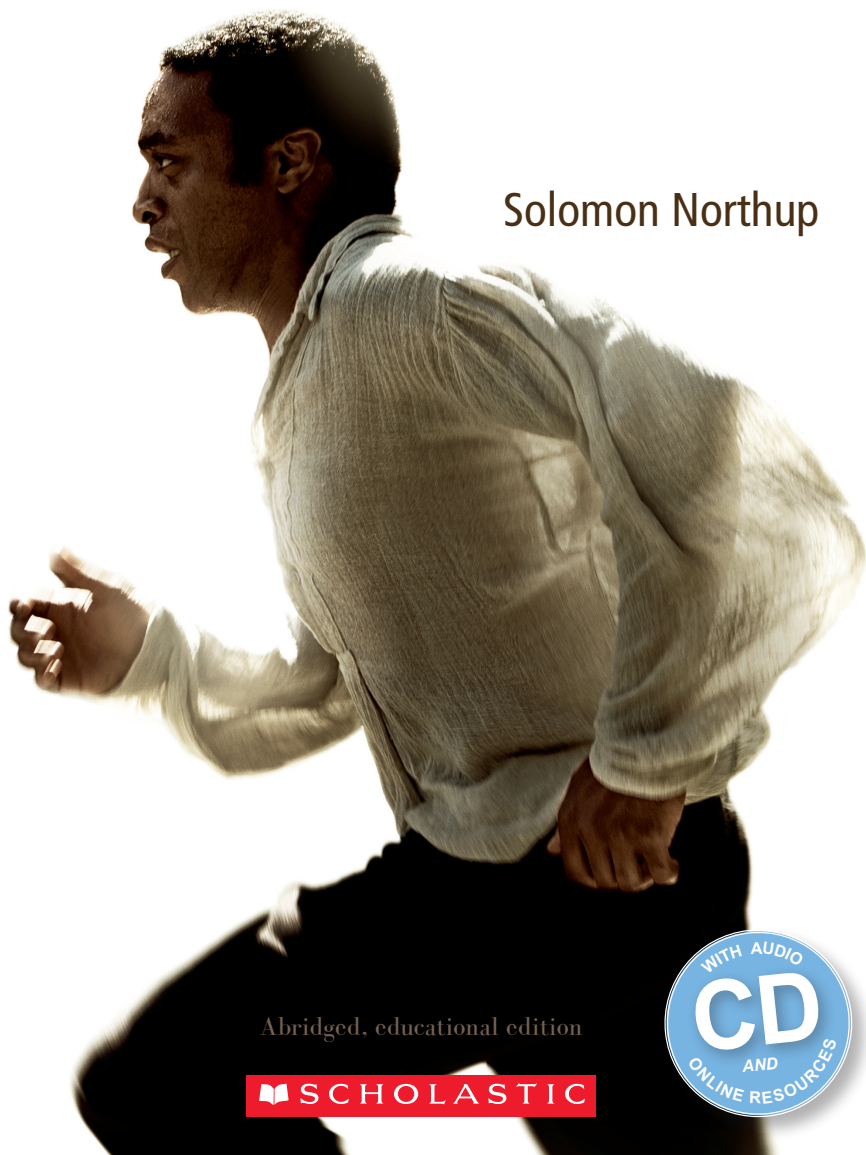


NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

12 YEARS A SLAVE

Solomon Northup



Abridged, educational edition

 **SCHOLASTIC**



Contents	Page
12 Years a Slave	4–57
People & Places	4–5
Slavery in the United States	6–7
Chapter 1 Home	8
Chapter 2 Two strangers	11
Chapter 3 The slave pen	14
Chapter 4 To the South	17
Chapter 5 For sale	21
Chapter 6 Red River	24
Chapter 7 The fight	27
Chapter 8 On the run	30
Chapter 9 No escape	33
Chapter 10 In the cotton fields	35
Chapter 11 A new escape plan	40
Chapter 12 The letter	43
Chapter 13 A piece of soap	45
Chapter 14 Light in the dark	49
Chapter 15 ‘Who is Solomon Northup?’	52
Chapter 16 Two white men	54
Epilogue	57
Fact File: The end of slavery	58–59
Self-Study Activities	60–63
New Words	64



SOLOMON NORTHUP

is a free man who becomes a slave. He tells this story.



