



Freedom in a Slave Society: Stories from the Antebellum South (Cambridge Studies on the American South)

Johanna Nicol Shields

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Before the Civil War, most Southern white people were as strongly committed to freedom for their kind as to slavery for African Americans. This study views that tragic reality through the lens of eight authors - representatives of a South that seemed, to them, destined for greatness but was, we know, on the brink of destruction. Exceptionally able and ambitious, these men and women won repute among the educated middle classes in the Southwest, South, and the nation, even amid sectional tensions. Although they sometimes described liberty in the abstract, more often these authors discussed its practical significance: what it meant for people to make life's important choices freely and to be responsible for the results. They publically insisted that freedom caused progress, but hidden doubts clouded this optimistic vision. Ultimately, their association with the oppression of slavery dimmed their hopes for human improvement, and fear distorted their responses to the sectional crisis.

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