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Slavery and Human Progress

David Brion Davis

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David Brion Davis : Slavery and Human Progress before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Slavery and Human Progress:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. AwesomeBy intriguedI bought this after reading Davis' Slavery and Inhuman Bondage, and I am satisfied with both purchases. Davis likes to dwell on how slavery was compatible or contradictory to the concept of social and human progress, and how this concept differed throughout different periods. This is an excellent read for history students and those studying the history of slavery from the Ancient Mediterranean, to Western Europe, and in the New World.6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Not for the casual readerBy Neal J. BurnsI picked up this book because of its compelling thesis about the shifting meaning of slavery in history. Unfortunately, I got about 1/6th of the way through it and I realized that it is a bit more scholarly than what I had imagined. I would not recommend it unless you either already have a fairly solid foundation in European and world history, or you are willing to put in the effort to acquire it while plodding through this book. The audience for this book is obviously other academic historians and advanced students thereof, not the general public.8 of 15 people found the following review helpful. The Enigma of AbolitionBy John C. LandonThis work could be taken as a reflection on and/or conclusion to the author's previous two well-known classic works on slavery and poses the paradox lurking in all ideas of progress applied to historical analysis. The book shows history's answer, one that historians perhaps fail to see. The place of the slavery in human history is so endemic that we are left with the question of why toward the end of the eighteenth century forces for its abolition appeared and within several generations more

or less succeeded in its overcoming. It is not a question we should leave to the Hegels of this world, come on Historians. This book cogently addresses the core issue and orbits around it, and would make a good ending to a perusal of the author's lead-up texts, along with some of the literature cited on the slavery debate, which the book reviews, to some extent. The idea of progress is out of fashion, which makes the issue seem less significant to postmodern indifference, yet the ambiguity here lingers as a challenge to our notions of 'what drives history'. In part, the paradoxes of historical progress springs from the inadequacy of our historiography which is either some teleological historicism or some derivative of the anti-progressivism of Darwinian evolution. In that context, the puzzle of slavery and abolition remains stubbornly mysterious. This work gives us a 'good question' whose answer would constitute a true 'universal history'.

Pulitzer Prize-winner David Brion Davis here provides a penetrating survey of slavery and emancipation from ancient times to the twentieth century. His trenchant analysis puts the most recent international debates about freedom and human rights into much-needed perspective. Davis shows that slavery was once regarded as a form of human progress, playing a critical role in the expansion of the western world. It was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that views of slavery as a retrograde institution gained far-reaching acceptance. Davis illuminates this momentous historical shift from "progressive" enslavement to "progressive" emancipation, ranging over an array of important developments--from the slave trade of early Muslims and Jews to twentieth-century debates over slavery in the League of Nations and the United Nations. In probing the intricate connections among slavery, emancipation, and the idea of progress, Davis sheds new light on two crucial issues: the human capacity for dignifying acts of oppression and the problem of implementing social change.

"A work of breath-taking erudition that is also a model of clarity and good sense. [Davis] surveys more than a thousand years of slavery and antislavery in a way that is fresh and revealing even for those who are familiar with...the subject."--George M. Fredrickson, Stanford University "[Davis's] superior literary ability enables him to cover a great deal of ground in tight smooth prose...the best introduction we have to the extent and significance of slavery in the history of the Western world."--The Atlantic "A work of awesome intellectual depth and range. Provocative, probing, and powerful...ranks among the most important studies of slavery."--Library Journal About the Author David Brion Davis, Sterling Professor of History, Yale University.