

## Resistance to Slavery Booklist

### Non-Fiction

#### **J 326.8 / MYE**

##### **Amistad: a long road to freedom.**

**Walter Dean Myers. 1997. 100 p. (MJS)**

*School Library Journal* - With characteristic scholarship, clarity, insight, and compassion, Myers presents readers with the facts and the moral and historical significance of the Amistad episode. Archival photographs and artwork, newspaper accounts and correspondence, and interpretive text reveal the dramatic story of the captive Africans who mutinied against their slaver crew and accidentally landed in the United States instead of back in Africa. From their imprisonment in 1839, through two years of court battles ending up in the Supreme Court, this group of Africans, led by their striking spokesman, Sengbe (Cinque), aroused the moral conscience of America. The complicated issues involved are explained within the context of the times when tension in the United States between antislavery and slaveholding forces was escalating. The author tells the human story along with the legal story: the search for an interpreter to deliver Sengbe's testimony; the despair of the Africans who could not comprehend the reason for their imprisonment; the fascination of Americans with these proud, unyielding captives; and the dilemma of major historical personalities who dealt with this controversy. This story is not the movie screenplay. Although the topic is timely, Myers offers readers a well-researched, documented, non-fictionalized account of this far-reaching episode. Frequent black-and-white maps, drawings, and diagrams add to an understanding of this tragic event.

#### **977.00496 / KAT**

##### **Black pioneers: an untold story.**

**William Loren Katz. 1999. 193 p.**

*Kirkus Reviews* - Katz (*Black Women of the Old West, 1995, etc.*) takes fascinating material - the tale of free and escaped African-Americans who helped colonize the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys from the late 18th-century to the middle of the 19th century and gives it a textbook treatment. In this gathering of details and events in the lives of real people who settled the area, he presents a full history of the contributions of determined people who established schools and churches, fought slavery, and won basic civil rights. The many black-and-white period drawings and photographs help establish the people in the narrative and the facts surrounding their lives. The facts alone, one after the other, add up to a cogent picture of the growing wealth and importance of African-Americans in US history, but the dry presentation may doom it to use solely for reference or as a supplement to more inviting works.

#### **J 326 / FRA**

##### **Bound for the north star: true stories of fugitive slaves.**

**Dennis Brindell Fradin. 2000. 206 p. (MJ)**

*Publishers Weekly* - Adhering closely to the facts, often using primary source quotes, Fradin (Ida B. Wells) delivers 12 riveting accounts of daring escapes from slavery. Fradin illustrates a broad spectrum of flights, beginning with two accounts from Mary Prince and from Fed (later known as John Brown) who escaped to Britain, thus conveying to readers that England banned slavery prior to the U.S. and demonstrating how Prince acted as a catalyst in the British antislavery movement. Though some readers may be familiar with the escape attempts of Eliza Harris (the model for Uncle Tom's Cabin) and Margaret Garner (the inspiration for Toni Morrison's *Beloved*), Fradin discusses the two women and their children in the same chapter and highlights their vastly different fates. He also includes 15-year-old Ann Maria Weems, one of the few children to attempt escape alone, and Solomon Northup, a free black man who was kidnapped and sold into slavery. The narrative focuses on the emotional realities and risks, enabling readers to feel the claustrophobia of Henry "Box" Brown's 26-hour escape from Richmond to Philadelphia inside a cramped box and carted by train as a shipment of shoes. The heroism of both black and white Underground Railroad operators shines through, especially in the memorable Oberlin-Wellington rescue in which the abolitionist town defied slave catchers and the Federal Fugitive Slave Law to save a runaway, and two chapters in which Levi ("nicknamed the President of the underground Railroad") and Katie Coffin figure prominently. Archival photographs and illustrations contribute to the historical accuracy of the stories but the design, unfortunately, looks institutional. Luckily, the attractive cover, a photograph of a square from the Underground Railroad Quilt made by Oberlin residents, will lure readers to the volume. Fradin makes liberal reference to the freed African-Americans' own accounts and will likely send many readers on to further volumes.

**Q 306.362 / FRA**

**5000 miles to freedom: Ellen and William Craft's flight from slavery.**

**Judith Bloom Fradin and Dennis Brindell Fradin. 2006. 96p. (MJS)**

*Booklist* - Both exciting escape adventure and gripping history, this account of a husband and wife on the run from slavery traces their journey to freedom in the U.S. and across the world. Ellen is a light-skinned African American, daughter of the master who raped her mother. Disguised as a wealthy Southern gentleman, she escapes with her husband, William, disguised as her slave, and they travel by train and steamboat to freedom in Boston. When their astonishing story makes the fugitive couple famous, slave catchers come after them, so the Crafts leave for England, where they continue their abolitionist work, until their return home after the Civil War. The Fradins, whose many fine histories include *Ida B. Wells* (2000), draw heavily on the Crafts' personal accounts to add depth and drama to the carefully documented narrative. The handsome design includes lots of photos, archival artwork, letters, and newspaper accounts. (See also Dennis Brindell Fradin's book, ***My Family Shall Be Free! The Life of Peter Still.***)

**J 326 / LAN**

**Fleeing to freedom on the underground railroad: the courageous slaves, agents, and conductors.**

**Elaine Landau. 2006. 88 p. (MJ)**

*Booklist* - Whether they require facts about towering abolitionist personages (Harriet Tubman, Levi Coffin, William Lloyd Garrison) or seek fresh inspiration for African American history-themed projects, researchers will make use of this entry in the reliable *People's History* series. Although the black, white, and sepia-tone palette won't instantly draw readers, there is energy enough in the narrative, written by a seasoned nonfiction writer who excels at distilling troubling topics without

oversimplification ("Slavery allowed some plantation owners to acquire great wealth. But the human misery that supported the system was staggering"). Enhancing the general facts are primary-source quotations, dramatic anecdotes about figures both unsung and well known, and archival images that, though at times disappointingly small, still pack a wallop. Readers won't soon forget the picture of a slave's horrifically scarred, knotted back. End matter includes contextualized excerpts from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the Emancipation Proclamation, as well as notes for quotes, suggestions for further reading, and lists of non-book resources.

