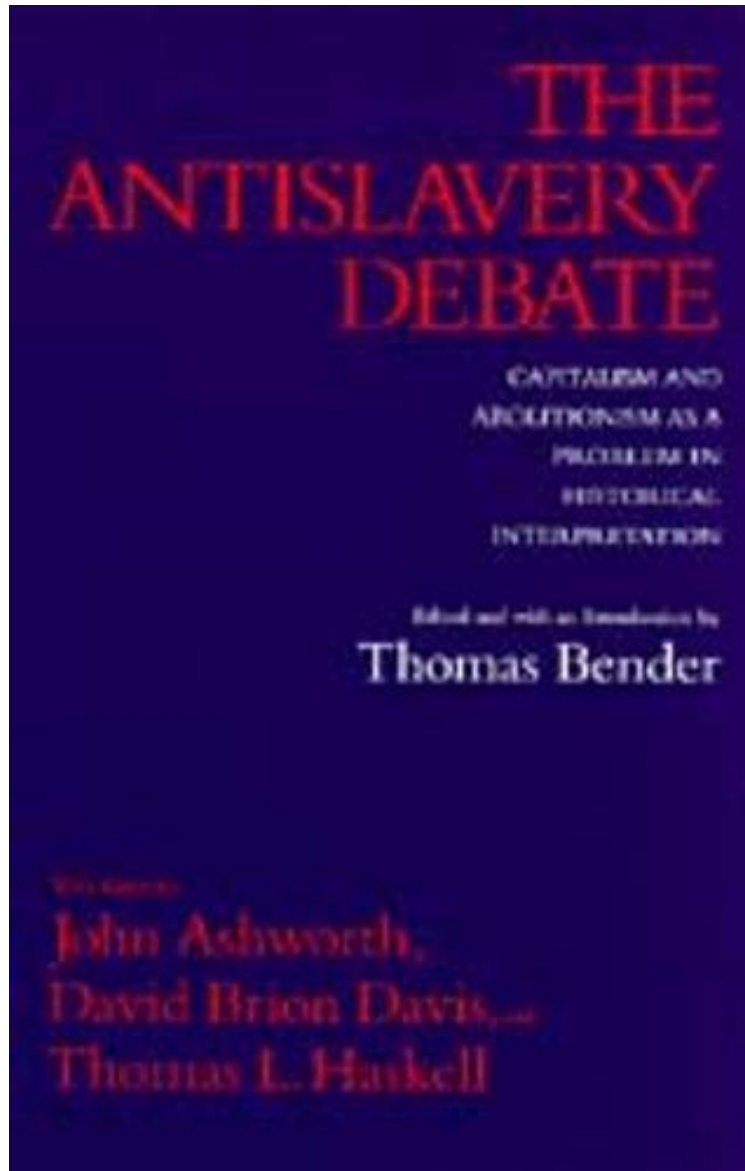


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The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation

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From University of California Press : **The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Brandon ClemonsGreat book!3 of 4 people found the

