

White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea

Tyler Stovall

Princeton University Press (Jan 17, 2021)

Hardcover \$29.95 (336pp)

978-0-691-17946-9

With its thorough inquiries into world history, Tyler Stovall's *White Freedom* shows that the highly regarded American ideals of liberty and freedom do not contradict the nation's record of racism; in the US, "freedom" has always been a purposefully discriminatory notion.

Stovall is meticulous about parsing historical events, global ideologies, and the usurped symbols of freedom to show that the freedom of one group of people has long been seen as dependent on the oppression of other groups. For example: the Statue of Liberty, regarded as a symbol of personal freedom, is reconsidered with nuance here, as Stovall questions the implications of putting a woman with European features on a pedestal—and even of holding her in high regard while relegating women like her to the home, where they were expected to be dependent on men for survival. Stovall's complex presentation represents the statue as a racial icon and a symbol of whiteness, especially after her antislavery roots were buried in America, made instead to symbolize European immigration.

Semichronological accounts of major global uprisings show how the enforcement of national freedoms applied to white people only—many times, to just white men. Even during Reconstruction, Stovall shows, the concept of freedom remained tantamount to whiteness despite the abolishment of slavery; the formerly enslaved faced violence, disenfranchisement, and death. Women's suffrage is portrayed as an underscoring of white freedom, too, in that black women did not benefit from its progress; neither is it credited with elevating white women to a status equal to that of white men.

The pointed research represented in *White Freedom* strengthens the case that concepts of freedom and liberty in the United States have always worked as intended—to uphold the systemic racism of the land.

TANISHA RULE (January / February 2021)

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