**J 326 / HAN**

**Freedom roads: searching for the underground railroad.**

**Joyce Hansen and Gary McGowan. 2003. 164 p. (MJ)**

*Booklist - From Florida's Fort Mose, established by fugitive slaves in 1732, to discoveries made within the past few years, the authors examine the origins and development of the Underground Railroad, with a special focus on the varieties and limitations of historical evidence. They clearly establish that evidence about the railroad is scanty or circumstantial, pointing to thermal scans of suspected sites, the discovery of a hidden closet in an old Brooklyn house, spirituals, legal claims, and family anecdotes. Of course, they also consider narratives of escaped slaves and oral history gathered by WPA workers, cautioning against the uncritical use of such evidence. Showing how facts and inferences from all of these sources can be combined to create a general picture, they conclude that the Underground Railroad was probably a multitude of individual initiatives rather than a unified, systematic organization. Maps, sidebars, contemporary documents, and a scene-setting painting at each chapter's head add both information and atmosphere.*

**306.362 / THO**

**Lest we forget: the passage from Africa to slavery and emancipation.**

**Velma Maia Thomas. 1997. 32 p. (EMJS)**

*School Library Journal - No matter how much one has read about the degradation of slavery, the images and the words in this book will have a firm impact on its audience. A three-dimensional interactive book, it contains reproductions of photographs and documents from the Black Holocaust Exhibit that was conceived and developed by the author. By combining highly effective and readable text with photographs, news clipping, drawings, and facsimiles of documents, Thomas shares with her readers the details of virtually every aspect of slave life from the horrors of slave ships to the dangers of trying to escape. Throughout the assortment of pop-out and pull-out replicas, points are raised that will lead to classroom discussion. With its inclusion of documents such as a receipt for a slave woman or the freedom papers of a former slave, those discussions will be given an added dimension.*

**J 323 / BIO / Pin**

**Let it shine: stories of Black women freedom fighters.**

**Andrea Davis Pinkney. 2000. 107 p. (EM)**

*School Library Journal - Engaging text and glorious art are combined in this collection of sketches celebrating the contributions of 10 women who moved forward the cause of civil rights in America. Following a preface that describes her own family roots in the civil rights movement and their influence on her, Pinkney presents her heroines chronologically, from Sojourner Truth to Shirley Chisholm, in verbal portraits that capture the subjects' spirit and personalities amid biographical highlights. Blending straightforward narrative with a lively storytelling style, the author balances the hardships and racial injustice that these women faced against their faith, strength of character, and determination. They include Harriet Tubman,*

Mary McLeod Bethune, and Rosa Parks, as well as Biddy Mason, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Ella Josephine Baker, Dorothy Irene Height, and Fannie Lou Hamer. The book includes many quotes, incidents, and details that lead readers down their personal paths to historical recognition. However, it is Alcorn's vibrant, inspired oil paintings that make this book a standout. A full-page stylized portrait appears opposite the first page of each story; it is filled with symbolic details that are elucidated in the text. A brilliant example is a larger-than-life Harriet Tubman balanced on one knee over a railroad track with arms diagonally outstretched, bridge-like, as tiny travelers make their way up the steep height toward the freedom star. Smaller paintings appear within the stories, carrying the message further. Line, color, and canvas texture give the pictures depth and dynamism, vastly enriching the reading experience.

**J 326 / HAM**

**Many thousand gone: African Americans from slavery to freedom.**

**Virginia Hamilton with illustrations by Leo & Diane Dillon. 1993. 151 p. (EMJ)**

*Publishers Weekly - The inspired pairing of this Newbery winner and these two-time Caldecott recipients has yielded a heartfelt and ultimately heartening chronicle of African Americans from the earliest days of slavery to the 1865 ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery in this country. Made up of succinct yet compelling profiles of celebrated and lesser-known individuals, Hamilton's narrative deftly peels back time's layers and lends an unusual immediacy to this critical chapter in American history. In brief, chronologically arranged entries that even reluctant readers will find easy to absorb, the author first offers accounts of slaves in the pre-Revolutionary War era, many of whom were taken from their homes in Africa and sold to slave traders. Included are descriptions of the appalling shipboard conditions during the "middle passage" from Africa to America, which a shocking 30% of the ill-treated passengers did not survive. Hamilton neatly condenses the tales of such notable freedom crusaders as Gabriel Prosser, the Virginia slave who was hanged for organizing a failed revolt in 1800; Tice Davids, allegedly the first slave to escape by traveling the "underground road" from Kentucky to Ohio; passionate abolitionists Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass; and Harriet Tubman, the former slave who made more than 20 journeys back to the South to lead others to freedom. Hamilton's account takes note of the legislation passed by the federal government over the years--both protective of and damaging to the rights of African Americans. Her final reference, however, is optimistic, if somewhat oversimplified. She writes that after the Civil War, African Americans "were able to find the best in life," including seeking education, finding jobs, owning land and living together as families. She concludes: "They did all of these things almost as soon as the war was over. For 125 years they have continued to do so." Throughout the volume, the Dillons' dramatic, full-page, black-and-white art offers stunning portraits of the individuals profiled, poignantly conveying their anguish, determination and hope.*

**J 326 / RAP**

**No more! stories and songs of slave resistance.**

**Doreen Rappaport with illustrations by Shane W. Evans. 2002. 60 p. (EM)**

*Publishers Weekly - Weaving together first-person accounts by familiar historical figures, traditional black spirituals and vignettes featuring fictional composites of actual people, Rappaport (Freedom River) creates an affecting, multi-textured chronicle of slavery in America. Throughout, the author underscores the courage, resilience and resolve of those held captive. Writing in the present tense, Rappaport*

brings an immediacy to such events as the failed attempt by a group of Africans to revolt against their captors during the Middle Passage; Frederick Douglass's bold defiance of his vicious master, a "nigger-breaker"; and the daring work of John Scobell, a runaway slave who became a Union spy during the Civil War. Interspersed with anecdotes of specific historical incidents are passages affording glimpses of the captives' daily lives, as in descriptions of "hush harbors," spots deep in the woods where they met clandestinely to worship; and the secret schools at which black children learned to read and write. The symbolic and realistic converge effectively in Evans's (*Osceola*) often emotion-charged oil paintings, which capture both the pain and the triumph at the heart of this trenchant compilation.

