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Steven Mintz, John Stauffer, eds. *The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Freedom, and the Ambiguities of American Reform.* Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007. 405 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55849-570-8.

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Exploring Evil

Hermann Goering was a despicable human being. But, there is a quote mistakenly attributed to him that I have always liked: "Whenever I hear anyone speak of Culture, I reach for my gun." Similarly, whenever I hear of an historian using "Good" or "Evil" or "Morality" without firmly embedding such universal abstractions in a particular time and place, my hand metaphorically inches toward my 1907, .38 caliber Smith & Wesson.

The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Freedom, and the Ambiguities of American Reform edited by Steven Mintz and John Stauffer, however, situates its twenty-two essays within a specific chronological and geographic context - for the most part. After a general introduction by Mintz, the book is divided into four parts (each with its own introduction): "Slavery and Freedom as Moral Problems," "The Antislavery Impulse," "Imagining Emancipation" and "Post-Emancipation America." "This volume," Mintz writes, "represents an effort to confront certain fundamental moral issues raised by American history, above all, the problem of slavery and its legacies of racism, racial exclusion, and racial inequality." And, again, for the most part, the essays confront moral issues within a specifically American context.

The first and longest essay, however, "The Ancient and Medieval Origins of Modern Freedom" by Orlando Patterson, is an exception. Tracing the origins of the West's concept of freedom to Greco-Roman philosophy and the precepts of Christianity, Patterson vehemently argues that these concepts preceded capitalism by twenty-two hundred years and that by at least the 13th century, liberty and freedom had acquired essentially their modern meanings. The last essay, Jack M. Holl's "Dwight D. Eisenhower: Religion, Politics, and the Evils of Communism", is also something of an exception. Holl closely examines the thirty-fourth president's view that a belief in God was fundamental to the concept of democracy. "Our form of government," Eisenhower stated in a 1952 address to the Freedom Foundation, "has no sense unless it is grounded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is." For him, faith and democracy were inextricably bound together.

The remaining twenty essays vary widely in length, depth and subject matter. Ira Berlin's "The Transformation of Slavery in the United States, 1800-1863" and Paul Finkelman's "The Significance and Persistence of Proslavery Thought" are merely well-written summaries of much longer works. Others - Stanley L. Engerman and David Eltis's "Slavery and Evil", Randolph Roth's "Twin Evils? Slavery and Homicide in Early America," Peter Hinks' "Timothy Dwight, Congregationalism, and Early Antislavery," David Waldstreicher's "Benjamin Franklin, Religion, and Early Antislavery," Paula Kane's "The Supernatural and Slavery: Catholics, Power, and Oppression" and Jonathan A. Glickstein's "The Specter of White Chatellization: William Goodell's Abolitionist Thought" - are interesting, but seem somehow incomplete. Still other essays, those by Catherine Clinton, Iver Bernstein, Sharon Hartman Strom, Laura Mitchell, Richard Wightman Fox and Ellen Dwyer, added specific insights and information to already established interpretations.

The remaining six essays each present unfamiliar aspects of important issues. For example, Robert E. Bonner's essay "Confederate Racialism and the Anticipation of Nazi Evil" discusses Confederate leaders' growing reluctance to publicly declare that their new state would be an Herrenvolk republic. It would take sixty years, Bonner concludes, and Adolph Hitler to fully explicate Confederate racial ideology. Margaret M. R. Kellow's article, "The Oriental Imaginary: Constructions of Female Bondage in Women's Antislavery Discourse," explores the relationship between white female abolitionists and the imagery of white Christian women enslaved by despotic and sexually depraved Moslem masters. And, in his essay "Bankruptcy and Bondage: The Ambiguities of Economic Freedom in the Civil War Era," Edward Balleisen performs a miracle of prestidigitation. He makes a close

analysis of the federal Bankruptcy Act of 1867 interesting by examining its racial and class ramifications.

"Icarus Unbound: Ambition and Sin in Anglo-American Culture, 1560-1776" by William Casey King (like Engerman and Eltis's essay and that by Margaret Keller) has discourse at its center. King investigates the changing definition of "ambition" over time and how its social, intellectual and moral transformation affected the institutional foundations of Anglo-American society. Finally, the essays of Michael Fellman and Leslie Butler, "The Transferability of Otherness: American Expansionists Greet the Filipinos, 1898-1902" and "Liberal Victorians and War in the Age of Empire," have a great deal in common. Although Butler's piece is broader in scope, both discuss how and why the articulate classes in America and Britain accepted or rejected overseas expansion at the turn of the 20th century. Generally applying an exceptionalist model, Fellman views America's encounter with the Filipinos as an extension of 250 years of Indian fighting, on the one hand, and the suppression of subordinate races on the other. But, Butler points out that for Anglo-American liberals the choices they confronted were more that just "Benevolent Assimilation," racial suppression or extermination. Their attitude depended on specific cases and there was not always uniform agreement about those cases. Only the goal of a universal liberal society remained constant; the ways and means of achieving that goal were for liberals always a matter of contention.

Mintz and Stauffer's *The Problem of Evil* is an interesting book. Its essays are uniformly thoughtful and well-written. They will be a useful starting point for students investigating the subjects with which they deal. The publishers have conveniently placed endnotes at the conclusion of each essay. (For example, Orlando Patterson's piece is followed by 106 such notes.) Yet, the editorial staff did allow an unreasonable number of typos and minor grammatical errors to slip pass them. But, despite the volume's obvious virtues, I am still uneasy about its title. I detect just a whiff of presentism in several of its essays. However, I strongly recommend *The Problem of Evil* as a resource for academic libraries ?" and my Smith and Wesson remains holstered.

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