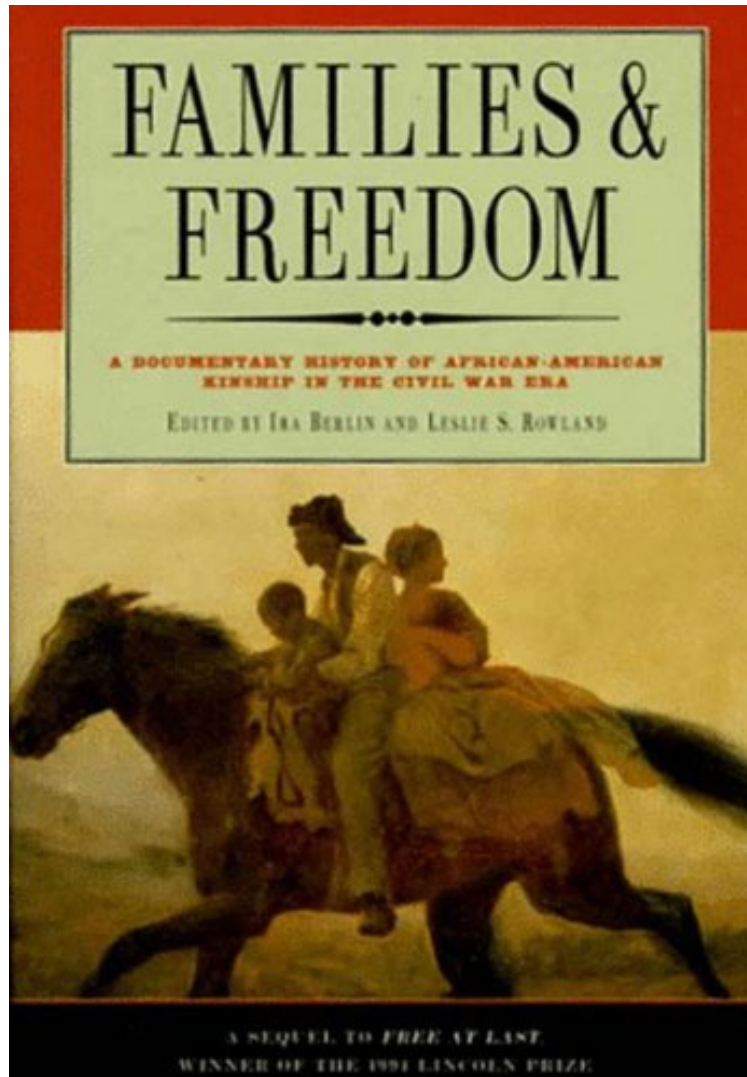


[Mobile book] Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African American Kinship in the Civil War Era

Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African American Kinship in the Civil War Era

Ira Berlin

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Ira Berlin : Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African American Kinship in the Civil War Era before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African American Kinship in the Civil War Era:

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Through the dramatic and moving letters and testimony of freed slaves, *Families and Freedom* tells the story of the remaking of the black family during the tumultuous years of the Civil War era. Former slaves, free blacks, and their contemporaries recount the elation accompanying the reunion of brothers and sisters separated for half a lifetime and the anguished realization that time lost could never be made up.

From Publishers Weekly Berlin and Rowland are, respectively, the former and present directors of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland. In this sturdy sequel to *Free at Last*, they present documents, primarily letters written by African Americans, that illustrate the stark brutalities of slavery in the 1860s. In the border states of Missouri, Maryland and Kentucky, where slavery remained legal despite the Emancipation Proclamation, black men who had joined the Union army were often arrested by civil authorities when they went home to help their families. When blacks entered army camps, often their families occupied shanty towns nearby. Many soldiers complained to their white commanders about their families' wretched living conditions; some even wrote to President Lincoln. Letters from blacks in the North show that they endured the same problems as whites' only magnified because free blacks in the North toiled on the fringes of the economy. There's also material on the immediate postwar situation of black families. Black units remained in service as occupation troops and on the Mexican border while their loved ones at home suffered discrimination and vengeance from former slave owners. Letters describing the sudden ability of blacks to form legal marriages in the South underscore the inhuman conditions of slavery, as do the missives of those futilely searching for kin sold off years earlier. With each letter preceded by a brief explanatory note, this valuable collection of primary documents contributes to our understanding of 19th-century black social history; it also can serve as an excellent college text. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* This is the sixth installment of a Freedman and Southern Society-sponsored study entitled *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*. The impeccable standards established by the editors in the previous works (most recently, *The Slaves' Economy*, International Specialized Book Svcs., 1995) are rigorously maintained in this one. The joy and horror evoked by these historical documents are certain to remain with the reader for a long time. As the title suggests, the focus here is the complex familial relations of African Americans of the time. Because family ties were discouraged if not forbidden by slavery, the concept of the extended family developed and has survived to today. Slaves, thus deprived, acquired "family" where they could. The documents presented here examine these blood and extended relationships with poignancy. This work (and the entire series preceding it) is not merely highly recommended for all public and academic libraries; it is sine qua non for even the most rudimentary American history collection. Don R. Brusha, Sebring P.L., Fla. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Kirkus* s Berlin and Rowland, editors of the prize-winning collection *Free at Last*, have come up with another moving documentary history, this one focusing on black family life in the Civil War era. Told mostly from the perspectives of black soldiers and their families, these poignant letters show the devotion and love that existed among African-American relatives despite all efforts to destroy slave families. Slaves were usually discouraged by their masters from forming familial relationships--they were split up regularly when relatives were sold; there was no official recognition of slave marriages--yet many slaves managed to nurture close families. During the Civil War, these relationships were sorely tested, as families were again separated, women and children left, even after liberation, among their embittered former owners. Yet it is hard to say who was more destructive of the black family during the war--the North or the South. The federal government was shameful in its treatment of black soldiers fighting for the Union: Letters here attest to the fact that they were often forcefully conscripted and received less than half the pay of their white counterparts. Their families received little or none of the promised assistance, and the soldiers were denied furlough or required to pay dearly for it, even when the war was over. As one "umble soldier" who could not get leave wrote to the secretary of war to beg permission to visit his family: "In August I lost two of my children. I asked for a leaf [sic] of absence and was refused. . . . Now the war is over and I now want to see those who are dearer to me than my life." A revealing history about the precarious state of black families during and after the Civil War. (36 bw illustrations) -- Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.