**973.0496 / MYE**

**Now is your time! The African American struggle for freedom.**

**Walter Dean Myers. 1991. 292 p. (MJS)**

*Publishers Weekly* - Combining the emotional and plot-weaving powers of his novelist talents with a strong author's presence, Myers portrays the quests of individual Africans against the background of broader historical movements. Instead of a comprehensive, strict chronology, Myers offers, through freed slave Ibrahima, investigative reporter Ida Wells, artist Meta Warrick Fuller, inventor George Latimore, artist Dred Scott, the 54th Massachusetts Regiment and others, history at its best--along with deeper understanding of past and contemporary events. Readers will grasp reasons behind incidents ranging from bewildering Supreme Court decisions to the historical need for the black extended family. Intriguing and rousing.

**973.7115 / PAS**

**Passages to freedom: the underground railroad in history and memory.**

**Edited by David W. Blight. 2004.**

*Booklist* - In an effort to provide a more accurate account of what was, by necessity, a clandestine operation, the National Underground Railroad Center in Cincinnati offers a collection of essays, photographs, and illustrations from scholars to document the enterprise in as much detail as possible. Writing with respect for the history and with caution about the mythology, contributors detail the contributions of famous abolitionists, including Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass, and those who are less well known. Scholars examine the origin of the term Underground Railroad, the double meaning of spirituals and other signals used in the secret society, and the operations of at least 150 antislavery societies existing in Ohio (the locus of the movement) at the peak of abolitionist activism. Scholars also examine the passion and courage of abolitionists, and the dilemma of the lasting appeal of the Underground Railroad as an archetypal image of a freedom-seeking, freedom-supporting nation, and, at the same time, the shame of slavery that necessitated such heroic efforts. Among the contributing scholars are Ira Berlin, David Blight, Eddie S. Glaude Jr., and Deborah Gray White. This is a scholarly but thoroughly accessible resource on the Underground Railroad.

**J 326 / MCK**

**Rebels against slavery: American slave revolts.**

**Patricia C. McKissack and Fredrick L. McKissack. (MJ)**

*Booklist* - The McKissacks present a fascinating cast: the men and women who led slave revolts in the Americas. Among those introduced are Toussaint-L'Ouverture, a skillful general who led a revolt in Haiti; Gabriel Prosser, a Virginia slave who was inspired by Toussaint-L'Ouverture; and Cinque, who gave captured Africans a face and a name, as well as more familiar names, such as Harriet Tubman and Nat Turner. There is also information about day-to-day resistance and alliances between

*African and Native Americans, especially those between runaway slaves and the Seminole tribe in Florida. Acknowledgment is given to the white people, especially the Quakers and Methodists, who helped the cause of abolition, but the McKissacks make it clear that numerous blacks, known and unknown to history, took their fate into their own hands by securing their freedom and rescuing others.*

**973.0496 / FRA**

**Runaway slaves: rebels on the plantation.**

**John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger. 1999. 454 p.**

*Kirkus Reviews - In a searing indictment of plantation life in the antebellum South, noted historian Franklin (professor emeritus at Duke Univ.) and Schweninger (History/Univ. of North Carolina, Greensboro) use primary documents such as court records, newspapers, and letters of contemporaries, including slaves themselves, to show that slaves often resisted their condition by means direct and indirect, and frequently to the point of running away. Historians traditionally have depicted antebellum plantation slaves as docile and resigned to their fate. Indeed, early studies of American slavery, such as Ulrich Phillips's *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929), romanticized plantation slavery and even portrayed slaves as generally contented with their lot. While modern scholarship has exposed the harsh aspects of plantation life, the image of the slave as passive victim has survived. The reality was vastly different, say the authors; quiet resistance and open rebellion were common occurrences on the typical Southern plantation, and the average plantation owner had several runaways every year. In a meticulous survey of primary sources, the authors examine multiple aspects of slave resistance, including passive resistance and outright racial violence on the plantation; the motives of runaways, which included, commonly, the desire to be reunited with family members; and typical opportunities for running away, such as the death of the master. Runaways faced tremendous obstacles, the authors point out: they had to travel hundreds of miles to freedom amid a well-organized system of slave catching and retrieval that was so efficient and vicious that it even enslaved free blacks, and runaways faced drastic penalties, including physical punishment and even death, if caught. Most were caught, but thousands continued to seek their freedom, and many made it, whether alone, through the solicitude of free blacks or by the Underground Railroad of clandestine assistance, to the promised land of the free states or Canada. A well-crafted and carefully researched account that opens a new window onto a dark and painful chapter in American history.*

**\* J 306.362 / ESK**

**Slave uprisings and runaways: fighting for freedom and the underground railroad.**

**Anne E. Eskridge with a forward by Henry Louis Gates. 2004. 128 p. (MJ)**

*This is one volume of the *Slavery in America History* series. It is a thorough, engaging account of information that is often overlooked in history textbooks.*

**306.362 / HOR**

**Slavery and the making of America.**

**James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton. 2005. 254 p.**

*Publishers Weekly - In this compact and lucid account of how "[t]he history of slavery is central to the history of the United States," the Hortons (*Hard Road to Freedom, etc.*) demonstrate the vital role that blacks played in landmarks of the American record (colonial settlement, the Revolution, westward expansion, the Civil War, Reconstruction). Africans and African-Americans appear not just as "passive laborers" but as shapers of American culture, from colonial politics to Southern*

cuisine. The authors reveal the myriad experiences of free and enslaved blacks and devote particular attention to the lives of women, both white and black. The oft-told tale is made fresh through up-to-date slavery scholarship, the extensive use of slave narratives and archival photos and, especially, a focus on individual experience. The well-known players (Attucks, Vesey, Tubman, Douglass) appear, but so do the more anonymous ones—the planter's wife and the slave driver share space with the abolitionist and the Confederate soldier, and all are skillfully etched. As the Hortons chronicle lives from freedom in Africa to slavery in America and beyond, they tell an integral American story, a tale not of juxtaposition but of edgy oneness.

