Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom Study Guide

Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom by Catherine Clinton

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom examines the life and significance of Harriet Tubman. Tubman was born a slave in the 1820s in Maryland. She escaped slavery in her early 20s and made her way north. Within a year of her escape, she began helping others reach freedom, putting her own life in danger to do so. During the Civil War, she helped establish a spy ring in South Carolina and worked to ease the transition to freedom for thousands of former slaves. After the war, she settled in Auburn, New York and continued to help those who needed it. She established a charity home for needy and neglected African Americans.

Tubman was born Araminta Ross sometime in the early 1820s. Both of her parents were also slaves. She was hired out at very young ages to neighbors of her master and was often treated harshly at these places. As an adolescent, she was hit in the head with a lead weight, when she stepped between an angry master and another slave. Although she recovered, she suffered from visions and debilitating periods throughout her life, which may have been due to this. She married a free black named John Tubman in 1844.

In 1849, Tubman escaped to freedom in the north. Little is known about how she escaped, but once she reached Philadelphia, she took the name Harriet Tubman. In 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law gave sweeping authority to local federal commissions in fugitive slave cases. Slave catchers and others were paid regardless of whether the African American they picked up was a fugitive or not.

Within a year of her escape, Tubman secretly returned to the South to help several family members escape before they were sold farther south. She more than likely used the networks of the Underground Railroad (UGRR). This began her vocation of helping slaves escape to Canada. In the winters, she stayed in Canada with family members, going into New England in the spring and summer to earn money for another clandestine journey into the South in the fall to bring out more slaves. She became known as the Moses of her people. She used various UGRR stations and stationmasters to help her.

When the Civil War began in 1861, Tubman went to Fort Monroe in Virginia. The fort had become a magnet for fleeing slaves and Tubman worked as a nurse, cook, and laundress. In 1962, the Massachusetts governor asked Tubman to travel with others from the state to Port Royal, South Carolina. She worked with the head doctor at the freedman's hospital and she also used her knowledge of local plants and remedies to help both soldiers and former slaves. In 1863, Tubman was asked to organize scouts to infiltrate and map the interior. Her spy ring was responsible for the famed Combahee River Raid in June 1863.

After the war, Tubman returned to Auburn, New York, where she had a house and where her parents now lived. She began to help the poor and neglected African Americans in the area. She also became involved in women's suffrage. She married

Nelson Davies in 1869. Their household remained full of family and others who needed support. Tubman worked toward establishing a charitable institution in Auburn for blacks that were poor and neglected. In 1908, the Harriet Tubman Home opened. She died in 1913.

Preface, Remembering Harriet Tubman

Preface, Remembering Harriet Tubman Summary

Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom examines the life and significance of Harriet Tubman. Tubman was born a slave in the 1820s in Maryland. She escaped in her early 20s and made her way north. With a year of her escape, she began helping others reach freedom, putting her own life in danger to do so. During the Civil War, she helped establish a spy ring in South Carolina and she worked to ease the transitions to freedom for thousands of former slaves. After the war, she settled in Auburn, New York and continued to help those who needed it. She established a charity home for needy and neglected African Americans.

Tubman escaped from slavery in the late 1840s. After this, she returned into Southern states many times to help other slaves escape. When the Civil War ended, she settled in Auburn, New York and maintained a shelter for impoverished blacks. She bought land in the area and eventually created the Harriet Tubman Home.

In the years before and after the Civil War, Tubman was famous for her daring raids in the South to free slaves, her connections with the Underground Railroad, and for her work in the war itself. Yet, her character and motives often remained shrouded behind her fame, making her more of a symbol than a real person. This has been changing in recent years with a greater interest in African American individuals of this period. Scholarship and knowledge of Tubman is still relatively scant as only two biographies have been produced and both were written decades ago.

Preface, Remembering Harriet Tubman Analysis

In the Preface, Clinton gives a brief introduction to Harriet Tubman, her life, and her accomplishments. She also situates Tubman within a larger framework of American history including the Underground Railroad and the Civil War. She argues that Tubman has remained an enigma, largely because much of the information about her has been more folkloric in nature, recreating Tubman as a myth and a symbol as opposed to a real human being who lived and struggled. She suggests that current scholarship and historical analysis has much to add to an understanding of Harriet Tubman.

