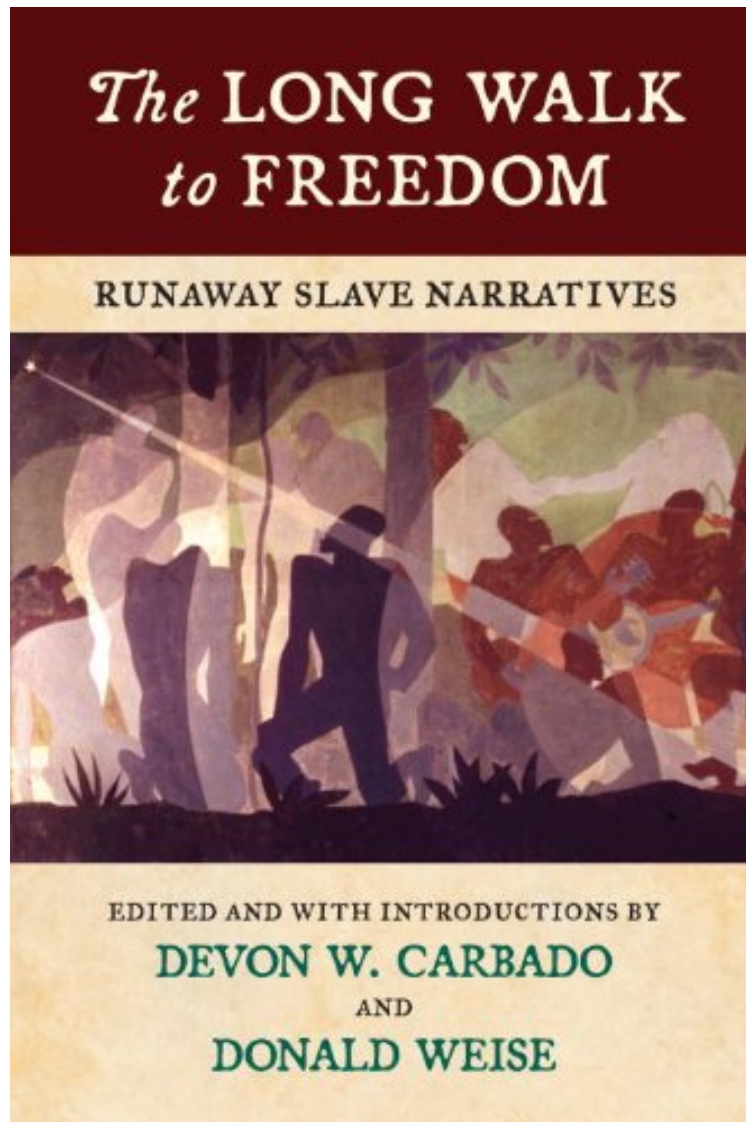


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The Long Walk to Freedom: Runaway Slave Narratives

Devon W. Carbado

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Devon W. Carbado : The Long Walk to Freedom: Runaway Slave Narratives before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Long Walk to Freedom: Runaway Slave Narratives:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. From the horses mouthBy PlatoFromTexasExcellent collection of portions of the narratives of black men and women who spent much of their lives asslaves in the south. Much of it is available for free on the internet but I may never have bothered reading them unless the authors had concisely included them as a selected collection in this book. The yearning and cry of the soul for freedom is so unmistakable in these

writings. The suffering that they experienced is deeply saddening. I am especially amazed at the eloquence of the writers and how they are able to put to pen their thoughts with such power. Their life story tugs at the heart and makes one sensitive to seeing people around us suffer injustice. It is terrible to consider that people of that time could rest easy knowing that they authored the destructive enslavement and tribulations of individuals for the sake of their wallet, ego, and for the comforts of their own family. Makes me wonder how often people living in the big cities of the south today take a moment to consider what sort of nightmare that slavery has imprinted on the history of their city and region. One chapter though that did bring me back to the reality of human nature is that of "The Confessions of Nat Turner". The monster that is within, if given free reign, can abuse us and others regardless of how low or high our estate may be. We do best to keep this monster under check. This book has motivated me to re-read more of American history from the perspective of personal human events rather than just an impersonal political or economic horizon. The brief foreward and afterward were also insightful in painting a picture of what was happening among the different colonial states with regards to slavery. Also, the book is written at a level of English that I think should make it accessible and encouraged reading for high schoolers and college students. All Americans need to be knowledgeable not only in the bright spots of America's past but also in its dark institutions such as slavery. Obtaining such a balanced outlook will give the reader greater sensitivity and respect for our fellow humans with whom we share this journey of life.