### **J 973 / BIO / Truth**

**Sojourner Truth: ain't I a woman?** (EMJ)

**Patricia C. McKissack and Fredrick McKissack. 1992. 186 p. (EM)**

*School Library Journal* - With compassion and historical detail, the McKissacks offer a rich profile of Isabella Van Wagener. Her experiences as both slave and freed slave in New York shaped her midlife commitment to abolition and women's rights. At age 46, she received a call to "walk in the light of His truth." Henceforward, her name was Sojourner Truth and, although she never learned to read or write, the six-foot tall woman became a striking, eloquent spokesperson whose wit, common sense, and candor popularized her with audiences throughout New England and the Midwest. This biography draws personal information from many of the same sources cited in other recent biographies by Lindstrom (Messner, 1980; o.p.), Taylor-Boyd (Gareth Stevens, 1990), and Macht (Chelsea, 1992). But the McKissacks emphasize the condition of African-Americans from 1797-1883, their subject's convictions and magnetism, her contributions to the welfare of her people, and her involvement with other influential abolitionists and activists during the last 40 years of her life. Brief profiles of these acquaintances, from Susan B. Anthony to Harriet Tubman, are appended. Middle grade readers and researchers will enjoy the readability, quotes, and documentary photos, all of which breathe life into the personality and times of Sojourner Truth.

### **973.0496 / LAI**

**Still I rise: a cartoon history of African Americans.**

**Roland Own Laird and Taneshia Nash Laird with illustrations by Elihu "Adolfo" Bey. 1997. 206 p.**

*Library Journal* - In comic-book form, this nonfiction work presents American history from the African American viewpoint and offers nuggets of little-known information on the impact of African Americans on American history. Though it is impossible to offer a comprehensive history in 206 pages, the Lairds, publishers of *The Griots*, a popular Afrocentric comic strip and freelance artist Bey have done a credible job of raising issues of concern to all Americans. While the cartoon format draws readers in, the black-and-white illustrations are often simplistic, and the character dialog doesn't expand the story but serves primarily to reiterate the narrative description. Still, this is a worthwhile acquisition for public libraries with collections of graphic narratives or African American history.

### **966.6201 / REE**

**This our dark country: the American settlers of Liberia.**

**Catherine Reef. 2002. 136 p. (MJS)**

*Booklist* - This photo-essay is a grim, disturbing history of Liberia, first in 1822 when it was an American colony for free blacks and former slaves and later as an independent nation. It's an account of racism and betrayal in the U.S and in West Africa, with no happy ending. Reef draws on letters and speeches to show that the

*whites, including Abraham Lincoln, saw the deportation of blacks as a way to solve racial problems in the U.S. In contrast, few African American leaders supported colonization: Frederick Douglass termed it the hateful, unchristian "twin-sister of slavery," and he called the U.S. the black American's native land. Just as ugly is the Americo-Liberian colonists' prejudice toward the local people: the new settlers regarded the Africans as uncivilized and inferior and denied them civil rights. Reef tells it in clear, plain style, always showing the connections between the two homelands. The handsome, very spacious design, marked by thick, quality paper and stirring black-and-white photos (many of them published here for the first time), makes the hard facts accessible, and many readers, adults as well as teenagers, will want to use the meticulous endnotes to find out more about the politics and the individuals in the portraits. A must for history collections.*



## Fiction

### **\*J / Ayres**

#### **Stealing south: a story of the underground railroad.**

**Katherine Armstrong. 2001. 201 p. (JS)**

*School Library Journal* - Will Spencer, 16, leaves his family's farm in Atwater, OH, to become a peddler. While on one last outing as an Underground Railroad helper, he promises Noah, a runaway slave, that he will go into Kentucky and rescue the boy's brother and sister from their owner. As Will travels south, he encounters kind and generous people who own slaves and finds himself questioning the morality of what he is doing. He knows slavery is wrong, but he feels uncomfortable gaining the trust of people and then stealing from them. His hand is forced when he unwittingly agrees to carry cargo for another man-six young boys and an elderly woman, Miss Delight-to a slave market. In the end, this agreement provides the means to escape, and Will carries them all, including Noah's sister, toward freedom. Ayres has penned an engrossing story filled with realistic characters and situations. Will's desire to leave the farm and travel, coupled with his hotheadedness and his confusion about what action to take, comes across as completely believable. The other characters are equally realistic, from Miss Delight's calmness in telling Will not to be so polite to her in front of others, to Noah's sister's indecision about escaping while still uncertain of her other brother's whereabouts. The author also touches on the fact that some slave owners used their female slaves as breeders of babies to sell. Readers will not be disappointed in this page-turner. (Companion story to **North By Night**)

### **F / Butler**

#### **Kindred.**

**Octavia E. Butler. 1979. 264 p. (S)**

*Review by Donna Nichols-White in 500 Great Books for Women - **Kindred** utilizes the devices of science fiction in order to answer the question "how could anybody be a slave?" A woman from the twentieth century, Dana is repeatedly brought back in time by her slave-owning ancestor Rufus when his life is endangered. She chooses to save him, knowing that because of her actions a free-born black woman will eventually become his slave and her own grandmother. As a twentieth-century African-American woman trying to endure the brutalities of nineteenth-century slavery, Dana answers the question, "See how easily slaves are made?" This book is hailed by many as a landmark work on realities of slavery told by a master storyteller and writer of science fiction.*

