

Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery

Anne Farrow , Joel Lang , Jenifer Frank

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Slavery in the South has been documented in volumes ranging from exhaustive histories to bestselling novels. But the North's profit from—indeed, dependence on—slavery has mostly been a shameful and well-kept secret . . . until now.

In this startling and superbly researched new book, three veteran New England journalists de-mythologize the region of America known for tolerance and liberation, revealing a place where thousands of people were held in bondage and slavery was both an economic dynamo and a necessary way of life.

Complicity reveals the cruel truth about the Triangle Trade of molasses, rum, and slaves that lucratively linked the North to the West Indies and Africa; discloses the reality of Northern empires built on profits from rum, cotton, and ivory—and run, in some cases, by abolitionists; and exposes the thousand-acre plantations that existed in towns such as Salem, Connecticut.

Here, too, are eye-opening accounts of the individuals who profited directly from slavery far from the Mason-Dixon line—including Nathaniel Gordon of Maine, the only slave trader sentenced to die in the United States, who even as an inmate of New York's infamous Tombs prison was supported by a shockingly large percentage of the city; Patty Cannon, whose brutal gang kidnapped free blacks from Northern states and sold them into slavery; and the Philadelphia doctor Samuel Morton, eminent in the nineteenth-century field of "race science," which purported to prove the inferiority of African-born black people.

Culled from long-ignored documents and reports—and bolstered by rarely seen photos, publications, maps, and period drawings—Complicity is a fascinating and sobering work that actually does what so many books pretend to do: shed light on America's past.

Expanded from the celebrated Hartford Courant special report that the Connecticut Department of Education sent to every middle school and high school in the state (the original work is required readings in many college classrooms,) this new book is sure to become a must-read reference everywhere.

From the Hardcover edition.

Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery Details

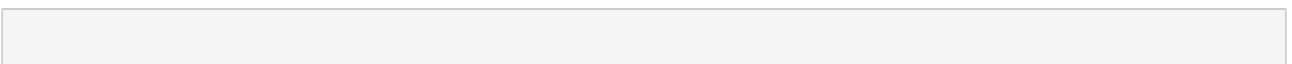
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From Reader Review Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery for online ebook

Annie Oosterwyk says

Three journalists from The Hartford Courant have researched the North's participation in slavery. Mills, rum and molasses, shipping, and the ivory trade all relied on slave labor and yet we have the perception that the Northern states were the good guys. This book clearly presents how interconnected the economies of the United States were and how no one is blameless.

This is well written and very interesting. It is of special interest to me as many of the examples are local.

Daniel O'Dunne says

Every American, no matter where he or she is on the political spectrum, needs to read this book.

Victoria says

It's interesting to go back and read true history. This book did a great job at examining how deep slavery was entrenched into our entire society, and how so many attempted to keep it that way.

Elizabeth says

Unsurprisingly, I never learned about anything included in this book about the North's investments in slavery in my 16 years of education in Massachusetts. How we view and understand history (and thus the present) is based not only on what we're taught, but also what is left out. This is a quick read, and should be required of everyone--New Englanders, who self-righteously paint themselves as always having been on the right side of history, in particular.

Sally Ponce says

Eye opening book on how slavery built America

James Durney says

This is history for people who do not read history and have little intention to change. The authors are reporters who were horrified to find slavery existed in Connecticut. After that startling discovery, they proceeded to establish that slavery was common in America. Next, they made the equally startling discovery that Northerners profited from both the slave trade and dealing with slaveholders. I feel that this was news to

educated people is the most upsetting part of the book.

This book attempts to be several things at once. First, the book wants to expose slavery in Northern America. The first five chapters present an account of this. The author's wishing to make their abhorrence of slavery clear, never missing a chance to "flog a dead horse". That very few are in favor of slavery never seems to occur to them. The second part of the book deals with the international slave trade and New England and New York's role. In the years prior to the Civil War, New York City has very close ties to the South and to an illegal international slave trade. The chapter on kidnapping and selling free Blacks is one of the best in the book. The last part of the book overreaches trying to prove Northern complicity in "race science" and the Ivory Trade. By this time, most readers of history will have serious doubts about the book and recognize they are reading for enjoyment not solid information.

The book will appeal to those who wish to prove their anti-slavery credentials, those who wish to show America to be a raciest society and Lost Cause Tradition adherents. This last group will use the information to say there was "no difference" between North & South on slavery.

The book is not footnoted. Notes, based on direct quotes, may be found in a notes section. These notes are so poor as to be useless. The best they do is direct you to the bibliography, where you find the majority of books are contemporary works. The major value of this book is in being a quick read and inexpensive.

Socraticgadfly says

While I knew most the basics of Northern states' slaveowning and its eventual phaseout, and that, pre-1807, Northern shippers/sailing captains made plenty of money on the slave trade, the post-1807 info, as well as the way this book pulled so many things together, is still very good.

That includes the financial tentacles of the New York Cotton Exchange and the economic impact of cotton itself, with the South producing 2/3 the world's cotton and exporting half of that total. Those two tidbits alone should help readers understand more of why Southern fire-eaters held out hope either that the North wouldn't oppose their secession or that Britain would intervene.