ANNE NORTHUP

is Solomon's wife.

MR HENRY NORTHUP

is a friend of Solomon and his family.

BASS

is a Canadian who builds houses in Louisiana.



EDWIN EPPS

is a plantation owner in Louisiana.



JOHN M. TIBBATS

does building work for plantation owners.

JAMES H. BURCH

buys and sells slaves in Washington, DC.



MERRILL BROWN and ABRAM HAMILTON

meet Solomon in Saratoga and tell him they work in a circus.



WILLIAM FORD

is a plantation owner in Louisiana.



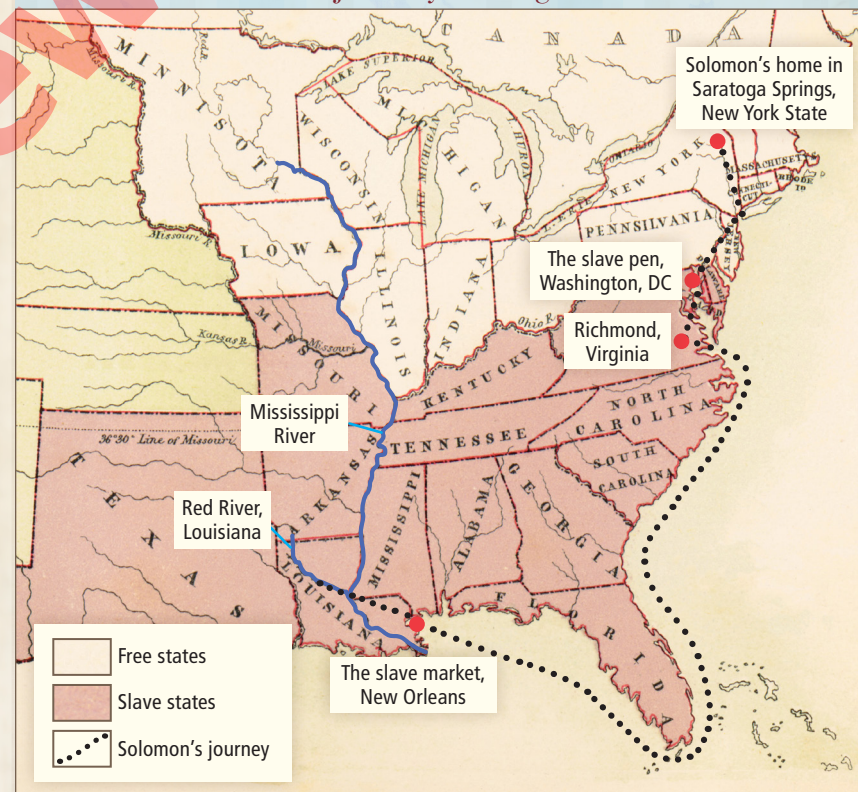
PATSEY

is a slave on the Epps plantation.

ELIZA

is a slave with two children, Randall and Emily.

PLACES Solomon's journey through the United States



Slavery in the United States

● 1619

Ten black slaves arrive to work on a cotton plantation in Virginia, on the south coast of North America. They are the first black slaves in North America.

● 1619-1808

Of the 12.5 million slaves taken to the Americas from Africa, 388,000 are sold to white people in the United States. Most of the rest go to Brazil and the Caribbean.



● 1791

People need cotton to make clothes and many other things. A new machine for making cotton is designed. It can make cotton more quickly. Cotton becomes very valuable and plantation owners suddenly need many more cheap workers. There is a big market for slaves.



1600

1700

1800

1900

The language of the plantation

Many slaves worked on cotton and sugar **plantations** in the South. Each plantation had an owner, called the **planter**. The planter bought his slaves from a slave **dealer** at a slave market. He usually employed an **overseer** to watch the slaves at work.