### **Y / Carbone**

#### **Stealing freedom.**

**Elisa Carbone. 1998. 258 p. (MJS)**

*Kirkus Reviews* - This compelling tale of a passenger on the Underground Railroad is entirely populated with historical figures; not since Gary Paulsen's *Nightjohn* (1993) has the physical and emotional impact of slavery been made so palpable. Child of a free father and a slave mother, Ann Maria Weems grows up in the warmth of a loving family that is suddenly torn apart when her brothers are sold South and money raised by abolitionists arrives, but only enough to purchase freedom for her mother and sister. Knowing that her harsh master will never willingly give her freedom, Ann Marie resolves to steal it when the opportunity for a staged kidnapping, at the hands of an abolitionist, Jacob Bigelow, arises.

**\*F / Cliff**

**Free enterprise: a novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant.**

**Michelle Cliff. 2004. 213 p. (S)**

*School Library Journal* - The lives of American women in the mid 1800s and early 1900s are vividly portrayed in this challenging montage of stories that centers on two fictional collaborators in John Brown's failed raid. Mary Ellen Pleasant is a cigar-smoking feminist who rises above race and gender, escapes to San Francisco after Brown's defeat at Harper's Ferry, and continues to use her significant influence to work toward integration. Annie Christmas is a privileged Jamaican who flees her plantation home to join the Cause and is captured by a Confederate chain gang. Her spirit is broken, and after the war she retreats to the isolation of a leper colony. The struggles of other women are richly described in this brilliant mosaic of mystery and myth. Eccentric Alice Hooper, who would do nothing more for the Cause than apologize, provides insight into the wealthy society of the day as does the story of unstable Clover Adams, whose statue still weeps in a Washington cemetery. Not every reader will recognize the historical, artistic, and literary allusions, but those who put forth the effort will be rewarded with a deeper understanding of the history of feminism, racism, and civil rights.

**J / pb / Dear America**

**Freedom's wings: Corey's underground railroad diary.**

**Sharon Dennis. 2006. 108 p. (E)**

*From School Library Journal* - Secretly taught by his father to read and write, a nine-year-old slave keeps a diary but knows that he must hide it from his owner. Corey's spelling and grammar improve over time as he learns from others and from observation. In addition to recording life on a Kentucky farm in 1857, the journal traces the boy's flight to freedom by way of the Underground Railroad. The writing is sparse but compelling, pulling readers along every dangerous step of the way. Wyeth infuses the narrative with historic references to people like Frederick Douglass but also acknowledges the nameless men and women who believed in freedom enough to risk their lives to help others. The historical note and photographs strengthen the link between fact and fiction.

**Y / Draper**

**Copper sun.**

**Sharon Draper. 2006. 302 p. (JS)**

*Booklist* - Best known for her contemporary African American characters, Draper's latest novel is a searing work of historical fiction that imagines a 15-year-old African girl's journey through American slavery. The story begins in Amari's Ashanti village, but the idyllic scene explodes in bloodshed when slavers arrive and murder her family. Amari and her beloved, Besa, are shackled, and so begins the account of impossible horrors from the slave fort, the Middle Passage, and auction on American shores, where a rice plantation owner buys Amari for his 16-year-old son's sexual enjoyment. In brutal specifics, Draper shows the inhumanity: Amari is systematically raped on the slave ship and on the plantation and a slave child is used as alligator bait by white teenagers. And she adds to the complex history in alternating chapters that flip between Amari and Polly, an indentured white servant on Amari's plantation. A few plot elements, such as Amari's chance meeting with Besa, are contrived. But Draper builds the explosive tension to the last chapter, and the sheer power of the story, balanced between the overwhelmingly brutal facts of slavery and Amari's ferocious survivor's spirit, will leave readers breathless, even as they consider the story's larger questions about the infinite costs of slavery and how to reconcile

history. A moving author's note discusses the real places and events on which the story is based.

**Y / Hamilton**

**House of dies drear.**

**Virginia Hamilton. 1968. 246 p. (EM)**

*Amazon - A huge, old house with secret tunnels, a cantankerous caretaker, and buried treasure is a dream-come-true for 13-year-old Thomas. The fact that it's reputedly haunted only adds to its appeal! As soon as his family moves in, Thomas senses something strange about the Civil War era house, which used to be a critical stop on the Underground Railroad. With the help of his father, he learns about the abolitionists and escaping slaves who kept the Underground Railroad running. While on his own, he explores the hidden passageways in and under the house, piecing clues together in an increasingly dangerous quest for the truth about the past. Newbery medalist Virginia Hamilton creates a heart-pounding adventure with this absorbing classic for older readers.*

**Y / Krisher**

**Uncommon faith.**

**Trudy Krisher. 2003. 263 p. (JS)**

*In 1837-38, residents of Millbrook, Massachusetts, speak in their different voices of major issues of their day, including women's rights, slavery, religious differences, and one fiery girl named Faith.*

**Y / Lasky**

**True north.**

**Kathryn Lasky. 1996. 267 p. (MJ)**

*School Library Journal - An excellent work of historical fiction, carefully researched and poignantly told. In Virginia's Great Dismal Swamp in 1858, 14-year-old Afrika defies Harriet Tubman and chooses to stay with her dying newborn baby while the others continue to travel north. Afterwards, she resumes her flight from slavery to freedom alone. Meanwhile, Lucy Bradford of Boston finds the hoopla surrounding her older sister's wedding a total bore. She looks for some excitement and finds more than she bargained for when she discovers the young slave hiding in her grandfather's house. Suddenly, Lucy's predictable life is turned upside down as she helps the girl continue north. The two main characters are resilient, appealing, and complex. As the story switches back and forth from one to the other, the inevitability of their encounter and readers' curiosity about the circumstances under which this meeting will occur create a page-turning scenario. The grim realities of slavery are unforgettably revealed through Afrika, and the contrast between her life and Lucy's is starkly and effectively conveyed.*