Chapter 1, Born into Bondage

Chapter 1, Born into Bondage Summary

Harriet Tubman was born Araminta Ross sometime around 1820 in Maryland. It is unclear where she was born or how many siblings she had. Her parents, Harriet Green and Benjamin Ross, were both slaves. They were owned by different individuals but managed to live close to one another. Little is known about her parents. Their status as slaves meant that they had little self-determination.

Slavery in the United States started in the Chesapeake region. By the early seventeenth century, many whites welcomed the cheap labor that African slaves provided. In 1800, slave owners had an average of eleven slaves on their land. The supply of slaves from Africa was cut off soon after this, at the same time that slaveholders were increasing settling in the frontier. This created a situation where slave women became valued not only for their labor but also for their children. There were around 2 million slaves in the United States when the international slave trade was ended. This number grew to over 3.5 million within fifty years.

Slavery presented a number of difficulties for slave families. Parents feared separation from their children and children were forced to watch their parents and siblings sold. Slave children were treated as commodities. Owners didn't do much to ensure the survival of slave children during the early parts of their life.

When Araminta and her mother's owner died, they were eventually left to his son, Edward Brodess. Since Edward was still a child, Anthony Thompson, who owned Ben Ross, looked after the child's holdings. This allowed Harriet Green and Ben Ross, along with their children, to live together as a family. In 1824, Edward Brodess married and moved his family and slaves, including Araminta and her mother, to his late father's land which was about ten miles away.

Chapter 1, Born into Bondage Analysis

Clinton discusses in this chapter Harriet Tubman's early life. As a child born into slavery, Tubman's life was always unstable. Her family could be broken up at any time and slaves were at the whim of their masters. Tubman's history shows how the death of a master or a parent giving a slave to a child was disruptive to slave life. Slaves moved with their masters and slave children were treated as commodities. Clinton's descriptions of slave life illustrate the theme of oppression throughout the work.

Yet, despite the hardships and oppression, slaves did manage a degree of resistance and subversion. Some slavers were able to negotiate terms with their owners, which allowed them to remain close to loved ones and maintain those relationships. Clinton also discusses a time when Harriet's mother was able to keep their owner from selling

off one of Harriet's brothers. In some cases, slaves were able to have an influence in the potential break up of their families.

Chapter 2, Coming of Age in the Land of Egypt

Chapter 2, Coming of Age in the Land of Egypt Summary

Slave children's life and labor was not their own and they quickly learned that their family could be taken from them at any time. They were often sent to work at very young ages, effectively cutting short their childhood. Araminta was hired out to care for a neighbor's infant at the age of the five. She was far too young for the responsibilities given to her and she was often whipped if the baby cried at night. She was soon sent back to her owner. She came back sick and undernourished. As soon as she was healthy, her owner hired her out again. This pattern would continue throughout Araminta's childhood.

Not surprisingly, little information is available about what Araminta's life was like as a child. There are several descriptions which call her "sickly." Later in life, Tubman would recollect that she was both resourceful and clever. These characteristics probably helped her in her life as a slave and helped to protect her from greater harm. As she grew older, she did household work for a while but was soon prized for her work in the fields.

Tubman would later say that she preferred outdoor work to that indoors and as an adolescent, she worked for a time hoisting barrels of flour into wagons and carts. During this time, she was able to work with her brothers. It was also during this time that her Christian faith grew. Another important incident during her adolescence was being struck on the head by a weight. A slave owner had thrown the weight at another slave, but it hit Araminta. She was severely injured by this, as it broke her skull, but she recovered in time.

At one point, Araminta was hired to John Stewart, who owned a lumber business and already employed her brothers and father. Her work for him made her strong and she outmatched the production of many men. She was able to earn some money through her efforts to buy a pair of steers.

