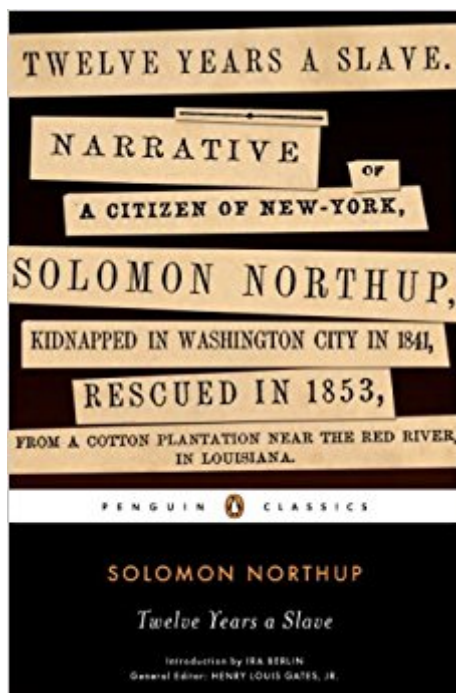


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Twelve Years A Slave (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Now the major motion picture that won the 2014 Academy Award for Best Picture, starring Chiwetel Ejiofor, Michael Fassbender, and Lupita Nyong'o, and directed by Steve McQueen. Perhaps the best written of all the slave narratives, *Twelve Years a Slave* is a harrowing memoir about one of the darkest periods in American history. It recounts how Solomon Northup, born a free man in New York, was lured to Washington, D.C., in 1841 with the promise of fast money, then drugged and beaten and sold into slavery. He spent the next twelve years of his life in captivity on a Louisiana cotton plantation. After his rescue, Northup published this exceptionally vivid and detailed account of slave life. It became an immediate bestseller and today is recognized for its unusual insight and eloquence as one of the very few portraits of American slavery produced by someone as educated as Solomon Northup, or by someone with the dual perspective of having been both a free man and a slave. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"I could not believe that I had never heard of this book. It felt as important as Anne Frank's Diary, only published nearly a hundred years before. . . . The book blew [my] mind: the epic range, the details, the adventure, the horror, and the humanity. . . . I hope my film can play a part in drawing attention to this important book of courage. Solomon's bravery and life deserve nothing less."

• Steve McQueen, director of *12 Years a Slave*, from the Foreword

"Frightening, gripping and inspiring . . . Northup's story seems almost biblical, structured as it is as a descent and resurrection narrative of a protagonist who, like Christ, was 33 at the time of his abduction. . . . Northup reminds us of the fragile nature of freedom in any human society and the harsh reality that whatever legal boundaries existed between so-called free states and slave states in 1841, no black man, woman or child was permanently safe."

• Henry Louis Gates, Jr., from the Afterword

"For sheer drama, few accounts of slavery match Solomon Northup's tale of abduction from freedom and forcible enslavement."

• Ira Berlin, from the Introduction

"If you think the movie offers a terrible-enough portrait of slavery, please, do read the book. . . . The film is stupendous art, but it owes much to a priceless piece of document. Solomon Northup's memoir is history. . . . His was not simply an extraordinary story, but an account of the life of a great many ordinary people."

• The Daily Beast

"An incredible document, amazingly told and structured. Tough, but riveting. The movie of it by Steve McQueen might be the most successful adaptation of a book ever undertaken; text and film complement each other wildly."

• Rachel Kushner, *The New York Times Book Review*

"The best firsthand account of slavery."

• James M. McPherson, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*, in *The New York Times Book Review*

"Northup published a memoir of his 12-year nightmare in 1853, the year after *Uncle Tom's Cabin* came out, and it was so successful that he went on to participate in two stage adaptations. The book dropped from sight in the 20th century, but the movie tie-in will certainly reestablish its virtually unique status as a work by an educated free man who managed to return from slavery."