**Y / Lester**

**Day of tears.**

**Julius Lester. 2005. 177 p. (MJ)**

*Booklist - From his first book, To Be a Slave (1968), Lester has told the history of slavery through personal accounts that relay the dehumanizing message of the perpetrators. Here he draws on historical sources to fictionalize a real event: the biggest slave auction in American history, which took place in Savannah, Georgia, in 1859. He imagines the individual voices of many who were there, adults and kids, including several slaves up for sale, the auctioneer, and the white masters and their families buying and selling the valuable merchandise. The huge cast speaks in the present tense and sometimes from the future looking back. A note fills in the facts.*

*The horror of the auction and its aftermath is unforgettable; individuals whom the reader has come to know are handled like animals, wrenched from family, friends, and love. Then there's a sales list with names, ages, and the amount taken in for each person. Brave runaways speak; so does an abolitionist who helps them. Those who are not heroic are here, too, and the racism is virulent (there's widespread use of the n-word). The personal voices make this a stirring text for group discussion.*

**Y / Moses**

**I, Dred Scott: a fictional narrative based on the life and legal precedent of Dred Scott.**

**Sheila P. Moses with a forward by John A. Madison, Jr., great grandson of Dred Scott. 2005. 96 p. (JS)**

*Booklist - Few people know why the Dred Scott decision is considered one of the causes of the Civil War. This fictionalized slave narrative humanizes the struggle of brave Dred Scott and supplies extensive historical notes that explain the complex legal facts. Scott, born a slave, traveled with his master to several northern states. Sixteen years later he discovered that, according to the Missouri Compromise, his slavery ended when he "stepped foot in free territory." Abolitionist lawyers helped him sue for freedom, and although he triumphed at first, his owners appealed and won, with the Supreme Court eventually deciding that slaves like Scott were not free--a notorious decision that polarized the country. The legal stuff is dense, but it's balanced somewhat by the personal anguish of slave family separation. The small, beautifully designed book, with spacious type, is illustrated with stirring full-page wood engravings, and the commentary and eloquent foreword by Scott's great-grandson are part of the story. An excellent curriculum addition, this book will resonate with adults as well as teens.*

**Y / Mosley**

**47.**

**Walter Mosley. 2005. 232 p. (JS)**

*School Library Journal - The intense, personal slave narrative of 14-year-old Forty-seven becomes allegorical when a mysterious runaway slave shows up at the Corinthian Plantation. Tall John, who believes there are no masters and no slaves, and who carries a yellow carpet bag of magical healing potions and futuristic devices, is both an inspiration and an enigma. He claims he has crossed galaxies and centuries and arrived by Sun Ship on Earth in 1832 to find the one chosen to continue the fight against the evil Calash. The brutal white overseer and the cruel slave owner are disguised Calash who must be defeated. Tall John inserts himself into Forty-seven's daily life and gradually cedes to him immortality and the power, confidence, and courage to confront the Calash to break the chains of slavery. With confidence, determination, and craft, Tall John becomes Forty-seven's alter ego, challenging him and inspiring him to see beyond slavery and fight for freedom. Time travel, shape-shifting, and intergalactic conflict add unusual, provocative elements to this story. And yet, well-drawn characters; lively dialogue filled with gritty, regional dialect; vivid descriptions; and poignant reflections ground it in harsh reality. Older readers will find the blend of realism, escapism, and science fiction intriguing.*

**Y / Myers**

**Glory Field.**

**Walter Dean Myers. 1994. 375 p. (JS)**

*School Library Journal - This moving, effective novel is a sort of Roots for young adults. It chronicles the African American experience through the lives and times of one family, beginning in 1753 with the capture of Muhammed Bilal in Sierra Leone.*

*He survives his journey to America on a slave ship to become the founder of a family, whose history The Glory Field is all about. Readers then meet one of his descendants, Lizzy, a young slave who works on a plantation in 1864 on Curry Island, South Carolina. From slavery, escape, and the Civil War, they follow the fortunes of the family to the year 1900. Then, teenaged Elijah migrates North. Chicago of the 1930s is described through the experiences of Luvenia, 16; Curry of 1964 is seen through the eyes of Tommy, also 16. The last part of the story is set in the present and focuses on Malcolm and Shep, teenaged cousins who have come to Curry from New York City for a family reunion. The decades pass swiftly and are connected by characters that appear in one segment of the saga and reappear later as survivors from the past or as memories. Each part of the story ends on a hopeful note, yet each is unfinished. Readers are left to wonder what happened to various people; sometimes an answer is provided, but more often not. The vast array of characters play out their lives challenged and beset by problems of racism, poverty, and identity. The anchors in their lives are family and their love for one another and their land. A beautifully written, powerful book.*

### **J / Pearsall**

#### **Trouble don't last.**

**Shelley Pearsall. 2002. 237 p. (EMJ)**

*Publishers Weekly- This action-packed, tautly plotted first novel presents a quest for freedom on the Underground Railroad that realistically blends kindness and cruelty. "Trouble follows me like a shadow," begins 11-year-old narrator Samuel. When Harrison, one of the elderly slaves who raised him after the master sold off the boy's mother, decides to run away, Samuel must go with him. "Truth is," Samuel confesses, "even the thought of going straight to Hell didn't scare me as much as the thought of running away." His fears prove justified. Samuel and Harrison's journey thrusts them into uncertainty and peril, and introduces an imaginatively and poignantly rendered cast. This memorable portrayal of their haphazard, serendipitous and dangerous escape to freedom proves gripping from beginning to end, Ages 9-12.*

