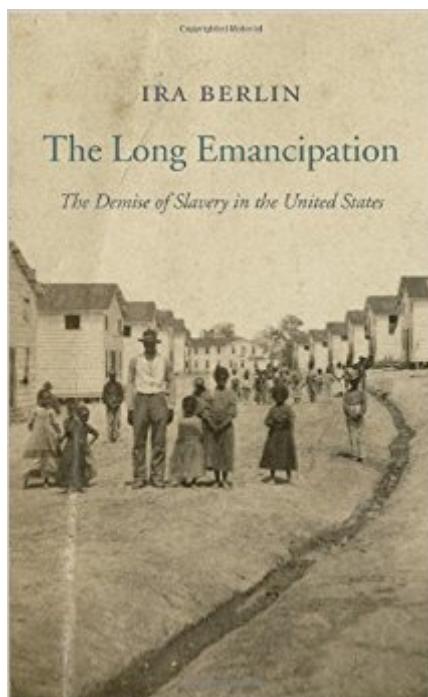


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The Long Emancipation: The Demise Of Slavery In The United States (The Nathan I. Huggins Lectures)



Synopsis

Perhaps no event in American history arouses more impassioned debate than the abolition of slavery. Answers to basic questions about who ended slavery, how, and why remain fiercely contested more than a century and a half after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. In *The Long Emancipation*, Ira Berlin draws upon decades of study to offer a framework for understanding slavery's demise in the United States. Freedom was not achieved in a moment, and emancipation was not an occasion but a near-century-long process—a shifting but persistent struggle that involved thousands of men and women. Berlin teases out the distinct characteristics of emancipation, weaving them into a larger narrative of the meaning of American freedom. The most important factor was the will to survive and the enduring resistance of enslaved black people themselves. In striving for emancipation, they were also the first to raise the crucial question of their future status. If they were no longer slaves, what would they be? African Americans provided the answer, drawing on ideals articulated in the Declaration of Independence and precepts of evangelical Christianity. Freedom was their inalienable right in a post-slavery society, for nothing seemed more natural to people of color than the idea that all Americans should be equal. African Americans were not naive about the price of their idealism. Just as slavery was an institution initiated and maintained by violence, undoing slavery also required violence. Freedom could be achieved only through generations of long and brutal struggle.

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Customer Reviews

Professor Berlin challenges the standard explanations for the long process of emancipation for American slaves. His emphasis is the role blacks played in their own emancipation, such as escaping from captivity and in support of abolitionist groups. The arguments are worth hearing, as they will probably give fresh perspective to many readers. Personally, I thought he overplayed his argument at times, but that is speaking as a general reader of a reasonable amount of history of that time, and not as an academic. Professor Berlin points out early that slavery "came apart in pieces", with the initiative showing early progress in the 1700s, only to weaken with the formation of the federal government with its explicit recognition of slavery and the growth in the slave population in the south in the early 1800s while it dropped in the north. Lincoln as "The Great Emancipator" was almost a culmination of the long effort, and not the seminal moment it is often portrayed as. The author deals at relative length in this book of 175 small pages with the essential human debate about the demand for slavery in conflict with the principles of equality, and its painful subtext of whether even freed blacks were inferior to whites and doomed to fail as independent humans. Thomas Jefferson takes another hit with his particularly ugly words and inaction. I also appreciated his perspective on the abolitionists in the north, which was largely successful in eliminating slavery legally and/or practically, as in, "As white Northerners increasingly identified their region with the expansion of wage labor and celebrated its economic and moral superiority over forced labor, their engagement with the issue of slavery waned. Perhaps their collective conscience had been soothed by the demise of slavery in the North, freeing them from the taint of slavery. They no longer pressed their representatives to attack slavery; slavery was no longer their problem." Excellent content and writing. After all, the Civil War was not fought to end slavery. It was, however, maybe the most important result. We can all learn something important from these lectures.

This book was easy to read and made slavery easy to understand. I was expecting it to be like academic read but it held my interest and I got through it quickly.

Highly recommend for a deeper understanding of slavery. The freedom struggle that started in 1600s continues today well into the 21st Century

Berlin's beautifully crafted lectures helped me understand the role black men and women played in their own emancipation.

Fascinating insight into the events leading up to emancipation.

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