Ben Ross was given his freedom in 1840. Anthony Thompson had willed that he should be given his freedom at the age of forty-five. This appears not to have changed his life dramatically. He continued to work for Dr. Thompson and continued to live near his family.

Araminta married John Tubman sometime in the 1840s before she escaped to the North. Little is known about him, how they met, or their marriage. It is known that he was a free black who also worked for John Stewart for a time. This is probably how they met. Marriage between a slave and a free person were not legal. A free man marrying a

slave woman was rare, because any of their children would be considered slave. That John Tubman would marry Araminta despite her status as a slave suggests that he cared deeply for her. She also appears to have loved him deeply and included him in her plans for freedom.

When her owner died in 1849, Araminta was faced with a choice. With this event, she could be sold into the Deep South and/or sold somewhere far removed from her family. Rather than let this happen, she chose to seek freedom in the North.

Chapter 2, Coming of Age in the Land of Egypt Analysis

Clinton further discuses what life was like in slavery for Harriet. As a young child, she was hired out to other individuals in the area and she was often treated badly. Again the theme of oppression looms large, as Clinton describes punishments that Harriet endured and the choices that were made for her by her owner. Slaves were often severely neglected and there are several occasions when Harriet is returned to her owner, because she is too sick to work.

As with the last chapter, Clinton also discusses how slaves resisted the inhumanity and harshness of slavery in various ways. Despite not being able to legally marry, slaves tried to create lives that had some appearance of normality and choice. They married, cared for children, and tried to maintain these bonds. Harriet married a free black, knowing that the marriage would not be legally recognized and that she could be sold at any time and be taken away.

Chapter 3, Crossing Over to Freedom

Chapter 3, Crossing Over to Freedom Summary

Often, when fugitives arrived in the North, they would take on new identities and names. Araminta chose to use her mother's name, Harriet, but kept her last name, Tubman. This perhaps shows her devotion to her husband.

Fugitives were most often men, yet Harriet was a girl in her twenties. In her later years, she would share stories about her escape with Sarah Bradford, a reformer who wrote an authorized biography of Tubman in 1869. Bradford's account suggests that Tubman wanted to run away for several years before she actually did. The reasons for delaying were her limited resources and lack of a guide to help her out. She also didn't want to leave her husband. In the end, her fears about being sold into the Deep South propelled her forward.

Tubman left the Brodess plantation sometime in September 1849. The *Cambridge Democrat* included a notice in its October 3 issue about a runaway slave called "Minty" which may have been Harriet. She fled Maryland and made her way into Pennsylvania. Several whites helped her early on, and she may have been directed to Arthur Leverton's farmhouse. Regardless, the Society of Friends aided Tubman along the way.

When Harriet escaped in 1849, the informal networks of the Underground Railroad (UGRR) were already established and working to help fugitives. This system had a number of safeguards in place to help protect both fugitives and those who helped them.

Catchphrases, secret rappings, and owl hoots were common. Tubman probably took the most common route of northeast along the Choptank River, across the Delmarva Peninsula, and into Pennsylvania. Little is known about the particular details of her escape, and she left no records about those who helped her.

Fugitives often traveled at night and hid during the day. Harriet probably spent some time walking and some time using other means of transportation. Slave catchers threatened the freedom of fugitives and they were avoided. Some towns in free states were welcoming to slave catchers and fugitives tried to avoid these areas. Tubman, luckily, arrived in Philadelphia unharmed and free.

Northern states were often seen by African Americans as Canaan, a land where they could work, marry, and live their lives as they saw fit. The issue of fugitives was a difficult one for slave owners and political leaders. In 1793, Congress passed the first Fugitive Slave Act, which legislated fines and imprisonment for anyone who helped a fugitive slave. Slaves were required to carry passes with them when they ventured off the plantation. The passes were signed and dated by the owner and were one reason why owners sought to keep their slaves illiterate.