### **Y / Rinaldi**

#### **Taking liberty: the story of Oney Judge, George Washington's runaway slave.**

**Ann Rinaldi. 2002. 267p. (MJS)**

*School Library Journal - Oney Judge was born into servitude, as a slave owned by George and Martha Washington. In spite of her favored status as personal servant to her mistress, Oney chose to run away and, at 24, successfully fled to Portsmouth, NH. This often-riveting novel opens as an elderly Oney is interviewed in 1842 by a reporter. She begins recalling her story as a three-year-old in 1775, her later talent as a highly skilled seamstress, and her place as a well-liked, well-treated companion to Mrs. Washington. Gradually, she recognizes that freedom is more important than security and comfort. Oney's narrative allows her own development to be revealed gradually, to let readers view the emerging nation and other characters from her almost naive point of view. The result is a subtle portrait of early American politics, of George and Martha Washington (and their children and grandchildren) as people and as public figures, while providing a glimpse of 18th-century life. An author's note provides factual information about Oney. Rinaldi also includes excerpts from George Washington's writings about slavery as well as a bibliography and secondary sources. Though fast-paced and readable, the novel remains sometimes troubling. The dialect used for slaves, particularly field hands, is sometimes difficult and may be viewed as*

*cliché,d, and the secondary characters are not fully developed. The book remains, however, a readable, seemingly informed novel.*

## **J / Woods**

### **My name is Sally Little Song.**

**Brenda Woods. 2006. 183 p. (EM)**

*Booklist - From the age of four, Sally has worked as a slave in the cotton fields on a Georgia plantation. She is 11 in 1801 when her parents hear that she and her older brother are to be sold. The family runs away and finds shelter with the Seminole Indians in Florida. Mama dies on the journey. Along with their grief is the terrifying threat from the vicious slave hunters, but the runaways ultimately find kindness and community. True to the child's voice, the terse, first-person narrative, with a simple lyrical poem at the start of each chapter, brings close the backbreaking labor and cruelty of plantation life, then the flight to freedom, the sadness, and the hope. The action is fast, the journey fraught with danger; the details bring it home. Remembering her own childhood, Sally finds it difficult to believe that the Seminole children are free to play all day ("Ain't them little ones got no work to do?"). Some characters are idealized, but the searing historical fiction shows that there can be no sunny ending; while slavery exists in America, the family will never truly be free.*

## **Picture Books**

### **J 759.13 / LES**

#### **From slave ship to freedom road.**

**Julius Lester with paintings by Rod Brown. 1998. (MJS)**

*Kirkus Reviews - In a stirring picture book for older readers, Lester creates meditations on the journey of Africans to slavery, on the lives of people held as slaves, and on runaways, the Civil War, and the meaning of freedom. Although these musings are both impressionistic and personal, Lester, in an introduction, demands that readers participate: "I found myself addressing you, the reader, begging, pleading, imploring you not to be passive, but to invest soul and imagine yourself into the images." "Imagination Exercise One--For White People" asks readers to imagine being taken away in a spaceship by people whose skin color they've never seen, to a place where they are given new names and can be maimed or killed. "Imagination Exercise Two--For African Americans" asks readers to examine any shame they have about being the descendants of slaves. Each of Lester's deeply personal commentaries is placed opposite one of Brown's paintings, which depict in brilliant colors and sculpturally molded forms the people who were slaves and stops or landmarks on their journey to freedom. This is a teaching book: Those who seek to understand the experience of slavery will find many questions to grapple with, for the text does not flinch from the horrors of slave ships, whippings, or the selling of human flesh. As is true of Tom Feelings's *The Middle Passage* (1995), this book needs the key of collaboration with caring adults to understand its treasures fully. Readers who make that effort will be amply rewarded.*

### **J 973 / BIO / Douglass**

#### **Frederick Douglass: the last day of slavery.**

**William Miller with illustrations by Cedric Lucas. 1995. (E)**

*Publishers Weekly - The success of this penetrating book lies in Miller's ability to convincingly convey the abolitionist Frederick Douglass's thoughts and feelings during his formative years as a plantation slave; and in Miller's focus on the limited and pivotal period of youth. The result is a searing, personal story that is easily absorbed by young readers, introduced to Douglass as a child whose mother is sold*

to a distant master: "Frederick tried to understand, but when he thought of his mother, tears and more tears came into his eyes." This lyrical account underscores Douglass's compassion and concern for his peers: as he watches an overseer whip another slave, he "felt the blows on his back, on the back of all the slaves who stood beside him."

### **E / MORROW**

#### **A good night for freedom.**

**Barbara Olenyik Morrow with illustrations by Leonard Jenkins. 2004. (E)**

*Booklist - Inspired by the true account of two runaway slave sisters who were hidden by Underground Railroad leader Levi Coffin in his home in Indiana in the 1830s, this dramatic picture book relates the story from the viewpoint of a white child, Hallie, who helps sisters Susan and Margaret escape. Although Hallie's Pa doesn't like slavery, it's law, and he is not meddling. But Hallie does meddle. When the slave catchers come, she points them the wrong way. Jenkins' mixed-media illustrations are packed with action, showing the small child standing up to the brutal men on horseback. Just as moving are the close-up pictures of Hallie talking with the runaways, who are nearly Hallie's own age, as they hide in the Coffins' cellar. The climax is the sisters' revelation of how slavery has torn them from their mother. Use this with Holocaust stories about the roles of the rescuer and bystander in evil times. A brief historical note about the Quakers Levi and Catharine Coffin, who provided a safe haven for about 2,000 slaves escaping to Canada, concludes.*

