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978-0-521-77400-0 - Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century

Robert J. Steinfeld

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Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century

This book presents a fundamental reassessment of the nature of wage labor in the nineteenth century, focusing on the common use of penal sanctions in England to enforce wage labor agreements. Professor Steinfeld argues that wage workers were not employees at will but were often bound to their employment by enforceable labor agreements, which employers used whenever available to manage their labor costs and supply. In the northern United States, where employers normally could not use penal sanctions, the common law made other contract remedies available, also placing employers in a position to enforce labor agreements. Modern free wage labor only came into being late in the nineteenth century, as a result of reform legislation that restricted the contract remedies employers could legally use.

Robert J. Steinfeld is a Professor of Law at the School of Law, State University of New York at Buffalo. He is the author of *The Invention of Free Labor* (1991) and numerous essays on labor history and forms of free and coerced labor. Professor Steinfeld has written for *Stanford Law Review*, *William and Mary Quarterly*, *Law and History Review*, and *American Historical Review*. He has been a Langdell Fellow at Harvard Law School and a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow.

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*For Jenny, Noah, and Ezra
and
for my father*

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