



The Promises of Liberty: The History and Contemporary Relevance of the Thirteenth Amendment

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In these original essays, America's leading historians and legal scholars reassess the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment and its contemporary relevance to issues of liberty, justice, and equality. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States, reasserting the radical, egalitarian dimensions of the Constitution. It laid the foundation for future civil rights and social justice legislation, yet subsequent reinterpretation and misappropriation has curbed more substantive change. With constitutional jurisprudence undergoing a revival, *The Promises of Liberty* provides a full historical portrait of the Thirteenth Amendment and its untapped potential for ensuring common liberties.

The collection begins with an introduction by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Brion Davis (Yale), who discusses the failure of the Thirteenth Amendment to achieve its framers' objectives. Davis is followed by James M. McPherson (Princeton), another Pulitzer recipient, who recounts the influence of abolitionists on the ratification process. Subsequent essays address Lincoln's commitment to ending slavery and the Thirteenth Amendment's surprisingly small role during and after Reconstruction. The anthology's third Pulitzer Prize winner, David M. Oshinsky (University of Texas, New York University), explains how peonage undermined the prohibition against compulsory service. Other essays relate the amendment to contemporary issues in organized labor, reproductive rights, and citizenship.

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