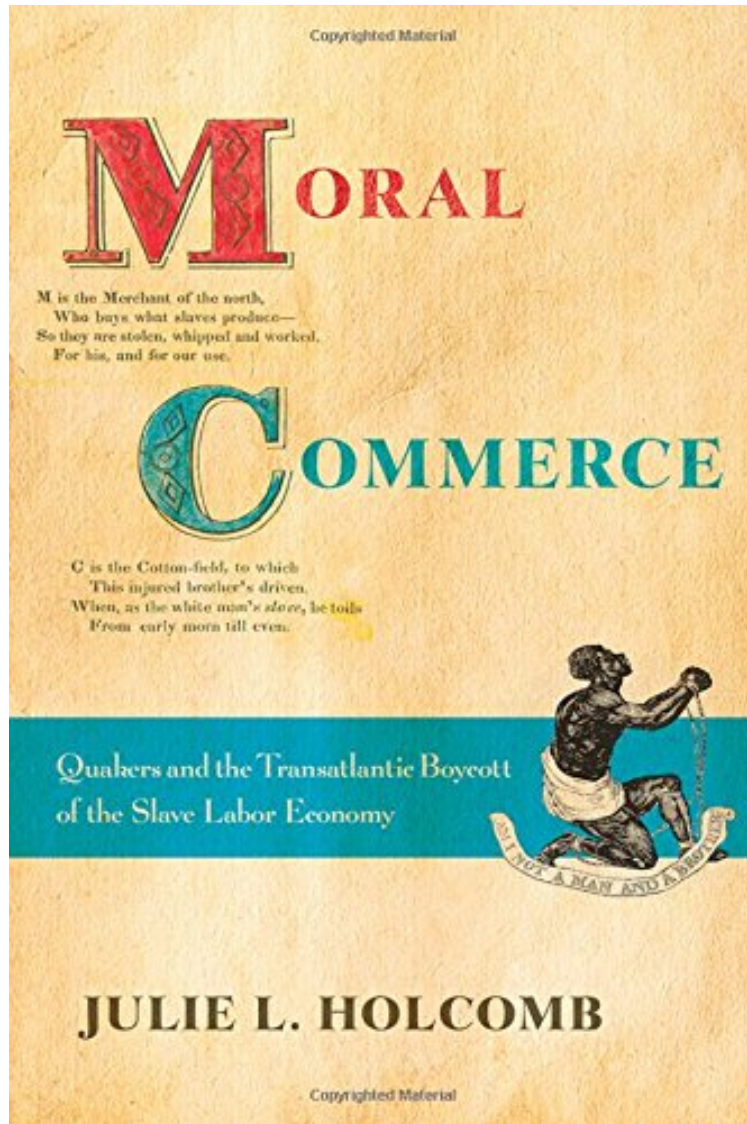


# Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy

Julie L. Holcomb

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How can the simple choice of a men's suit be a moral statement and a political act? When the suit is made of free-labor wool rather than slave-grown cotton. In *Moral Commerce*, Julie L. Holcomb traces the genealogy of the boycott of slave labor from its seventeenth-century Quaker origins through its late nineteenth-century decline. In their failures and in their successes, in their resilience and their persistence, antislavery consumers help us understand the possibilities and the limitations of moral commerce. Quaker antislavery rhetoric began with protests against the slave trade before expanding to include boycotts of the use and products of slave labor. For more than one hundred years, British and American abolitionists highlighted consumers' complicity in sustaining slavery. The boycott of slave labor was the first consumer movement to transcend the boundaries of nation, gender, and race in an effort by reformers to change the conditions of production. The movement attracted a broad cross-section of abolitionists: conservative and radical, Quaker and non-Quaker, male and female, white and black. The men and women who boycotted slave labor created diverse, biracial networks that worked to reorganize the transatlantic economy on an ethical basis. Even when they acted locally, supporters embraced a global vision, mobilizing the boycott as a powerful force that could transform the marketplace. For supporters of the boycott, the abolition of slavery was a step toward a broader goal of a just and humane economy. The boycott failed to overcome the power structures that kept slave labor in place; nonetheless, the movement's historic successes and failures have important implications for modern consumers.

"*Moral Commerce*?beautifully written, carefully researched, and convincingly argued?makes a striking contribution to American, British, and Atlantic perspectives on abolitionism. I particularly like Julie L. Holcomb's emphasis on religion, race, and gender as analytical threads throughout the book."?Richard Huzzey, University of Liverpool, author of *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain*"I am impressed with the chronological and geographic reach of *Moral Commerce*. The field has needed a work that connects the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries and which returns us to a transatlantic antislavery focus. Julie L. Holcomb connects the antislavery literature with research on historical consumerism in creative ways and uses a wide array of primary and secondary materials."?Beth A. Salerno, Saint Anselm College, author of *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America*"For too long, the full story of the Free Produce Movement has been overshadowed by disputes among abolitionists about whether abstention from slave-grown products was possible. In this well-researched and eloquent book, Julie L. Holcomb brings the transatlantic history of Free Produce out of the shadows and shows that the movement's main obstacle was not opposition from other abolitionists, but the global reach of slavery itself. Long before current scholarly debates about the relationship between slavery and capitalism, abolitionists understood that the global economy was deeply stained at every level by the plunder of fellow human beings."?W. Caleb McDaniel, Rice University, author of *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* About the Author Julie L. Holcomb is Assistant Professor of Museum Studies at Baylor University. She is the editor of *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers: The Civil War Letters of the Remley Brothers, 22nd Iowa Infantry*.