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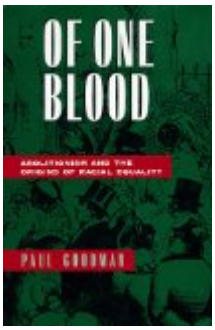
Paul Goodman. *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998. xxi + 303 $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-520-20794-3.



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Generations of historians have struggled to explain the sudden emergence and rapid growth of a militant 1830s abolitionist movement in the north within a society of whites who seemed quite removed from slavery but were largely hostile to the free African Americans in their midst. A number of vigorous debates has concerned the relationship between market revolution and reform: What might be the common characteristics of reformers and activists, as distinguished from those who adapted more comfortably to the market economy? What led a few reformers to adopt antislavery, and specifically immediatism (as opposed to colonization and other gradualist schemes)? How did a small band of promoters of a socially repugnant and putatively dangerous set of ideas succeed in building a sizeable following in a decidedly hostile environment in a mere decade?

The most interesting question (at least to me), concerns motive and meaning of the movement itself: whether white immediatists were able to develop a racial ideology distinct from the prevailing antebellum assumptions about black inferiority on the one hand and white prejudice on the other, both widely believed to be innate and permanent in their respective hosts. If so, why and how?

Also, how much power did such an ideology exert among other factors motivating abolitionists -- views of slavery as an anti-republican and vestigial form of despotism, as an un-Christian participation in man-stealing, as libertine and licentious? In short, was the theoretical foundation of immediatism the opposition to slavery or the opposition to racism?

Paul Goodman explores all of these questions in *Of One Blood*, a book nearly completed at the time of his death in 1995. He begins with events in the late 1820s that led to the first conversions to immediatism of supporters of gradualist measures to end slavery. One of the strongest elements of his book is the attention Goodman gives to the crucial role of African Americans in the crystallization of the immediatist movement. After the successful achievement of gradual emancipation in most northern states by the first decades of the nineteenth century, antislavery activists

turned their attention toward southern slavery with the same gradualist measures in mind. After 1816, virtually all of them, along with new antislavery converts, enthusiastically embraced the American Colonization Society's program to foster the removal of free blacks to Africa, ostensibly in order to bring slavery to an end. This was based on the notion that white prejudice and black inferiority made the large-scale emancipation of slaves impossible as long as they might be expected to remain in the United States as freedmen. It was the militant, almost universal rejection of colonization by African Americans and their clear-eyed unmasking of the program as a strategy to shore up slavery, not to bring about its demise, that converted Simeon Jocelyn, William Lloyd Garrison, and other antislavery activists from colonization to immediatism. Personal experiences with African American leaders and communities was also an important factor in convincing the early immediatists to reject the very premise of the ACS -- that blacks could not perform capably and morally as free members of American society -- and to work to convince other white Americans to abandon their racial prejudice and support black freedom and equality.

For the belief in racial equality constituted the guiding principle of the abolitionist movement, Goodman contends. Abolishing slavery, while it remained the primary goal, was a project whose success hinged on the eradication of whites' racial prejudice; hence the advocacy of racial equality, in Goodman's view, was really the central work of the abolitionists. This is the most passionately argued, and yet, for me, ultimately least convincing, aspect of this book, to which Goodman returns in his last chapter, and to which I will return at the end of this review.

How did the abolitionist leadership come to this conviction and this work? Goodman examines the life trajectories of a "crucial cadre" (36) of about twenty radical abolitionists. He assesses their economic and social positions, religious convictions, family relations, and other factors to locate common features in their personal circumstances that might have led white men and, discussed in two separate chapters, white women, to their passionate embrace of immediatism. He concludes that the early white abolitionist leaders were repelled by the emerging market economy and disillusioned with the accommodation made to it by traditional religion.

In response, they sought to "sacralize everyday life" and "impose moral order on social order" through their passionate commitment to the abolition of slavery and the eradication of white prejudice. Immediatism also served to mediate anxiety about manhood and effeminacy by "appropriating religiosity and moral leadership as fundamental to true manhood" and not simply "preeminently feminine" (101). White women who became early movement leaders responded to the new opportunities and new limitations that constituted "conflicting new conceptions of womanhood" within the emergent industrial order. Goodman's argument on the motivations of northern reform seems in some ways to be a gendered variation on the "social dislocation" argument first made made just after the turn of the century by Frank T. Carlton and reinvigorated in several different forms periodically thereafter. Ultimately, however, Goodman finds that religious conviction in encounter with "local contexts and experiences" (101) were most influential in determining whether a given individual would become an abolitionist.

