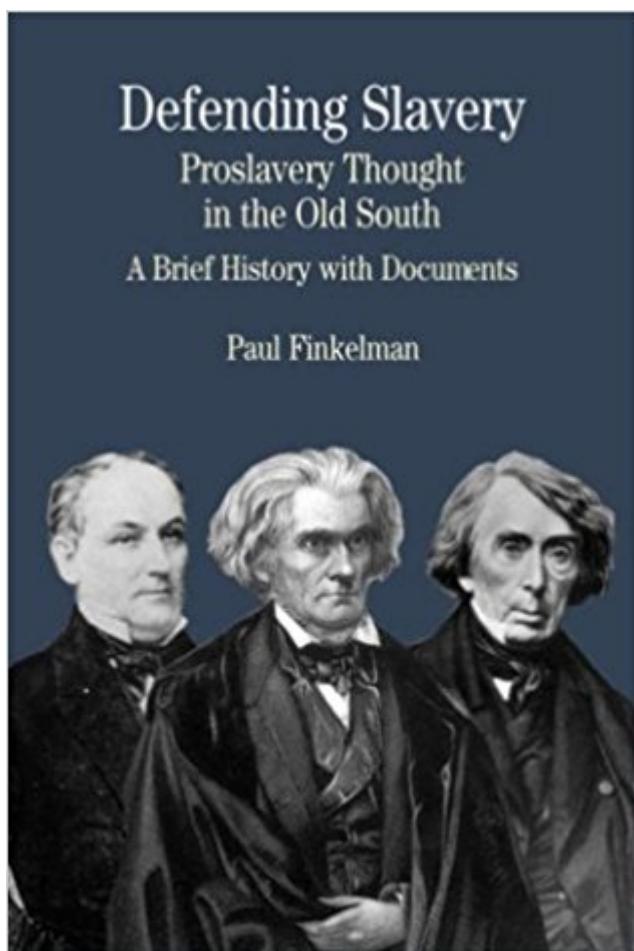


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Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought In The Old South: A Brief History With Documents (Bedford Series In History & Culture)



Synopsis

Within decades of the American Revolution, the Northern states had either ended slavery or provided for its gradual abolition. Slavery, however, was entrenched in the South and remained integral to American politics and culture. Nationally, it was protected by the U.S. Constitution, federal laws, and Supreme Court decisions, and slaveowners dominated all three branches of the federal government. From the time of the Revolution until the Civil War (and beyond), Southern thinkers offered a variety of proslavery arguments. This body of thought "based on religion, politics and law, economics, history, philosophy, expediency, and science" offers invaluable insights into how slavery shaped American history and continues to affect American society. In this volume, Paul Finkelman presents a representative selection of proslavery thought and includes an introduction that explores the history of slavery and the debate over it. His headnotes supply a rich context for each reading. The volume also includes a chronology, a selected bibliography, and illustrations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This collection will make an excellent addition to the Bedford series.... The documents are well selected. Readers will get a good sampling of many 'classic' statements of the proslavery ideology. Moreover, a wide variety of arguments are represented.... The introduction is especially note worthy; I am unaware of any concise introduction to proslavery thought that is better suited to the classroom."

Paul Finkelman is the President William McKinley Distinguished Professor of Law and Public Policy and Senior Fellow in the Government Law Center at Albany Law School. His many books include *Slavery in the Courtroom* (1985), which received the Joseph L. Andrews Award from the American Association of Law Libraries; *His Soul Goes Marching On; Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid* (1995), which was a History Book Club selection; and *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (second edition, 2002); and he is the co-author of *A March of Liberty: A Constitutional History of the United States* (2002). He edited *Dred Scott v. Sandford: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997), another volume in the Bedford Series in History and Culture. Finkelman has also published numerous scholarly articles on American legal history and race relations, and he lectures frequently on these subjects. In 1995, he was designated Virginia Historian of the Year by the Virginia Social Science Association.

This is certainly subject material of a highly sensitive nature. It offers a succinct and revealing glimpse into the various methods by which prominent antebellum Southerners like John C. Calhoun, Alexander Stephens, and Roger Taney attempted to justify and defend their peculiar institution of African chattel slavery and also to maintain white supremacy.

In light of the recent revelations in poor and inappropriate management of race relations around the country I was seeking information on the historical defense of such police and judicial action. This book provides a thoughtful selection from historical sources including actual documents. Subsections include arguments based on religion and on the law, The appendices provides a chronology in the United States from 1619 to 1870.

I thought this book was excellent. Slavery, despite its abolition a century and a half ago, and its legacy still have a powerful influence in American life. Particularly interesting was Thomas Jefferson's contribution to the salvery's justification through his now infamous Notes on Virginia. A good read and important historical background.

This book has first hand accounts of slave owners and their experiences and why they defended slavery. This is a must read. Very educational.

Still reading

As expected.

This collection of mid-nineteenth century writings defending American slavery is excellent in both selection and editing. Nearly all of the writings excerpted are either out of print or available only in terribly expensive editions. (The single exception is George Fitzhugh's *Cannibals All!*, edited by C. Vann Woodward. Woodward's preface is well worth reading.) Included in this collection are Vice President of the Confederacy Alexander Stephens' "cornerstone speech," in which he categorically declares that the Confederacy is built on the assumption that blacks are racially inferior to whites and ordained for slavery; James Henry Hammond's famous 1858 "cotton is king" speech in which he insists that the southern states are economically independent of their slavery-disapproving neighbors and refers to black slaves as the "mudsill" or inferior foundation (when compared to the "marble" of whites) of society; several "Christian" defenses of slavery, including Thornton Stringfellow's notorious affirmation, which he declares "no man denies," that "Jesus Christ has not abolished slavery by a prohibitory command; ...and has introduced no new moral principle which can work its destruction"; and several documents, including the above-mentioned Fitzhugh's, which purport to prove that blacks are by nature stupid, criminal, lazy, and disease-prone. Reading these documents is an uncanny experience. On the one hand, they're laughable in both their outrageous racist claims as well as their cultural blindspots. (Stephens, for example, insists that blacks are ordained by God to be slaves, and in the very next paragraph insists that the Confederacy is characterized by its high moral character.) But on the other, they're chilling, revealing as they do an utter insensitivity to our shared human nature. After reading these documents, one is thankful that this chapter of American history is in the past. One also worries, however, how much of the sentiments expressed in these documents is still around, just beneath the surface.

Very informative book. A great reading that makes you think about what exactly you are reading. Full of useful and thought provoking information.

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