The overseer rode a horse through the fields and carried a whip. In each group of slaves there was a **driver**. As well as doing a day's work, the driver had to watch the other slaves, and whip any slave who was too slow.

A slave was not allowed to speak to a white person, except to answer a question. When the slave spoke to a

plantation owner, he or she called them **Master** or **Mistress**. Planters usually addressed a slave as **Boy** or **Girl**.



6

● 1808

A new law says Americans cannot bring slaves from Africa into the United States. However white men can still own black slaves in some states, including Louisiana.

● 1841

Solomon Northup's story begins.

● 1853

Solomon's story ends.

● 1860

A government study shows that there are 4.4 million African Americans in the United States. Only ten per cent of them are free.

● 1861

The American Civil War begins. The South fights against the North. The South wants to keep slavery.

● 1863

Abraham Lincoln, the President of the United States, passes a law that says 'all slaves are free now and in the future'.

● 1865

The North wins the Civil War but President Lincoln is shot dead. The United States passes the 13th Amendment. It says that slavery is against the law everywhere in the United States.

7

12 Years a Slave

CHAPTER 1 Home

I have a story to tell about a slave. It is my own story and I was the slave. This is a true record of the facts.

My name is Solomon Northup and I was born a free man. I lived a free life in a free state in the North of America for more than thirty years.

My father was not born free. He was a slave, and he belonged to a white man named Mr Northup. The Northups were a good family, and when old Mr Northup died, my father became a free man. He took the name Mintus Northup and the Northup family continued to take an interest in him and his children.

My father married and had two sons. I was the second son, born in July 1808. Our family moved around as my father found jobs on different farms. He was a hard worker and everyone said he was an honest man. He earned enough money to send my brother and me to school.

As a teenager, I worked in the fields with my father. In my free time, I read books or played the violin, which I loved. Music has often helped me through dark times in my life.

My father died in 1829. That same year, on Christmas Day, I married Anne Hampton, a girl who lived near us. She could read and write, and was an excellent cook.

I was twenty-one, with no father to guide me and a new wife at my side. I dreamt of owning a house and land, and I decided to work very hard to get it. I worked building

the Champlain Canal, which opened in the spring of 1830. I was well paid, and was able to buy two horses and some equipment. I started a business moving timber from Lake Champlain along the canals and rivers. I employed several men to help me and we built rafts to move the wood. On one trip, I visited Montreal in Canada.

Three years later, Anne and I moved to a farm in a town called Kingsbury. We bought a few animals and planted vegetables. Anne worked in the house and I worked on the land. During the winter, I often played the violin at dances and Anne was sometimes employed as a cook for two or three weeks at a time at Sherrill's Coffee House. Soon we had three wonderful children – Elizabeth, Margaret and Alonzo.



With our land, my music and Anne's cooking, we lived a simple but comfortable life. We thought we could improve our lives, however, and in March 1834 we moved to Saratoga Springs. It was a place that city people visited for their holidays. Anne and I both worked at the United States Hotel in the summer, when visitors came. In the winter, I played the violin and worked on the new railway line to Saratoga.

While we were working at the United States Hotel, I often met slaves who were travelling with their masters from the South. Although their lives were comfortable, they all wanted to be free. But they didn't try to escape, because the punishment for runaways was awful.

At that time, I didn't understand what they were afraid of. Until you have lived as a slave, you can have no idea what a terrible life it is. I had always enjoyed the free air of the North, and my hopes and feelings were no different from those of a white man.

So far my history is ordinary. I was making my way quietly through the world, like any working man. I did not see the clouds that were coming towards me.

CHAPTER 2

Two strangers

One spring day, in 1841, I was looking for work. Anne was twenty miles* away, working as the cook at Sherrill's Coffee House for a few weeks. She had taken our daughter Elizabeth with her. Margaret and Alonzo were staying with their aunt.

I was walking around Saratoga, when two strangers stopped me. They were well-dressed white men, and they



* 1 mile = 1.6 kilometres. Miles are still used instead of kilometres in the United States today.