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Confronts the ways in which history is revised to downplay the horrors of slavery.

By Mary Lavers (in Canada) "I had as well be killed running as die standing." -Frederick Douglass

The slave narratives contained in this collection cause me to marvel that, at the end of slavery, no one was held accountable for crimes against humanity, that the champions of slavery are not now reviled with the same collective embarrassment directed at the Nazis of WWII. When a member of the Royal family dressed as a Nazi for Halloween it caused an international stir (and rightly so, that was disgraceful), yet people routinely dress in Confederate uniforms as part of Civil War and antebellum re-enactments, proclaiming the glory of the South, and we are asked to collectively pretend that they are not also glorifying the days of the atrocities of slavery. Where is the collective sense of deep shame?

The Long Walk to Freedom confronts the ways in which history is revised to downplay the horrors of slavery. It's one thing to claim that one generation cannot be held accountable for the sins of a previous generation (fair enough), but it is quite another to routinely hear the glorification of that generation, to speak of the founding fathers as practically infallible, to long for the days of the "Old South" without acknowledging that the society and culture of slavery-era North America was deeply broken. It allowed for the torture and enslavement of an entire group of people whose stories simply cannot be "wished away" or excised from our history.

The first hand accounts of runaway slaves in this volume are particularly gripping and vivid, as they refuse to allow us the comfort of imagining that slavery was "not that bad," or that most slaves were happy to serve their amiable masters like loyal members of the family. These stories are not the fiction of Mamie from *Gone With the Wind*. They are the reality of Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, and many others who endured the inhumanity of slavery and never stopped longing for freedom.

For more reviews please visit my blog, *Cozy Little Book Journal*.

Disclaimer: I received a digital galley of this book free from Edelweiss (Above the Tree Line). I was asked to write an honest review, though not necessarily a favourable one. The opinions expressed are strictly my own.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Sobering

By Alfred Itchcock

These are the kind of books that should be required reading to ensure things like this never happen again. Gives a good variety of different first-hand accounts from slaves. The slave-owners were not the only ones responsible for this reprehensible reality. Everyone in the South had a hand in making sure the slaves stayed in the possession of their masters.

In this groundbreaking compilation of first-person accounts of the runaway slave phenomenon, editors Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise have recovered twelve narratives spanning eight decades—more than half of which have been long out of print. Told in the voices of the runaway slaves themselves, these narratives reveal the extraordinary and often innovative ways that these men and women sought freedom and demanded citizenship. Also included is an essay by UCLA history professor Brenda Stevenson that contextualizes these narratives, providing a brief yet comprehensive history of slavery, as well as a look into the daily life of a slave. Divided into four categories—running away for family, running inspired by religion, running by any means necessary, and running to be free—these stories are a testament to the indelible spirit of these remarkable survivors. The Long Walk to Freedom presents excerpts from the narratives of well-known runaway slaves, like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, as well as from the narratives of lesser-known and virtually unknown people. Several of these excerpts have not been published for more than a hundred years. But they all portray the courageous and sometimes shocking ways that these men and women sought their freedom and asserted power, often challenging many of the common assumptions about slaves' lack of agency. Among the remarkable and inspiring stories is the tense but triumphant tale of Henry Box Brown, who, with a white abolitionist's help, shipped himself in a box—over a twenty-seven-hour train ride, part of which he spent standing on his head—to freedom in Philadelphia. And there's the story of William and Ellen Craft, who fled across thousands of miles, with Ellen, who was light-skinned, disguised as a white male slave-owner so she and her husband could achieve their dream of raising their children as free people. Gripping, inspiring, and captivating, *The Long Walk*

to Freedom is a remarkable collection that celebrates those who risked their lives in pursuit of basic human rights.

