

Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (Belknap Press)

By Peter Kolchin

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Two massive systems of unfree labor arose, a world apart from each other, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The American enslavement of blacks and the Russian subjection of serfs flourished in different ways and varying degrees until they were legally abolished in the mid-nineteenth century. Historian Peter Kolchin compares and contrasts the two systems over time in this magisterial book, which clarifies the organization, structure, and dynamics of both social entities, highlighting their basic similarities while pointing out important differences discernible only in comparative perspective.

These differences involved both the masters and the bondsmen. The independence and resident mentality of American slaveholders facilitated the emergence of a vigorous crusade to defend slavery from outside attack, whereas an absentee orientation and dependence on the central government rendered serfholders unable successfully to defend serfdom. Russian serfs, who generally lived on larger holdings than American slaves and faced less immediate interference in their everyday lives, found it easier to assert their communal autonomy but showed relatively little solidarity with peasants outside their own villages; American slaves, by contrast, were both more individualistic and more able to identify with all other blacks, both slave and free.

Kolchin has discovered apparently universal features in master-bondsman relations, a central focus of his study, but he also shows their basic differences as he compares slave and serf life and chronicles patterns of resistance. If the masters had the upper hand, the slaves and serfs played major roles in shaping, and setting limits to, their own bondage.

This truly unprecedented comparative work will fascinate historians, sociologists, and all social scientists, particularly those with an interest in comparative history and studies in slavery.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal
Unfree Labor will stand the test of time much as Jerome Blum's Lord and Peasant in Russia and Kenneth Stampp's The Peculiar Institution have for serfdom and slavery respectively. In this major comparative study Kolchin analyzes the numerous similarities, e.g., serious labor shortages in two land rich areas on the peripheries of a dynamic, changing Europe, and dissimilarities, e.g., a primarily economic system (Russia) versus a comprehensive way of life (America). He demonstrates a keen knowledge of the sources as he examines the organization and dynamics of these two systems, and the responses they evoked from the slaves and serfs, over three centuries. The final product is a skillful blend of scholarship and readability that no library should ignore. It is a paradigm of what comparative history at its best can achieve. Mark R. Yerburgh, Trinity Coll. Lib., Burlington, Vt.
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Review
Comparative history is a tricky business and *Unfree Labor* succeeds where many previous ventures into this genre have failed. (Richard S. Dunn *Times Literary Supplement*)

A learned and sophisticated book in the tradition of high scholarship, as well as a book written to be read and enjoyed. Those who share a taste for comparative history will be taken with the author's spirit of play, his readiness to ask 'what if,' and his zest for experiment and discovery. (C. Vann Woodward *New York Review of Books*)

In its balance of interpretation, clarity of exposition, and depth and breadth of research, the book is exceptional. Moreover, it is a model of comparative analysis, displaying, as too few such studies have ever done, the complexities and the value of historical comparison. (Carl N. Degler *Journal of Social History*)

Students of servile labor systems, slave and serf, and of American and Russian history, have needed, and have known they needed, a book like this for a long time...This is indeed a splendid and indispensable book...Required reading for American historians. (Eugene D. Genovese *Journal of Economic History*)

Kolchin's stupendous research effort and sensitive reading of the evidence have resulted in an original, perceptive, and significant book. Admirably proving the enormous value of comparative study, Kolchin's analysis provides fresh insights into the nature of unfree labor in general and slavery and serfdom in particular. And despite its sophistication and its length, the book is a good read; it is clear, cogent, and free of academic jargon. This is a splendid study. (Harold D. Woodman, Purdue University)

Kolchin's book is a work of staggering erudition as regards the literature and sources concerning both Russian serfdom and American slavery. His comparative study offers significant insight into both systems of bondage. There is nothing remotely comparable in the literature in Russian or English, and Kolchin's writing is always lucid. (Daniel Field, Russian Research Center, Harvard University)

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particular. And despite its sophistication and its length, the book is a good read; it is clear, cogent, and free of academic jargon. This is a splendid study.
--Harold D. Woodman, Purdue University

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This book untitled Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (Belknap Press) to be one of several books this best seller in this year, honestly, that is because when you read this publication you can get a lot of benefit into it. You will easily to buy this book in the book shop or you can order it via online. The publisher in this book sells the e-book too. It makes you more easily to read this book, as you can read this book in your Cell phone. So there is no reason to your account to past this guide from your list.

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Margaret Holt:

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