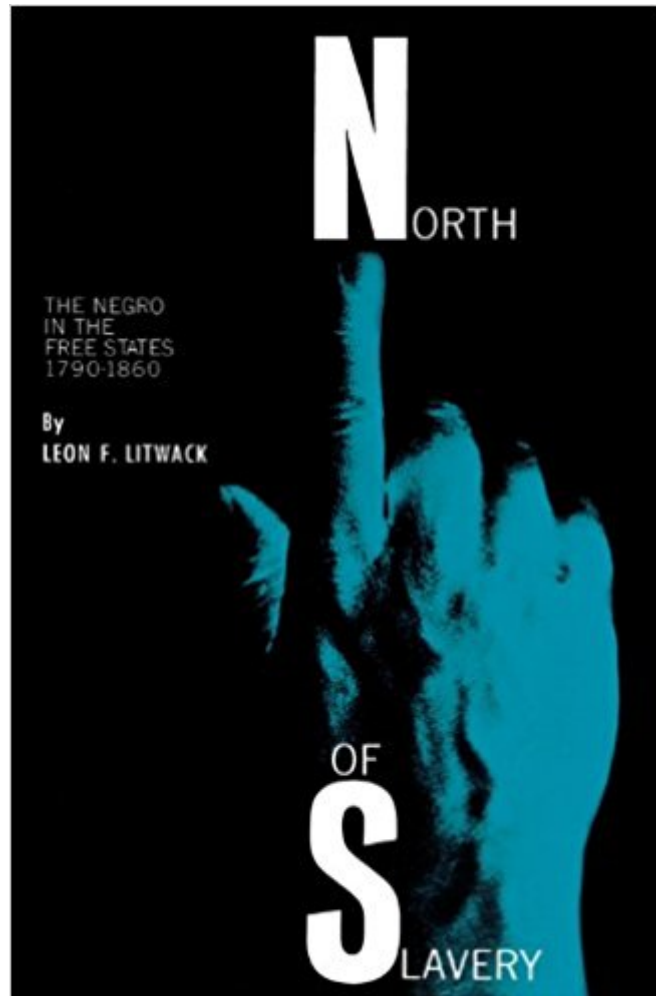




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# North Of Slavery: The Negro In The Free States, 1790-1860



## Synopsis

"... no American can be pleased with the treatment of Negro Americans, North and South, in the years before the Civil War. In his clear, lucid account of the Northern phase of the story Professor Litwack has performed a notable service." — John Hope Franklin, *Journal of Negro Education*

"For a searching examination of the North Star Legend we are indebted to Leon F. Litwack. . . ." — C. Vann Woodward, *The American Scholar*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although it was published in the 1960s, this book appears to be somewhat obscure, at least to this San Francisco Bay Area-born and bred reviewer. I am tempted to jump to the conclusion that it suffered in popularity because it contradicted the received narrative of those times, as well as subsequent times, that horrendous racism was a Southern phenomenon Northerners could congratulate themselves on being above. There are now other books covering this ground, and they are very much needed. What makes this book stand out in my mind are the delineations of self-directed emancipation and upward mobility activity by African-Americans themselves. While white people were arguing among themselves about what to do with America's Black population (Northern ethnic cleansing via emancipation and colonization, Southern paternalism of slavery as a jobs program with some room for commercial exchange with free people of color), African Americans were debating such issues as the value of integration versus segregation, staying in America versus finding somewhere to emigrate other than where white abolitionists hoped to ship them, and the very key issues of self-uplift. This self-agency, of course, undercuts both Northern

and Southern underestimations of Africans' capability of becoming Americans. I appreciated having that history fleshed out by reading this book.

No one could take pleasure from reading the disgraceful statistics of racism in America, but sometimes one must read unpleasant truths. Honest recognition of our national guilt is, I think, a necessary preliminary to becoming the beacon to the world that we proclaim ourselves to be. I read this book decades ago in college, and again this week. It's still a classic, a starting point for more recent studies in African-American history.

Great price and the item is better than described.

bought this book for a class i had, and this book brings some interesting concepts and points of view forth to the reader. interesting read. i would recommend if you are into african-american history.

We were not told because they wanted to protect us. Because they loved us. But, the truth will set us free and knowledge is power!

Published in 1961, time and events have aged Litwak's rhetoric somewhat, but his approach to antebellum racial matters is still historically valid and highly readable. It is a must for Civil War students, although you should balance it with other views. (P. J. Staudenraus's *The African Colonization Movement* puts a slightly different hue to that 19th century movement, inane though such thinking seems today.) I am bothered, however, by Litwak's approach because I am always bothered by activists who allow their personal views to creep into their work. (I also know how tough it can be to prevent it from happening.) UC Berkley trained and still teaching there today, Litwak could hardly epitomize even a moderate approach, much less conservatism. Interviews and stories about him show that even today his classes retain a '60s radical flavor (although this book predates all that.) Nonetheless, he is a good historian who has his facts straight if not always balanced. He does attempt on occasion to be fair and balanced, as when he points out that Frederick Douglass was as prejudiced toward Irish and Catholics (the former inevitably implying the latter) as whites were to him. A book of this nature tends to ring a negative tone by its nature. It always risks unfairly criticizing white men for holding attitudes of a bygone era. His book-closing, one-sided critique of Abraham Lincoln, while not offering one untrue statement, can be and often has been debated.

Whatever you may think, read this book.

This book is a remarkably readable and documented narrative on slavery in the North. As one learns US history in school as a child, one is led to believe in the evil of the south and the abolitionist good of the north. This book will shed much needed light on the role that slavery played in the north. It will demystify preconceived ideas of the past, and provide valuable insight on the enduring character of the northern states of the present. We had borrowed and read this book before, and it was so good we had to get it again.

North of Slavery marked the first comprehensive scholarly effort to explore the meaning of race in the northern states before the Civil War. In many ways, it remains -- almost forty years after its publication -- the single best starting point for examining the lives of Northern free blacks. It focuses on a region traditionally neglected by other studies of race relations, a problem being rectified in the scholarship only now. Challenging the myth of the North as a bastion of racial liberalism, Litwack portrays a North beset by segregation, racial pogrom, legal stricture, and -- above all -- a system of informal proscription which rendered black people there anything but "free." Written during the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement, the book had a chilling and prophetic understanding of the struggles which would confront the CRM as it moved out of the South and into the nation. North of Slavery was, and still is, a stunning antidote to the attitudes of those who tell themselves "it doesn't happen here." As is his style, Litwack peppers his history liberally with compelling first-hand accounts; the writing is exceptional: clean, hard-hitting, dark, compelling, and courageous.

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