"This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the historical reality of the slave experiences. Carbado and Weise have diligently selected narratives that will challenge readers' presumptions and cut against the mythology that slaves were passive, that mostly men (and not women) ran away, that slaves typically ran North (not South), and that gender and racial passing were rare occurrences. A landmark achievement, *The Long Walk to Freedom* allows fugitive slaves to speak for themselves—on their own terms and in their own voices."—Dr. Mary Frances Berry, Geraldine R. Segal Professor of American Social Thought and professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania
"The editors step aside and let these remarkable men and women tell their own stories."—Kirkus
"Readers will learn more about slavery in the American South from these autobiographical accounts than they could from any textbook."—Wall Street Journal
About the Author
Devon W. Carbado is professor of law and African American studies at the University of California at Los Angeles and the coeditor of several books, including *Race Law Stories* (with Rachel Moran) and *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (with Donald Weise). Donald Weise is an independent scholar in African American history and coeditor of *The Huey Newton Reader* (with David Hilliard). He lives in New York.
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From the Introduction: "I Will Run Away" "God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand it. Get caught, or get clear, I'll try it. I had as well die with ague as the fever. I have only one life to lose. I had as well be killed running as die standing." —Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
A decade ago, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger published *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*. The book was part of a much broader literature that challenged the idea that slaves were generally pliant and resigned to their roles as human chattel. While W. E. B. Du Bois, in *Black Reconstruction in America*, had argued vociferously against the idea of slaves as docile and pliant, Franklin and Schweninger's book, among other works, helped to solidify the idea. Far from passively acquiescing to what was euphemistically referred to as "the South's peculiar institution," slaves rebelled against their masters and ran away whenever they could. That they risked life and limb to do so was itself an indication of the brutality of slavery. *Runaway Slaves* was successful—both in commercial terms and with respect to the critical acclaim the book received. But despite its success, since then only a few texts focusing solely on runaway slaves have been published. To be sure, dozens of books of slave narratives are already on the market; the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, for example, can be found readily. Indeed, slave narratives remain one of the most enduring genres of African American literature. *The Long Walk to Freedom* contains the first-ever collection of fugitive slave narratives, presented as a unique genre, not simply as slave narratives more generally. The twelve narratives collectively span approximately seventy-six years. Excerpts from the best-known booklength narratives—including those by Douglass, Nat Turner, Harriet Jacobs, William and Ellen Craft—stand alongside narratives that haven't been published in more than a hundred years. Although most slave narratives were written or recorded after Abolition, the most widely read—even today—are antebellum fugitive accounts. Unlike the narratives of ex-slaves who had purchased their freedom prior to the Civil War or were emancipated afterward, fugitives' stories offer dramatic exploits that overcome staid polemics. Here, one finds patrols of slave catchers and their hounds in relentless pursuit of runaways, wild animals on the attack, intrigue on the Underground Railroad, slaves dangerously masquerading as freed people—sometimes disguised as the opposite sex—in order to pass. The runaway narrative of William Craft, for example, describes how he and his wife, neither of whom was literate, employed public transportation to make their way from Georgia to Pennsylvania. To do so, Ellen Craft disguised herself as a white man traveling with her slave companion. One finds in these narratives romantic elements as well—slaves running hundreds, if not thousands, of miles to be reunited at all costs with a loved one—that help establish emotional connections between the author and reader, much as if one were reading a novel. But these are not works of fiction. Cumulatively, these narratives are a useful window on a specific form of black resistance to slavery. The existence of these narratives makes clear that the limited number of large-scale slave revolts does not mean that slaves acquiesced in or were content with their status as slaves. Far from being passive objects of property, slaves resisted—often in incremental and pragmatic ways. For example, Isaac D. Williams's story conveys the strong, rebellious, and persistent spirit that many slaves possessed in order to run away. In his flight north, Williams was initially pursued by bloodhounds, which he was able to kill. But he was eventually caught and shot, his body riddled with bullets. Nevertheless, Williams survived, managed to escape jail, and fled north again, continuing to defy the dangers of nature and the numerous police and slave owners he encountered along the way. Slaves ran away for various reasons, among them brutal treatment; confrontations with an owner or overseer; the opportunity to escape; the fear of being sold or transferred, particularly away from one's family; and the fundamental desire to be free. Moses Roper's narrative documents the severe floggings he received from several different slave owners, five hundred lashes at the worst. His repeated attempts to escape, at the risk of again being flogged, no doubt were spurred by these acts of violence, which over time quite literally broke slaves down. "My natural elasticity was crushed," wrote Frederick Douglass in his narrative on the impact of being repeatedly beaten. "[M]y intellect languished, the disposition to read departed . . . the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!" According to