Although slave owners tried to maintain control over their slaves, several slave conspiracies and rebellions did occur in the early 1800s. Once, heavy rains thwarted a planned rebellion in Virginia. The most famous was Nat Turner's rebellion in 1822. Fifty slaves killed almost sixty whites after liberating themselves. They were eventually caught, but the event affected many slave communities in Maryland. Nat Turner took on an almost messianic status for many blacks.

Although some slaves did become fugitives, it was more common for slaves to runaway temporarily before returning to the plantation. This was a part of slaves' resistance to their lives in slavery. There is no evidence that Harriet ever ran away from the plantations she lived on before she fled for the North. The line between fugitive and runaway has often been unclear.

If a slave was recaptured, some masters branded them as a form of punishment or cut the slave's Achilles tendon to hobble the slave. Runaway ads appeared in newspapers and broadsheets in both the South and the North. Even when a slave reached the North, the fear of capture remained strong.

Chapter 3, Crossing Over to Freedom Analysis

A fugitive slave's name change when reaching freedom had several purposes. First, it provided a measure of security, helping to further hide the fugitive from their owners and slave catchers. Yet, their name change also symbolized a rebirth, a break from their former life as a slave. The new name symbolized the new person that the former slave would become in freedom. The fugitive was now a free person, able to make his or her own decisions, have control over their own lives, and free to choose whatever identity he or she wished.

Clinton also discusses what the escape to freedom was like for fugitive slaves, including Harriet Tubman. The idea and goal of freedom propelled slaves to the North and they faced considerable dangers and hardships along the way. The land north of the Mason-Dixon Line symbolized freedom and opportunity for slaves. They called it Canaan, referring back to Biblical stories and references. Freedom meant the end of slavery and bondage, as well as a chance at a better life.

Chapter 4, In a Free State

Chapter 4, In a Free State Summary

Black Philadelphia was an impressive community for newly arrived fugitive slaves. The streets bustled and black businesses crowded streets and alleys. By 1850, more free blacks lived in the region than in all other states. In Philadelphia, 20,000 free blacks resided here by 1847. Only a small proportion of Philadelphia's black population was born there. For those fleeing North, Philadelphia was the first stop on the road to freedom.

Tubman and other fugitives who reached Philadelphia were happy to arrive. One of the oldest abolitionist societies, the Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Slavery, was headquartered here. The city was also a draw for black reformers. Tubman was awed by the freedoms that black Philadelphians enjoyed, including mobility and economic opportunities.

Soon after her arrival, Tubman found work and supported herself. The city was probably large and overwhelming to Tubman. By 1850, the population was over 120,000. However, with her newly found freedom, she could go where she wanted and visit both public gardens and cultural institutions.

Yet, discrimination still occurred in Philadelphia. Blacks responded by creating their own institutions, including churches and charities which helped fugitives. Religion was particularly important as a means of self-improvement and the city had almost twenty black churches by 1850. Slavery was also still present. Slave catchers plagued many free black communities. Some kidnapped free blacks and sold them into slavery. Fears abounded over the threat of kidnapping, particularly for children. Harriet was particularly vulnerable, because she was a fugitive.

Racial issues also happened in the city. Some whites viewed the growing African American community as a threat. In 1838, a building where an anti-slavery convention was being held was burned to the ground. Blacks were often blamed for crime in the city and for other urban problems. By the time Harriet arrived in Philadelphia, most of the African Americans in the city had moved into poor neighborhoods to help protect themselves.

Many Southerners were concerned about the rising number of fugitive slaves. Congress enacted the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, giving local authorities the ability handle fugitive slave cases however they saw fit. Incentives were given to people to help catch fugitives. With the enactment, as many as 3,000 blacks moved into Canada.

Chapter 4, In a Free State Analysis

In this chapter, Clinton discusses what life was like for Tubman in the days after she reached Philadelphia and freedom. For fugitives coming to the North, Philadelphia must have been a totally new experience. In 1847, there were 20,000 blacks living within the city. Fugitives could find large communities of free and escaped slaves. This provided support and encouragement for newly arrived fugitives who came with little or no resources and may not have known anyone in the city.

