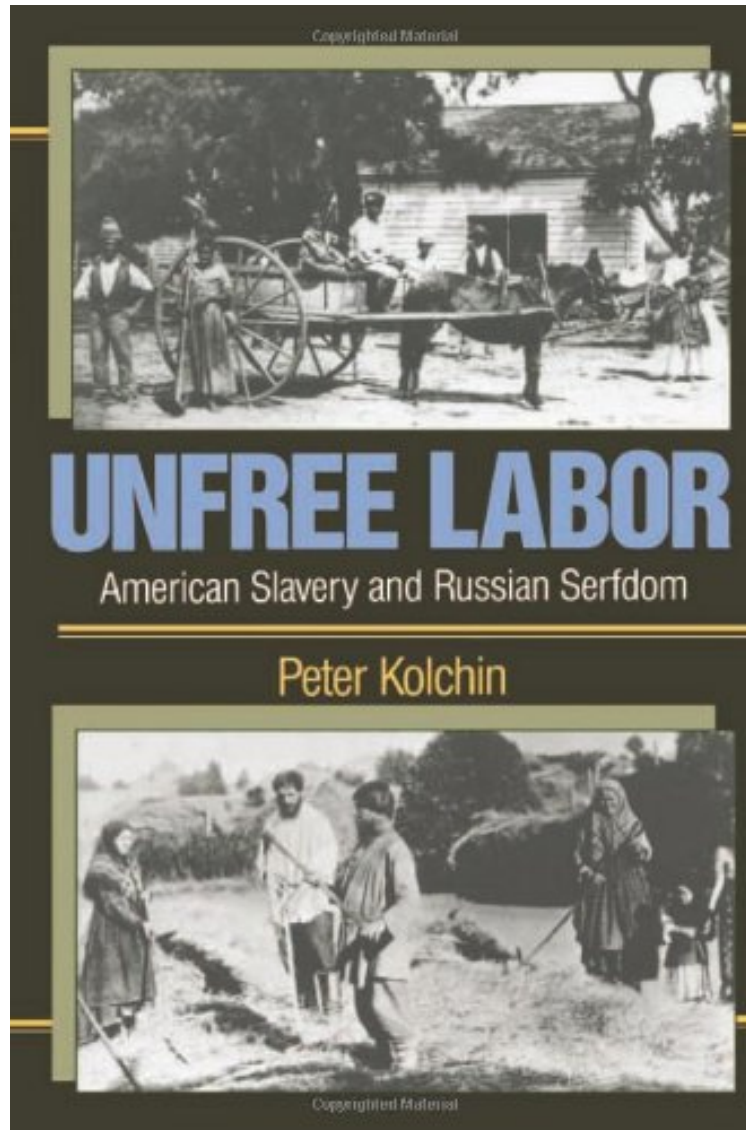


(Free) Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (Belknap Press)

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

Peter Kolchin

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#1151770 in Books Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1990-03-01 1990-03-31 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.25 x 1.34 x 6.131, 1.53 #File Name: 0674920988534 pages | File size: 59.Mb

Peter Kolchin : Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (Belknap Press) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (Belknap Press):

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. worth while readBy harryThe great question for me was how did Serfdom end in Russia in a seemingly peaceful way while it took a massive war to accomplish in the US. This work

provides answers to this question and many others. A very worth while read3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Historians -- this is how to do itBy Samuel C. GloverIf comparative histories are rare, part of the blame may fall on Prof. Peter Kolchin, because his "Unfree Labor" sets an extraordinary standard. Much of what he says about American slavery is a reprise of his own book by the same title, but readers new to the topic will gain from the treatment here. For me, his discussions of Russian serfdom were revelatory, and on their own justified the book's purchase. But what really sets the book apart is the dissection of the similarities and differences between these two contemporaneous institutions. This is an ambitious project, and Kolchin casts a vast net to carry it off. His analyses consider geography, agricultural markets, folk tales, the ratio of bondsmen to owners, and the rise of state power. He deftly examines the disparate origins of serf and slave populations -- the one an indigenous majority, the other a displaced minority. Kolchin often illuminates his comparisons with digressions on Brazilian and Caribbean slavery, which had characteristics intermediate between the American and Russian extremes. The book's thematic divisions ("The Masters and Their Bondsmen" and "The Bondsmen and Their Masters") nicely frame life for those on either side of the wall of privilege. Finally, although Kolchin necessarily takes a lofty and abstract view, anecdotes and quotations enliven almost every page. No review of "Unfree Labor" would be complete without mentioning what a fine model of historical presentation it is. Kolchin writes well, but he also appreciates how eloquent a well-crafted map or table of figures can be -- something that seems to elude far too many historians.

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.

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. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. 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 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) 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