Goodman complements his biographical investigation of the abolitionist leadership with a detailed social historical analysis of the membership of local abolitionist societies as the movement grew in the ensuing decade, fleshing out the social portrait of the abolitionist rank and file with information gleaned from an impressive array of sources, including city directories, census records, tax lists, and other town records. He argues that abolitionism attracted a broad range of

classes and occupational categories, drawing mass support among wage earners, artisans, mechanics, family farmers, and small proprietors. He credits the agency system and the establishment of a network of local abolition societies with building mass support. Agents also employed a strategy of inviting members of the popular American Colonization Society to engage in debates in order to draw large audiences. The abolitionists appealed to laboring people by defining aristocracy as a moral category and equating southern slaveholders with northern elites as dual threats to democracy.

After offering an intellectual historical analysis of racial "prejudice" in the United States in the early nineteenth century and the assessment of it by Europeans, who found it somewhat baffling, Goodman turns in his final chapter to what he clearly sees as his most important argument, that the "commitment to racial equality" (246) was the ideological cornerstone of the abolitionist movement, and that the success of early white converts in building mass support for it should be viewed as their crowning achievement and legacy. "They never wavered in their belief in equality," he insists (62), and "they grounded their belief in human equality in faith" (246). He makes this case most convincingly for Jocelyn and Garrison, much less so for the other individuals he highlights. Of course, Garrison's later attacks on Frederick Douglass, culminating in his general observation in the December 16, 1853, ***Liberator***, that essentially blacks were unable "as a class" to understand abolitionism (!), suggest that even Garrison had not internalized an abstraction he clearly embraced intellectually. As early as 1838 -- within the timeframe of Goodman's analysis -- Nathan Paul noted, in a speech to the Albany Anti-Slavery Convention in March of that year, that there were "two kinds of abolitionists," those who hate both slavery and prejudice and those who "as bad as they hate slavery, hate a man who wears a colored skin worse" (published in ***Friend of Man***, March 14, 1838).

Goodman does not discuss African Americans' ideas about white abolitionists' racial attitudes and behavior, and he does not show sustained interaction between black and white abolitionists. It is true that in his ten-year time frame, most African American antislavery activists were willing, at least publicly, to take at face value and even to praise warmly the efforts white abolitionists were making to combat race prejudice. However, the disillusionment many of them expressed in the years that followed must be taken into account, I think, in evaluating the movement's commitment and ultimate legacy.

African Americans appear in this book collectively as a catalyst for the conversion of whites to immediatism -- again, a crucial point; but thereafter, "abolitionists" are white. Since the subtitle suggests that "abolitionism" and "equality" are the objects of study here, the argument would have been complicated and strengthened if the ongoing efforts of black abolitionists to combat both racism and slavery had remained a vital part of the narrative, and if the involvement in certain quarters and lack of involvement in others between black and white activists in the period were critically addressed.

This leads me to an admittedly cranky objection to the book's subtitle, "The Origins of Racial Equality." This phrasing implies that there IS a state of being called "racial equality" that began to become a reality in the early abolitionist movement -- a point of view that I do not think is supportable, alas. Of course, Goodman may have meant to suggest merely that the IDEA of racial equality as a social innovation emerged in the context of the movement; but the text as well as the title phrasing seems to argue that it was achieved, at least in this milieu.

Nonetheless, this book offers a powerful and thought-provoking reinterpretation of the abolitionist movement. Particularly important is the

contribution it makes to our understanding of the relationship between reform and capitalism, the mechanics of building the first mass social movement that appealed to Americans across class lines, and the ways in which at least some Americans tried to negotiate a path between racial ideology, moral conviction and republican ideals.

A final technical note: The reader might want to be aware that the entry for this book in ***Books in Print***, and the publisher's own blurb, gives the number of pages as 426. But there AREN'T 426 pages in it, at least in the one I received. Soup to nuts, to the end of the index, there are 303.

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