Yet, life in Philadelphia also had its problems. Racial tensions existed and on occasion exploded. Some whites blamed blacks for problems such as crimes and other social ills. The presence of slave catchers and the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 increased tensions as both fugitives and free blacks had to guard against being captured and sold into slavery.

Chapter 5, The Liberty Lines

Chapter 5, The Liberty Lines Summary

Although the role and scope of the UGRR is unknown and debated, it is an important historically. Few records or information remain about its participants or their activities. Thomas Garrett was one of the famous stationmasters. He lived in Wilmington, Delaware and may have helped Harriet in her escape. He was arrested for helping slaves and fined for his activities. This did not stop him, however, and he continued to provide aid to fugitives. Both whites and blacks were active in the UGRR, although blacks faced greater dangers in doing so. Frederick Douglas helped nearly four hundred fugitives.

It is unknown when the UGRR began. Blacks escaping before the 1840s do not report the existence of the network. Its genesis may have come from increased pressure as southern bounty hunters began pursuing fugitives more aggressively and taking free blacks as well. These actions raised concerns among some organizations and communities. Individuals and groups began trying to help fugitives and these networks grew into the UGRR.

The networks of the UGRR were connected in various, often loose, ways. Yet, each part of the network tried to help fugitives reach freedom. Code words were often used to protect the identities of the stationmasters and others. Not surprisingly, those involved often did not take public stands on slavery in order to keep attention for their real activities. "Agents of the UGRR not only strengthened the antislavery movement, but the radical threat they posed hastened the coming of the Civil War" (pg. 66).

Most of the UGRR agents worked in the North, bringing fugitives from one point to the next. Those who went into the South to help slavers were known as "abductors." Few individuals became known for this activity and before Tubman, they were all white men. Each was caught at some point in their activities, something that Tubman would manage to avoid despite her many trips into the South.

Tubman's fame in this area was unparalleled. She worked in the dangerous era after the Fugitive Slave Law was passed and was the only women that gained such prominence in the UGRR. Her status as a female, fugitive, and black helped her to achieve a great deal of fame and to become a powerful figure in the anti-slavery movement.

UGRR agents used hiding places like attics and barns to hide fugitives in. Some even created hidden rooms and secret tunnels. All Northern states have evidence of UGRR activities. Thousands of individuals participated in the networks and Tubman would become familiar with numerous agents.

While most fugitives escaped alone, Tubman's raids were famous, because she often brought out groups of people. Once free, fugitives often tried to get information back to their families about their safety. Harriet also wanted to send word back to her family, and it appears that within a year, contact had been established.

Chapter 5, The Liberty Lines Analysis

Clinton turns to examine the Underground Railroad, or UGRR, in this chapter. The Underground Railroad helped hundreds, if not thousands, of slaves to freedom in the period before the Civil War. Yet, there is much that remains shrouded in mystery about the actual operations of the network. This is due mainly to the clandestine activities. Those who participated in the secret networks had to guard against being exposed. Stationmasters destroyed records on the slaves that they helped so that the records wouldn't be found, used against them, or create danger for others in the network.

Just as there is a great deal of mystery surrounding the Underground Railroad, there is also mystery surrounding Tubman's escape to freedom. She remained very quiet on the topic, wanting to protect those who helped her. It is likely, however, that Tubman received at least some help from the Underground Railroad. She would certainly make use of the networks later as she helped others to freedom, and it is likely that some of these contacts came from her own escape.

Chapter 6, The Moses of Her People

Chapter 6, The Moses of Her People Summary

On the same plantation that Harriet escaped from lived her niece, Keziah or Kizzy. She had two children. She and her children were slated to be sold in December 1850. Her husband, a free black, managed to get word to Harriet about the situations.

When the news reached Harriet, she began to try to find a way to help her niece. It is unclear why Harriet herself went back to Maryland to help with the rescue and little is known about the actual escape. Yet, this rescue shows Harriet's skill and adaptability. She was able to go into a town she had never been in before (Baltimore), find a safe house, and finally, to help her niece and children to safety in the North. It is possible that people she knew in Philadelphia told her where to go to find help in Baltimore.

