



# **A Self-Evident Lie: Southern Slavery and the Threat to American Freedom (American Abolitionism and Antislavery)**

*Jeremy J. Tewell*

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*A Self-Evident Lie* explores and underscores the fear and complex meaning of "slavery" to northerners before the Civil War. Many northerners asked: If slavery was the beneficent and paternalistic institution that southerners claimed, could it not be applied with equal morality to whites as well as blacks? Republicans repeatedly expressed concern that proslavery arguments were not inherently racial. Irrespective of race, anyone could fall victim to the argument that they were "inferior," that they would be better off enslaved, that their enslavement served the interests of society, or that their subjugation was justified by history and religion. In trenchant and graceful prose, Jeremy Tewell argues that some Republicans, most notably Abraham Lincoln, held that the only effective safeguard of individual liberty was universal liberty, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence. As long as Americans believed that "all men" were endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, everyone's liberty would be *self-evident*, regardless of circumstance.

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