Hypocrisy in interdicting the slave trade is also exposed. The British had taken the lead in this, but Americans charged they were hypocrites because British traders still brought goods to Africa that were important in the slave trade. Meanwhile, the U.S. government had negotiated a deal with the British that only the U.S. Navy could interdict U.S. ships off the coast of Africa. Unfortunately, until just before the Civil War, the U.S. Navy didn't actually do much interdiction.

Beyond that, though the fact of the North having slaves was known to me, the authors still do a good job of illustrating details of slave life, slave purchases, advertisements for slaves and more.

Also, a slice of the North's antebellum intelligencia is found highly complicit in the pseudoscience of racial studies, including the 19th-century fad of phrenology.

And, for those unfamiliar, the authors show just how much of a minority position abolition was in the North.

Finally, this book has several helpful maps, illustrating the triangular trade, where all in Africa slaves came from and more.

Rae says

An incredibly eye-opening account of the Northern economic history of slavery. Much of the blame/fault/shame of the practice is placed upon the South and yet the North profited enormously by its continuation. Very readable history. I was especially intrigued by the chapter on the ivory trade (piano keys and billiard balls).

By the authors:

Whatever readers may make of the evidence of Northern complicity, our own reactions to it varied.

One of us was most struck by the suffering of enslaved Americans. Whether they were treated better in the North than in the South is irrelevant to the institution's basic cruelty, and the irony of having legal slavery in a land defined by 'liberty and justice for all.'

Another was amazed by how much of its wealth America owes to slavery, and now sees the legacy of that wealth everywhere in the present.

The third was surprised over and over by how much of the history we assume we know is shaped by forgotten, or ignored, facts.

Darrick Taylor says

The book is a fine example of what non-academic history can do well. Based mostly on secondary sources, but also on published primary documents (and even a few manuscripts), it documents the ways in which the Northern British colonies and then Northern American states were complicit in the slavery system--mostly through economics. Slavery was legal in Northern colonies/states till the early 19th (in the early 18th century, South Carolina had the highest slave population in the colonies, but New York was second) but also provided the life blood of the early British colonies in the North. New England's economy in the early colonial period depended upon supplying timber and other raw materials to the British sugar plantations in the Caribbean, which ran on slave labor. In the 19th century, when cotton became the South's main crop, it was New York shipping that brought it to the rest of the world; so important was the export of cotton to New York City's economy that its mayor actually suggested that the city secede with the South at the outset of the Civil War, a vignette with which Farrow begins the book.

Much of what the book covers is known to historians, but the investigative efforts of the authors turned up nuggets that were surprising to me. For example, I knew how much the Northern colonies/states depended upon slavery at second hand, but was unaware how much the financial industry was implicated in it. Most Southern planters bought slaves on credit, provided for by Northern banks; when their cotton and/or slaves were transported, it was Northern firms which provided insurance for their property. Nor was I aware of the slave pirates that operated out of New York City in the 19th century, after the slave trade was abolished, who took slaves from Africa to other countries in the Southern hemisphere, such as Brazil and Cuba. Likewise I had never heard of the "other underground railroad," the gangs in the North who would capture free blacks and sell them into slavery. Incredibly, the book even documents two instances in which Southern slave owners actually cooperated with Northern authorities to apprehend some of these gangs.

My interest in the book was spurred by a desire to give my American history courses something counter-

intuitive yet easy to read. The authors' journalistic skill make "Complicity" a quick read, and are therefore very suitable for high school or undergraduate courses. My only real quibble with the book is that its subtitle is misleading. It ought to be about how the "Northeast" was complicit in slavery. Yes, the "North" was indeed complicit in slavery, but not all of these states were equally complicit, and the book demonstrates this. Almost its entire focus is on four colonies/states: New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. The Upper Midwestern states, in particular, are left out, and for good reason: they were mostly populated by small farmers who were the least dependent upon the slave economy of the South. There was a reason that this was the bastion of the "Free Soil" party in antebellum period, and that produced Lincoln. Historians have become more sensitive in recent years to the fact that the South was not monolithic, and stress its regional and class differences. More awareness of these with regards to the North would have been helpful in "Complicity." But on the whole, "Complicity" delivers on the goods.

Chris Demer says

This is an amazing book! Eminently readable, it connects the dots we all knew about but never seem to get connected in history books. The North were the good guys right? While the Southerners bought and sold slaves and benefited greatly financially. Not so fast.

This well researched book, clarifies the complicity of the north, from the ship building in Rhode Island (slave ships) to captains of said ships to the benefits of cheap cotton from the south for their textile mills. Cotton built the north as well as the south.

And then there were slaves in the north-tens of thousands. Although popular belief holds that they were treated mostly well, that is far from the truth. They were bought, sold, overworked, beaten and killed with impunity.

They were shipped to the south, even after slavery was outlawed in 1808. Free blacks all over the north were routinely abducted and taken south where they were sold. (as in "Twelve Years a Slave") There were slave revolts in Manhattan!