most historians, “the dark night of slavery” traces back to the first African people brought to British America in August 1619 and sold to English colonizers in Jamestown, Virginia. Some of the relatively small number of Africans in the colonies during this period likely worked as indentured servants side-by-side with white indentured servants who had fled the economic hardships of Europe. Others worked as slaves. As slaves did, white indentured servants often ran away and were punished harshly upon return. Thus, it was not uncommon to see advertisements in local newspapers for both black and white fugitives. For example, the September 26, 1751, edition of the *Pennsylvania Journal* sought the return of “an Irish Servant Man, Named Christopher Cooney, of Short Stature, pale Complexion, short brown Hair.” But because whiteness carried with it the presumption of freedom and blackness the presumption of slavery, indentured whites had an easier time escaping their servitude than did blacks. In 1775, on the eve of the Revolutionary War, slavery in the thirteen Colonies was more than 150 years old and had become part of the legal and racial caste system. But the revolutionary fervor of the time made the institution of slavery more vulnerable than it had ever been. The ideals of the colonists—freedom from English oppression, and self-determination—were at least somewhat, if not thoroughly, inconsistent with the idea of slavery. Other factors also helped to delegitimize the institution. One was economic: the tobacco market had crashed, and the wheat crops that replaced tobacco did not require the same kind of labor-intensive work, reducing the demand for slave workers. Compounding matters was a general recession, which found many slave owners unable to feed and support their unpaid labor force. Religion also generated abolitionist ideas. The Great Awakening—a movement that reinvigorated Christianity by encouraging an emotional engagement with religion, a sense of personal spiritual commitment, and feelings of guilt for one’s moral transgressions—particularly motivated Baptists and Methodists to save the souls of black folks. Moreover, Lord Dunmore, the dethroned governor of Virginia, to cite one example, “issued a proclamation of freedom to all slaves who would fight for the king.” This invitation also undermined slavery, and many slaves ran away in search of that promised freedom. Finally, the Revolutionary War itself weakened the institution of slavery by creating runaway opportunities through general upheaval (for example, slave masters fled war-torn territories along with their slaves) and because the significant number of white men who left their plantations to join the Patriot Army created an absence that the slaves could and did exploit. More than twenty thousand slaves, many runaways, ended up under the authority of the British military during this time. Even for the blacks who remained in slavery during the Revolutionary War period, change seemed to be on the way. Because the war had further diminished the already dwindling tobacco economy, reducing the demand for slave labor, slaves had greater freedom to pursue more skilled occupations. Indeed, slave owners permitted their more trusted slaves to lease themselves out to other owners. This transaction was risky for both the slave owner and the slave. The owner never knew whether his “property” would be returned “intact,” and the slave never knew the conditions under which he (and it was mostly men who could lease themselves out) could be forced to work in a new setting. Nevertheless, the practice of leasing enabled slaves to visit relatives and friends, and to forge relationships with whites outside of the plantation economy. Leasing also provided a means by which slaves could run away. It is unclear how many slaves exploited that limited opportunity, though, since free blacks could still be captured and re-enslaved, as Robert the Hermit’s runaway narrative attests. Robert Voorhis persuaded “a friend” to pay his master 50 pounds for his freedom. Voorhis rejoiced in the promise of his future when the payment occurred, but then quickly learned that his status as a slave would not be shed so easily. His friend, James Bevens or Bivens, sold him into the Southern market, and Voorhis was taken onto a schooner and chained there. He was subsequently sold at a public auction in South Carolina. Still, other anti-slavery currents flowed from the federal government. The Continental Congress passed a resolution opposing slavery as well as the Northwest Ordinance, which prohibited slavery in what is today Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and parts of Minnesota. There was reason to be at least cautiously optimistic about the dismantling of slavery as the Revolutionary War came to an end. But there were early signs that slavery might have a postwar life. In the heady rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence and a successful resolution to war, the fledgling United States of America embarked