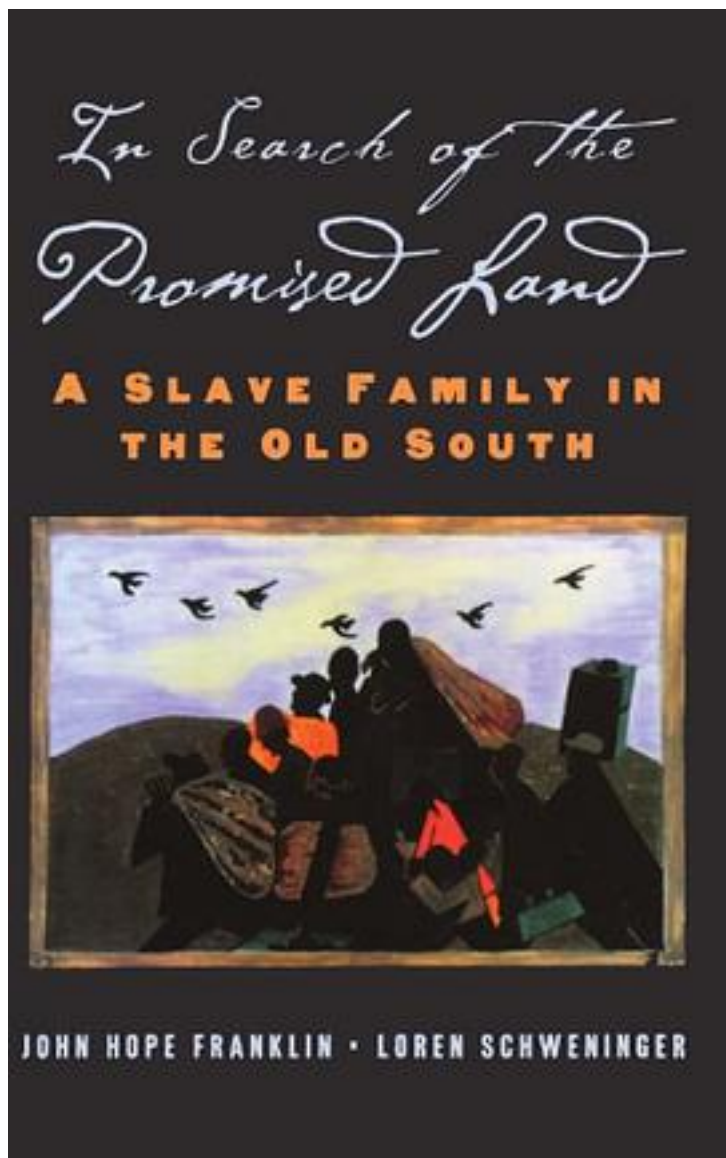


In Search of the Promised Land



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The matriarch of a remarkable African American family, Sally Thomas went from being a slave on a tobacco plantation to a "virtually free" slave who ran her own business and purchased one of her sons out of bondage. *In Search of the Promised Land* offers a vivid portrait of the extended Thomas-Rapier family and of slave life before the Civil War. Based on personal letters and an autobiography by one of Thomas's sons, this remarkable piece of detective work follows the family as they walk the boundary between slave and free, traveling across the country in search of a "promised land" where African Americans would be treated with respect. Their record of these journeys provides a vibrant picture of antebellum America, ranging from New Orleans to St. Louis to the Overland Trail. The authors weave a compelling narrative that illuminates the larger themes of slavery and freedom while examining the family's experiences with the California Gold Rush, Civil War battles, and steamboat adventures. The documents show how the Thomas-Rapier kin bore witness to the full gamut of slavery--from brutal punishment, runaways, and the breakup of slave families to miscegenation, insurrection panics, and slave patrols. The book also exposes the hidden lives of "virtually free" slaves, who maintained close relationships with whites, maneuvered within the system, and gained a large measure of autonomy.

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