following review helpful. Some unlooked at dataBy Jeffrey E. FiddlerIn discussing the personal opinions / change in opinion on slavery, I am puzzled how few, if any, historian looked at the Virginia manumission records. These are on line, and some of the records approach boiler plate truly reflecting opinion. For example:Wills C. 1784-87, 390-1, September 25, 1787, To all Christian People to whom these presents shall come, Greeting Know Ye that I George Corbin. . . for divers good Causes and Considerations me hereunto moving but more Especially from Motives of Humanity, Justice, and Policy, and as it is Repugnant to Christianity and even common Honesty to live in Ease and affluence by the Labour of those whom fraud and Violence have Reduced to Slavery; (altho' sanctified by General consent, and supported by the law of the Land) Have, and by these presents do manumit and set free.....These are at both the Virginia records and at Utah State University: [...]I find these records substantiate Haskell's thesis. The Virginia manumission effort was ended after 1812 or so by a concerted drive in the legislature to limit / make manumission harder.Apparently some historians have a feel for what was going on but for some reason never tried these records. There are enough of them so one could easily quantify the boiler plate phrases:p. 120-Robert Evans of Chas City persuaded that freedom is natural right and doing unto others etc-frees Negro womanp. 517-11 Feb 1789-know all men by these presents that I Samuel Landrum of Chesterfield County do believe that all men are by nature equally free and from a clear conviction of the injustice and criminality of depriving my fellow creatures of their natural right do hereby emancipate or set freeOne reason I post this review is to draw attention to these records. I just want to add that the phrase "natural right" occurs more than 200 times in these manumission records. This book is a great starting point.10 of 14 people found the following review helpful. A Healthy DebateBy Dennis R. HidalgoDennis R. HidalgoThomas Bender, ed. The Antislavery DebateWhat can a historian do when there is not enough empirical evidence to produce a quantitative and comprehensively thesis for a social historical problem that defies psychological scrutiny? David Brion Davis opted for an answer that satisfies cynic assumptions with circumstantial evidences. Davis argues that the strength of abolitionism in early industrial Britain derived from its susceptibility to the needs of the dominant political elite. It was particularly influenced by this new bourgeoisie capitalist class' modes of industrial discipline. Antislavery main, and unconscious, purpose was to desensitize English society to the newer forms of oppression evident in the increasing wage labor. His context of conceptual reference appears to flow from Marxism and Freudian thought: the rise of an oppressing bourgeoisie driven by its hidden and selfish Id. To Thomas Haskell this idea of unconscious "self-deception" and motivation by class interests is not convincing. For him, it is impossible for the historian to bring concrete evidence to bear, which will distinguish between unconscious intention and unintended consequences. Following what appears to be a more objective goal, Haskell intends to draw a straighter line between the rise of the market economy and the rise of the abolitionist movement in 1750s. In doing so he moves from a quasi-Freudian historical analysis to an Ericsonian: that of a cognitive change of behavior. For Haskell capitalist and market expansion broaden social perception that in turn promoted moral responsibility. The most powerful catalyst in this process of change was the "intensification of market discipline, and the penetration of that discipline into spheres of life previously untouched by it." To this Davis decries Haskell approach for being more economic deterministic than a rationalistic. To this, John Ashworth adds that Haskell is not able to follow up the empirical inclinations of his Davis' critic since he does not supply enough evidence to support his argument. Indeed, his only example of moral switch to Antislavery is the Quaker John Woolman. Without knowing Haskell is caught in one of the most frustrating traps of an empirical driven discipline. His response is that he is not looking for a comprehensive societal change but for a mechanism that might have caused the change. The problems this approach is the usefulness of such "found" mechanism if there is no proof that the mechanism was indeed used sufficiently as to merit its historical validity. Nevertheless, Haskell bottom line is his desire to demonstrate that abolitionists rationally attached the worst evil of their times. Davis and Ashworth's response to Haskell's premise is that wage labor could have been also attacked and was not. Ashworth spend most of his time criticizing Haskell and throwing some bits toward Davis. Yet he is also able to provide an interesting proposition. First, he asserts Davis' starting point as the place to launch the investigation: the emergence of a dominant class. This would lead us to the disregarding of wage labor abuses and protected interests. But instead of moving completely toward Davis, he detours into the cultural notion of family and its effect on productivity. The simple conclusion, thus, is that since slavery, through its detrimental effect on family and society, slowed the pace of economic advance, "it is not surprising that to more people than ever before it seemed an unmitigated evil." Haskell response to this is that these family values could have been in existence long before the abolitionist movement, thus, rendering useless in the debate. Ashworth's last answer is that the production ethos has a long family history, it was the innovation brought by master-wage earner relationship that transformed the view of family into a more entrepreneurial project. Clearly this debate is provocative, but narrowly conceived, as is mainly centered around Marxist concepts of history, evasive evidences and a revival of neo-Whiggists approaches. Very little criticism could be employed against the authors since they exhausted most of it that could be applicable to their line of argument. However, an also important critique to a combine look at the arguments presented may be the dearth of sociological and cultural approaches that may enhance the historical view that as historians we are trying to discover.

This volume brings together one of the most provocative debates among historians in recent years. The center of controversy is the emergence of the antislavery movement in the United States and Britain and the relation of capitalism to this development. The essays delve beyond these issues, however, to raise a deeper question of historical interpretation: What are the relations between consciousness, moral action, and social change? The debate illustrates that concepts common in historical practice are not so stable as we have thought them to be. It is about concepts as much as evidence, about the need for clarity in using the tools of contemporary historical practice. The participating historians are scholars of great distinction. Beginning with an essay published in the *American Historical Review* (AHR), Thomas L. Haskell challenged the interpretive framework of David Brion Davis's celebrated study, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. The AHR subsequently published responses by Davis and by John Ashworth, as well as a rejoinder by Haskell. The AHR essays and the relevant portions of Davis's book are reprinted here. In addition, there are two new essays by Davis and Ashworth and a general consideration of the subject by Thomas Bender. This is a highly disciplined, insightful presentation of a major controversy in historical interpretation that will expand the debate into new realms.

From the Inside Flap "The marrow of the most important historiographical controversy since the 1970s." Michael Johnson, University of California, Irvine "A debate of intellectual significance and power. The implications of these essays extend far beyond antislavery, important as that subject undoubtedly is. This will be of major importance to students of historical method as well as the history of ideas and reform movements." Carl N. Degler, Stanford University