

Africa, and proposes a radical transformation in the ways in which specialists look at the African precolonial and colonial past.

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BROWN, KATHLEEN M. *Undoing Slavery. Bodies, Race, and Rights in the Age of Abolition.* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia (PA) 2023. 446 pp. \$39.95.

How could the body not be central to histories of slavery? And yet, in her latest book on the abolitionist struggle in Pennsylvania and Virginia in the first half of the nineteenth century, Kathleen M. Brown argues that the body as an analytical category can be used to enlighten many more aspects of the discourse and daily practices of abolitionists, as well as the lawsuits held in this period fighting over the rights to freedom of enslaved men and women. Brown has written a comprehensive social, legal, economic, and medical history of the age of abolition, based on an extraordinary number of primary and secondary sources. This well-documented, readable, and multifaceted book aims to revisit the well-known fight against slavery and racism in the United States through the lens of the concept of “embodied self-sovereignty”. This “body-centered approach” (p. 7) to the abolition movement includes consideration of the major theme of birthright, the frequent mentioning of the body by abolitionists in regard to slavery’s physical violence, the physical effects of their exhausting activism and resistance, their healing practices, and overall the centrality of well-being and bodily integrity to a genuine exercise of rights. But this perspective also entails making connections with contemporary medical theories on blood and the racialized body. These informative links reveal how medicine and racism were inextricably entangled, and how they impacted on the metaphors used by abolitionists and on the ideas presented by “expert” witnesses in court cases revolving around race and the identification of enslaved people who had escaped.

The ultimate aim of this approach, Brown contends, is to argue against human rights scholarship that has neglected the body and focused only on the legal recognition of universal rights. Instead, the author aims to highlight the importance of the domestic and the intimate, such as family integrity, corporeal care, and the right to move freely, as necessary conditions for achieving these human rights, not as secondary aims to be fought for after securing these rights.

Although the choice of focusing on the body “on its own terms” (p. 4) and seeing the human body as having “its own stubborn logic” (p. 6) could have deserved more theoretical embedding (for instance, to explain whether the body is referred to in a discursive or more phenomenological way), overall this approach leads to a multi-layered and humane history featuring Black and white abolitionists, including men and women, such as Frederick Douglass, Richard Allen, and Sarah Mapps Douglass, but also doctors embracing increasingly racist ideas. The narrative pays

careful attention to gender and the ways it intersects with race and class. One of the book's chapters discusses the relationships between Black manhood, slavery, and the dignity of human rights. Particularly interesting are the sections on the balancing act that Black women abolitionists had to perform, having to hide any references to rape in their texts and speeches to come across as respectable and thus deserving human rights. White middle-class women, on the other hand, could only express compassion for Black women, not for enslaved men, at risk of endangering their purity and decency. As is well known, one of the most influential abolitionist images of the infringement of slavery on human rights was that of the enslaved mother, being torn apart from her child. Yet, Brown argues, this sympathy could not really counter the racist medicalization of Black women's bodies.

Equally informative is the book's discussion of the body and race in medicine. Here, Brown gives prominence to the theme of blood, since abolitionists often used the notion of "one blood", rooted in Quaker theology, to acknowledge the common humanity of free whites and enslaved African Americans, thus going against slavery's maternal inheritance principle. Distinguished minister, writer, and Black civic leader Richard Allen saw African-American labour and their blood watering the soil as earning their national belonging and citizenship. But from the 1820s blood lost its mystical meaning and increasingly became framed in a new scientific language. Blood now came to signify race rather than universal humanity. Slowly, the idea of the body as shaped by climate gave way to the idea of race as biological and inherited. Moreover, by the mid-century, Brown shows, American medicine had increasingly incorporated racist ideas. Typical and inferior characteristics of race were now thought to reside in body parts, such as skin colour and the skull.

These racist medical ideas were also found in law and jurisprudence. Brown analyses a number of important court rulings and their mostly negative effects on abolitionism, underlining the idea that slavery was innate and protecting the rights of slaveholders rather than the human rights of enslaved men and women and those who had fled to free states. Lawsuits around 1800 centred around the contested meaning of birthright for an enslaved child and the disputed view of enslaved women as reproducing property. By the mid-nineteenth century, several court cases confirmed state and federal laws that codified "a static, inherently enslaveable, African-descended body" (p. 308), thus refuting personal liberty for enslaved people, and denying them the right to bodily integrity and autonomy, thereby dovetailing with medical racism. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, part of the Compromise of 1850, enabled federal commissioners to help slave catchers in returning fugitives to their enslavers. The law obstructed the abolitionist cause.

In addition to demonstrating the convergence of law and medicine, Brown also highlights the role of the body in the economic history of slavery by analysing the abolitionist "body politics" entailing the criticism of the consumption of products produced by slave labour. Abolitionists emphasized the enslaved's blood and sweat incorporated in cotton clothing worn close to the skin or in sugar swallowed by consumers, hence making intimate bodily connections. Here, the book aims to shed light on domestic life and household economies, including enslaved women's labour, which the author claims have been obscured by the recent studies of capitalism and slavery that have taken a global perspective.

In sum, the interweaving of social, economic, medical, and legal history in the book is one of its strongest points. The book's emphasis on the role of the body in abolitionism and on the high importance of health, freedom of movement, and bodily autonomy underlines material aspects and makes for a humane historical narrative. Although some of the aspects of the history of slavery and abolitionism might already be familiar to readers, and some of the chapters contain too much detail, still the focus on the body serves to bring together elements of this history that are normally discussed apart from each other. This use of the body as a lens through which to view major developments in political, social, and economic history – rather than simply analysing the body as a topic in the history of medicine – promises to be a fruitful new approach. In addition to other recent books such as Charlotte Epstein's *Birth of the State: The Place of the Body in Crafting Modern Politics* (Oxford, 2021) and Hedwig Richter's, *Demokratie. Eine deutsche Affäre. Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2020), which take the body as a perspective to analyse modern politics and democracy, Brown's *Undoing Slavery* demonstrates how the body can serve as an approach to bring together the social, economic, political, and medical aspects of the history of slavery and abolition.

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CARMODY, TODD. *Work Requirements. Race, Disability, and the Print Culture of Social Welfare*. Duke University Press, Durham (NC) [etc.] 2022. 320 pp. Ill. \$104.95. (Paper: \$27.95.)

“This book is about why we assume all work is inherently meaningful and about how people on the social margins have been made to ensure that it is” (p. 221). So begins the Acknowledgments section of Todd Carmody's brilliant and original analysis of the print culture of US social welfare in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Carmody's Acknowledgments also shed light on the set of skills, inclinations, and circumstances that allowed him to write this wide-ranging, interdisciplinary book. From an education in “poetic form and literary history”, he derived “habits of focused close reading” and an ability “to trace the circulation of cultural forms across disparate contexts” (p. 221); from a “peripatetic” career in academia, he picked up tools and knowledge from colleagues across the often-siloed academic landscape (p. 222); and from engaging in years of scholarly labor “without the privileges and protections of stable employment” (p. 224), he gained purchase on the questions at the core of this book: How is a “work society” made and remade over time? What does it take to convince the gatekeepers of such a society that one belongs – that is, to be legible as a worker? And might it be possible to imagine a way of “being and belonging” that is “beyond work” (p. 22)? The answers *Work Requirements* offers are grounded in a particular historical era, decades removed