Then there were the out-of-sight slaves, the ones who never left Africa. These were the thousands of Africans, on the east coast and towards Central Africa who were captured to carry elephant tusks to the coast for shipping to New England. This was the ivory that decorated every middle and upper class Victorian home on the keys of pianos. The piano makers got rich from the slavery and plunder of Africa, just as the south did.

So we really need to re-think the concept that this country was truly founded on a few hundred years of free labor-in the North as well as the South. It was through slavery that the US was able in so short a time to compete economically with Europe, and ultimately to gain independence.

So I guess we have African Americans to thank for our country's independence and success.

A MUST READ!

Melissa says

I read this book a few years ago, and found myself thinking about it last night, after watching a couple of episodes of a television series on the American Revolution that my husband is very into at the moment. This book contains facts which may be shocking to many (such as the fact the Rhode Island was the state with the largest slave trade) but isn't quite as surprising to those who have studied the history of economics and who know how deeply the slave trade was embedded into the worldwide economy, not just our own nation's economy, before, during, and after our country's founding. I thought this book was an honest, earnest look at how not just one subset of people, states, or historical factors can be, in essence, blamed for participation in slavery. I do remember that the author did get slightly diverted from the primary topic in one or two chapters, which made the book slightly longer than it needed to be -- and I did disagree with her assertion that Darwin's theories helped somehow bring about thought processes that "reduced" or contradicted racism -- otherwise, I would have given this book 5 stars.

Shari says

We have all heard about Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, UNCLE TOM'S CABIN, but how many of us have actually read it? That Ophelia, from the North, went to Louisiana to visit her cousin, Augustine, and harped at him about keeping slaves. Yet Augustine noticed how she could not bring herself to touch Topsy. He challenged her to take Topsy and educate her. She did, plus some other slaves. She took them North on her return and freed and educated them, but then sent them back to Africa. Had any of them been born in Africa? The attitude was, it appeared, that you could free them, educate them, but then you must send them back to the dark continent. They could not remain amongst white populations.

Or Thomas Jefferson, the vaunted writer who wrote that all men were created equal, but who also wrote of the natural inferiority of the black race. We all know his other family existed and that most of his children were bi-racial. What did he really think; what did he really feel? How do we actually balance Jefferson speaking out of both sides of his mouth?

We accept so much through our public school education that doesn't quite measure out to the truth and we do not question it. Yet we think we have the answers -- all the answers that we need. If we learn it in school it has to be the truth and we need not question it further. We are not taught in school to question -- question everything.

This book exposes man's idiocy from a time when much of our belief in the daily things were guided by an unquestioned faith, from other people's interpretations of the Bible and other people's understanding of religion. We looked at supposed scientists who guided our thinking based on imperfect understandings of medicine and science. All guided by 'the word.' If someone arrived at an explanation that hinged on their interpretation of faulty science or imperfectly understood Biblical readings, and that made us feel better about a troubling social problem, we accepted such answers. QUESTION EVERYTHING!

Slavery was okay because the blacks were not quite as human as the whites were. The blacks did not feel pain, which excused heinous beatings and outright murders. And don't be an abolitionist because slavery is all part of God's plan. Wait! There is a God who thinks this is okay?

And then there is the true religion of the young country -- capitalism. All this vengeance and cruelty to raise

a lot of bucks to put us at the top -- above our neighbors, above the rest of the world.

The cruelty that even the North excused in the name of commerce -- how does anyone justify that? This book does not flinch. It exposes. And it should. We have yet to learn that we must question everything.

David Rooker says

Do you think you know a little about the depredations imposed upon African Americans. Read this book, and I assure you that you will learn something new about the cruelty of our American "extractive" culture. You'll come to appreciate just how much of our wealth was created through forced labor. You'll learn about the "scientific" suppositions about race in the 19th century that combined with religious prejudice indicted people of African descent as inherently sub-human - and you'll likely be surprised about how many of these prejudices are still extant. Lastly, this books serves as a reminder about "how much history we assume we know is shaped by forgotten or ignored facts."

Linda Lombri says

This book was an eye opener and shocker because it filled in many blanks in American history for me not taught in schools. Or perhaps you have to be a college major in American History to be privy to the facts of American slavery in the North. The worst part was finding out that our economy and that of Europe was dependent on the cycle of US slavery, southern US cotton fields, northern textile mills, US and EU markets for our textile products and back to US slavery. Although I am happy my family emigrated to the US after the Civil War, I am not proud of the legacy of prejudice we still all encounter. Kudos go to all the researchers and authors of this book.

Manny says

Interesting book, Interesting concept. The book covers the "complicity" of the Northern states in slavery and the slave trade. Its funny to read history and even today, if you are from the North you have extra credit because the South has a black cloud (no pun intended) hanging over their heads. The truth is the North benefited from slavery at every step of the way.

The book covers the financial benefits to the North from the moment of the trade and bringing in the slaves as well as the output from the crop and finally financially in the banking industries of the north.