After this, Harriet may have started to think about her other family still living in slavery, and she may have wondered if she could help them too. It appears that she decided to do something, because in 1851, she helped rescue one of her brothers and two other men from slavery. Harriet appears to have been working without financial support from anyone in these rescues.

On her next journey into the South, Harriet tried to convince her husband to come to the North with her. In the few short years that she had been gone, he had already taken another wife and refused to go with Harriet. She took this rejection hard and still thought of herself as married to him.

In 1851, Harriet began working as a part of the UGRR. On her next raid into the South, she brought out eleven fugitives, including another brother. She also made her first venture into Canada at this time, viewing it as the new Canaan.

The Anti-slavery movement used Tubman as a symbol. She returned many times to the South to bring out slaves, and her fame grew even though her identity was kept secret. She was thought of as being like Moses and leading her people to freedom. Starting in 1852, she made at least one raid a year, often rescuing ten fugitives at a time. Money still came mainly from her own work as a cook and domestic. She generally worked in the spring and summer in the United States, wintered in Canada, and led rescues in the fall. She may have made other trips to bring out other family members. Sometimes she took trains into the South, believing that she was less visible and less suspicious by doing so.

Slaveholders, slave catchers, and politicians were angered by her actions. They wanted to end her raids into the South. In attempts to capture or stop her, severe penalties were enacted for anyone helping fugitives escape. Yet, Harriet managed to avoid detection. She used disguises and stayed off the plantations. When a group was with her, she required discipline from them, and she planned everything very carefully.

In discussing her success, Tubman often said that it was divine intervention. She seemed to have an uncanny knack for knowing when dangers were present as she led fugitives to the North. Harriet's spirituality, and her physical endurance helped her as she worked on helping others.

Chapter 6, The Moses of Her People Analysis

The theme of freedom looms large in this chapter as Clinton explains how Tubman became the Moses of her people, leading them to safety in Canada. Once Tubman tasted freedom, she wished to help her family out of slavery as well. This indicates much about Tubman's character that she would be willing to put her life and her freedom at risk to help her family and other slaves escape slavery.

Yet, trying to attain freedom was not without its risks for slaves. There were severe penalties for those who helped fugitive slaves. Fugitives who were caught were often punished as well, some severely. Despite the risks, many slaves still sought freedom through escape, believing that it would bring them a better life.

Chapter 7, Canadian Exile

Chapter 7, Canadian Exile Summary

In the early 1850s, Harriet discovered St. Catharines, Ontario, a place that would become her temporary home. Some of her family members also settled here. Canada had about 2.5 million people living on around 240 million acres. Like the United States, it had a tangled history with racism and slavery. Slaves were first brought into Canada in 1628 and as the country wanted to bring in more settlers, they allowed individuals to bring slaves. Later, the laws were changed to eliminate slavery. Slave extradition to the United States was uncommon, making it a safe place for ordinary fugitives.

As the situation in the United States worsened for blacks, many chose to move to Canada. They created many Afro-Canadian communities and some organizations in Canada sought to help fugitives and other blacks who moved into that country. Most blacks in Canada lived in isolated communities along the border. They welcomed fugitives that arrived and tried to help them. Some communities promoted social justice and economic self-development. Generally, blacks who settled in larger communities were better off than those who went to small all-black isolated communities.

How many blacks lived in Canada during the early nineteenth century is not known. Yet, after the Fugitive Slave Law was passed in the United States, the number of blacks in Canada appears to have grown. Probably less than one percent of the population in Canada during the 1850s was black.

When Harriet began coming to St. Catharines, the town less than 300 blacks living there, but this number doubled by 1860. During the time that she spent there each year, Harriet helped out family members and other fugitives who had arrived recently. Canada and St. Catharines offered her a place of safety.

Chapter 7, Canadian Exile Analysis

Canada was often referred to as Canaan for those escaping slavery. Like the Biblical Canaan, it was viewed as a place of potential happiness and opportunity. Due to its policies, Canada was a place where fugitives could live in relative safety. Within the United States, slave catchers could apprehend slaves anywhere and return them to their masters. In Canada, officials were not extraditing fugitives, except in remarkable situations, giving fugitives a measure of safety and security.

