

Generations of Captivity



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Ira Berlin traces the history of African-American slavery in the United States from its beginnings in the seventeenth century to its fiery demise nearly three hundred years later. Most Americans, black and white, have a singular vision of slavery, one fixed in the mid-nineteenth century when most American slaves grew cotton, resided in the deep South, and subscribed to Christianity. Here, however, Berlin offers a dynamic vision, a major reinterpretation in which slaves and their owners continually renegotiated the terms of captivity. Slavery was thus made and remade by successive generations of Africans and African Americans who lived through settlement and adaptation, plantation life, economic transformations, revolution, forced migration, war, and ultimately, emancipation. Berlin's understanding of the processes that continually transformed the lives of slaves makes "Generations of Captivity" essential reading for anyone interested in the evolution of antebellum America. Connecting the "Charter Generation" to the development of Atlantic society in the seventeenth century, the "Plantation Generation" to the reconstruction of colonial society in the eighteenth century, the "Revolutionary Generation" to the Age of Revolutions, and the "Migration Generation" to American expansionism in the nineteenth century, Berlin integrates the history of slavery into the larger story of American life. He demonstrates how enslaved black people, by adapting to changing circumstances, prepared for the

moment when they could seize liberty and declare themselves the "Freedom Generation." This epic story, told by a master historian, provides a rich understanding of the experience of African-American slaves, an experience that continues to mobilize American thought and passions today.

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