### **J 973 / BIO / Parker**

#### **Freedom river.**

**Doreen Rappaport with pictures by Bryan Collier. 2000. (EM)**

*Booklist - Based on a true slave escape story, this picture book for older children combines an exciting, heartrending narrative with dramatic collage and watercolor pictures. John Parker was an ex-slave who became a successful businessman and an active conductor on the Underground Railroad. On one of his journeys, he helped an African American couple escape with their baby from the slave state of Kentucky to the free state of Ohio. The white owner knew the slave parents would never leave their child behind, so he had the baby sleep at the foot of his bed; but Parker stole the baby, tricked the master, and led the family across the river to freedom. Rappaport frames the incident with a biography of Parker, who may have helped as many as 900 African Americans. In a note, illustrator Bryan Collier speaks about his pictures, but his main commentary is about his own religion: he believes that Parker's story is about the power of prayer. His spiritual message will appeal to some readers; others will find it intrusive and simply focus on the inspiring story and stirring narrative pictures.*

### **E / Ringgold**

#### **Aunt Harriet's underground railroad in the sky.**

**Faith Ringgold. 1992.**

Characters from *Tar Beach* once again fly-this time in a fantastical sky train run by Harriet Tubman that traces a route on the Underground Railroad.

### **J973 / BIO / Truth**

**Only passing through: the story of Sojourner Truth. (EM)**

**Anne Rockwell. 2000.**

*Publishers Weekly - Though writing in the third person, Rockwell here gives Sojourner Truth an authentic, resonant voice. Ably tailoring her account to a young audience, the author opens her story as nine-year-old Isabella is being sold at a*

slave auction in Kingston, N.Y., in 1806. The narrative follows the heroine through her transformation into "Sojourner Truth," an itinerant preacher against the evils of slavery. After being denied the freedom that her master had promised her in 1826, the young woman escapes to the home of a nearby couple who abhor slavery; they then buy Isabella from her deceitful master and free her. Rockwell documents some remarkable incidents and demonstrates how far ahead of her time Isabella was: when her son is illegally sold to a plantation owner in another state, Isabella takes the perpetrator to court and wins the boy's freedom. "No one had ever heard of such a thing. Slaves didn't do such things. Women didn't do such things. But Isabella did." The author dramatically builds up to and convincingly recounts the pivotal moment when Isabella changes her name and vows to travel the country as "a voice for all the silent slaves still in bondage." Rockwell's vibrant storytelling, powerful content and moving author's note will likely send readers off to further reading about this extraordinary heroine.

**\*J 305.567 / TUBMAN**

**Minty: a story of young Harriet Tubman.**

**Alan Schroeder with illustrations by Jerry Pinkney. 1996.**

*Publishers Weekly - This fictionalized account of Tubman's childhood on a Maryland plantation provides a cruel snapshot of life as a slave and the horrid circumstances that fueled the future Underground Railroad leader's passion and determination. Pinkney's (John Henry) full-bodied watercolors evoke a strong sense of time and place. Laudably, Pinkney's scenes consistently depict young Minty's point of view, giving the harshness of her reality more resonance for readers. A formal author's note follows the text and both Schroeder and Pinkney have included personal messages about the history of the book project. A firm stepping stone toward discussions of slavery and U.S. history.*

**E / Woodson**

**Show way.**

**Jacqueline Woodson with illustrations by Hudson Talbott. 2005. 40 p.**

*Booklist - A Show Way is a quilt with secret meanings, and the image works as both history and haunting metaphor in this exquisite picture book. Based on Woodson's own history, the unforgettable story tells of African American women across generations, from slavery and the civil rights movement to the present. The cut-out jacket design is impressive, as is Talbott's mixed-media artwork inside, which extends Woodson's clear poetic narrative with beautiful collages that make use of big triangles, squares, and curves to emphasize portraits and landscapes and show connections and courage. The first double-page spread is of anguished separation when Soonie's great-grandmother is sold "without her ma or pa." Growing up on a plantation in South Carolina, Soonie learns from Big Mama about children "growing up and getting themselves free," and also how to sew quilts with signs that show the way to freedom. Time passes: Soonie's granddaughter, Georgiana, has twin girls who march for freedom in the 1960s. The final glorious spread shows Georgiana's granddaughter, Jacqueline Woodson, laughing at home with her own beloved daughter, Toshi Georgiana, whose picture is embedded in a quilt, connecting her with those who came before. A must for the classroom.*

**Recommended Series**

**See the [Black Americans of Achievement series](#) which includes titles on Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, etc. These re-issues have been updated and include contemporary issues related to each person profiled.**



See also **The Graphic Library series** with titles such as **The Brave Escape of Ellen and William Craft** by Donald B. Lemke with illustrations by Phil Miller, Tod Smith, and Charles Barnett III and **John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry** by Jason Glaser with illustrations by Al Milgrom, Bill Anderson, and Charles Barnett III.

See the **African American Library's Journey to Freedom series** with titles such as **Abolitionists: A Force for Change** by Sarah E. De Capua, **Harriet Ross Tubman** by Don Troy, **Nat Turner and the Virginia Slave Revolt** by Rivvy Neshama, & **Frederick Douglass** by John Passaro.

See **The Way People Live series**, especially **Life on the Underground Railroad** by Stuart A. Kallen.

See **The People's History series**, especially **Fleeing to Freedom on the Underground Railroad** by Elaine Landau.

### Recommended Authors

Sharon Draper  
Judith Bloom Fradin & Dennis Brindell Fradin  
John Hope Franklin  
Virginia Hamilton  
Julius Lester  
Patricia C. McKissack and Fredrick McKissack  
Walter Mosley  
Walter Dean Myers

#### **A brief note on the booklist:**

- Almost all recommended books are available at the Urbana Free Library. Those not available at the Urbana Free Library are marked by an asterisk (\*), and can be requested from other libraries in the Lincoln Trail Libraries system.
- I offer some guidelines on age appropriateness for books (both reading level and maturity of the material) – not as the final word, but as a place to start in finding useful resources. The code for age level is E (Elementary), M (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades), J (7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades), and S (High School students).
- Non-fiction is listed first in alphabetical order by title, followed by fiction and then picture books, both in alphabetical order by author's name.