

A STELLAR GUIDE

North Star to Freedom: The Story of the Underground Railroad. Gena K. Gorrell. Illus. Stoddart, 1996. 168 pp. \$24.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-2988-7.



Prefacing the Introduction and each of the eleven chapters of this elegantly-structured text are dramatic epigraphs addressed to “you” — “all those whose names have been forgotten.” “They snatched you from your village and clamped iron chains and shackles on you, and marched you till your feet were raw and bleeding”: so begins the scene-setting passage heading Chapter 2, “The Dreadful Passage.” Calling up the history of enslaved Africans and their break to freedom, these passages in their immediacy also bring to mind the “slavery by another name” abiding in some countries today, to which the Afterward and Rosemary Brown’s Foreward allude. *North Star to Freedom* tells the story of slavery in North America as an inspiring “story of justice overcoming injustice,” and points towards the exposure and eradication of contemporary forms of enslavement.

Though the northwards escape from slavery on “The Railroad that Wasn’t” (Chapter 6) constitutes the heart of the story, there are chapters setting forth what came before and after “The Winds of Change” (Chapter 4) made the abolition of slavery a possibility. From slavery in the ancient world to Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and its aftermath, Gorrell covers a lot of ground in a fresh and lucid account of her subject, illuminated as well by a generous array of pictures, many drawn from archival sources. The shapely historical narrative accommodates a multitude of stories about the individuals and groups figurating its design; famous and nameless, black and white, righteous and reprobate are all gathered in. Of particular interest is Chapter 10, “New Life, New Land,” which treats black settlements in Canada; this material hits home. Handsomely produced, and complete with a Chronology, bibliography and index, *North Star to Freedom* is a comprehensive, enlightening and inspiring guide through a past not yet behind.

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