• The Hollywood Reporter

This story of the abduction of a free Negro adult from the North and his enslavement in the South--provides a sensational element which cannot be matched in any of the dozens of narratives written by former slaves. 'Think of it: For thirty years a man, wit all man's hopes, fears and aspirations--with a wife and children to call him by the endearing names of husband and father--with a home, humble it may be, but still a home...then for twelve years a thing, a chattel personal,

classed with mules and horses....Oh! it is horrible. It chills the blood to think that such are.' --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

As slave stories go, this one is, in my view, without peer. Northup's s captivating tale -- which has gained attention because of the movie that shares the book's title -- is told in exacting detail with an easy prose. He sets the stage masterfully, describing people and places before proceeding into the narrative. Unlike works of fiction, this book is so compelling because, by all accounts, it is true. There is no polemical axe to grind, as with Uncle Tom (a novel at one point wryly referenced by Northup). Here you see both the brutality of slavery and the moments of kindness by slaves and even some slave owners. Solomon tells the story with clarity and intelligence. The free versions on other sites I found were pretty poorly formatted, so spending a dollar for a polished version on is worthwhile, but this one is not the best of them. Granted, the book is formatted adequately, and any typographical errors in this version seem to be simple reproductions of the original. However, the supporting material is a letdown. I read the version that includes the introduction by novelist Dolen Perkins-Valdez. That introduction is borderline insulting, as it makes only a weak attempt to separate accounts with fictional elements like *Roots* from an authentic account like this one. Worse still, Perkins-Valdez can't resist indulging in repeatedly referencing her own recently released slave novel, even going so far as to quote herself. There are almost no historical elements to this version beyond the main book -- no mention of Northup after the book, no mention of the writer who helped him pen the book, nothing. There is more information on the writer of the introduction than there is the author. One other oddity worth mentioning: the original book's preface -- the one done by the man who helped Northup write the book -- has been curiously excised from this version too. That makes this version something less than complete. For those looking for a better version, you might consider *Twelve Years a Slave - Enhanced Edition* by Dr. Sue Eakin Based on a Lifetime Project. New Info, Images, Maps, which contains a robust amount of supporting material and, better still, is right now the same cost as this version.

Growing up in the North, I had always found it hard to imagine that slavery not only existed in this country, but flourished. Through the years, I have read many an autobiography or history book concerning slavery and thought I knew it all. And yet I was blind. Until I read Solomon Northrup's "12 Years a Slave." Where has this book been? It is a masterpiece of history, of one man, one free man's life. A true picture of 'The Old South'. Mr. Northrup was a free black man with a beautiful wife and two daughters living in Saratoga, NY. He was lured from his home by slave traders who specialized

in the awful practice of kidnapping free black citizens and selling them into slavery. Torn from his home and family, Mr. Northrup endured the worst that can happen to a human being, and still live. And yet, he remained fair and honest, never stooping to the level some of his white masters did. I am not going to rewrite the book in this review because I recommend reading it for yourself. Slavery was and is a vile institution. Solomon Northrup is my new inspiration. This book will shock you. But you will be the better for having read it. My highest of fives.

The book itself is great -- absolutely wonderful. But I see that all sorts of folks have rushed it into print in the last month or two, to cash in on the film (which is also great) - This edition is quite cheap and shabby; it doesn't even include page numbers. I'd recommend one of the other editions (although some of them are probably also shabby... but at least look for one from a reputable publisher. And really: the book itself should be considered a classic. It's beautifully written, and powerful in its descriptions and insights.

I bought this after watching the movie. I am a college student that works full time, so I usually don't have much time for reading things that aren't school related. I finally got around to finishing this. This is an extremely difficult book to read. What this man went through was astoundingly awful. It is an important narrative though. If you want to understand southern culture as it is today, if you want to get a deeper understanding of race relations in America, or if you just want to read a good book, I highly recommend it. You get a real picture of what institutional (versus man to man) racism is. You will also understand how far our country has come from it. If one black man can triumph over adversity in that day, all of them certainly can now. A history professor once told me that it's not enough to just say that the south was wrong, you have to understand why they thought like they did. This will definitely shed some dark light on the subject.

I saw the movie, but the movie only stole ideas from this book and created its own "honey coated" story - that is, compared to the book. One can only marvel at the ability of man to cope with the most extreme situations, and then marvel even more at the cruelty that man is capable of. Slavery has been around since the beginning of time, I guess, and the perpetrators of this evil even used the Bible as a means to justify its use, but a person with any conscience can only abhor its use, as the author demonstrates in his own words that people become inured to violence that is around them on a daily basis, and that this violence eventually corrupts an entire society. A lesson that has been learned, and then forgotten, way too many times throughout the history of man.

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