Yet, Clinton also suggests that racial tensions existed in Canada as well. In addition, fugitives often lived in small, isolated outposts where they had few resources. While life remained hard in Canada, fugitives viewed it as infinitely better than the lives that they had led in slavery.

Chapter 8, Trouble in Canaan

Chapter 8, Trouble in Canaan Summary

In the years leading to the Civil War, the tensions between slavery and the anti-slavery movement, as well as the North and South, grew. The Kansas-Nebraska Act created political upheaval as Congress and the nation debated its impact on the country.

Harriet continued her raids into the South, helping slaves escape. Members of the Abolition movement helped fund her raids. In 1856, she helped her parents to the North. Although both had attained freedom, the journey was one of Harriet's most dangerous. Her father had been sheltering fugitives on their way north, and he had attracted the attention of those who supported slavery. Harriet knew that if he were caught, there would be little she could do to protect him. She obtained a rig for her parents to travel in with her as they made their way to Wilmington. Once there, she traveled with her parents by train to Canada.

In the late 1850s, Senator William Seward offered to sell Harriet a house of his. The house was located in Auburn, New York, where Seward and his family also lived. The town was friendly towards fugitives and Seward had used his own home as a depot for fugitives. Harriet and her parents moved to Auburn.

After moving into her new house, Harriet returned from the South with a light-skinned black girl. The girl claimed later that she and her family were free blacks and that Harriet had stolen her from them. She also claimed to have a twin brother. Clinton argues that this seems highly out of character for Harriet. Later, it would be alleged that the girl was Harriet's niece, although there are no records to support this. The girl was known as Margaret Tubman and Margaret Stewart. Margaret's daughter, Alice Lucas, was close to Harriet. Alice stated at one time that Harriet knew she was wrong to take Margaret and that Harriet may have seen in Margaret the girl that Harriet had been. Clinton argues that this still doesn't explain why Tubman would kidnap Margaret.

After Harriet adopted Margaret, Margaret went to live with Frances and William Seward. This arrangement was not uncommon as white abolitionists often opened up their homes to children of color.

Family reminiscences about Margaret create even more mystery regarding the situation. In the twentieth century, relatives would tell a Tubman biographer not to believe anything that Alice Lucas had to say as she wasn't a relative. Alice argued that family members didn't like her mother because of her light skin and the pride that she took in it. She also argued that Margaret and Harriet resembled each other strongly. Clinton suggests that this resemblance might signal a closer relationship between the two than aunt and niece. There is no information or evidence about Margaret's story of being part of a free black family and having a twin brother.

Clinton suggests that Margaret may have been Harriet's daughter. Margaret would have been born around the time that Harriet left Maryland. If the child were Harriet's and if she was born in Maryland, the child would be a slave as well. Margaret's light skin suggests that she may have had a white parent and if her father were white, it might explain John Tubman's alienation from Harriet before and after she left. Harriet may have been the victim of rape and there is no evidence that she was involved in a consensual relationship other than that of her marriage. She might have had Margaret and then left her with a free family until she was settled in the North. Family stories suggest that Harriet had a deep need and love for this particular child. Clinton states that there is no evidence for this situation, but the timeline does fit such an explanation.

Chapter 8, Trouble in Canaan Analysis

The mystery surrounding Margaret Tubman remains one of the more intriguing aspects of Harriet Tubman's life. Clinton uses the available material, including interviewing family members, to construct a number of possible explanations for Margaret's presence in Tubman's life and the way that she came into it. While Margaret suggested that she was taken from a free black family in Maryland, this scenario seems highly out of character for Tubman. At the very least, Clinton suggests, Tubman must have believed that Margaret was in some kind of danger living where she was. Clinton also suggests that Margaret may have been Tubman's daughter who had been given to a safer family to raise while Tubman secured a place in the North for herself. While the truth may never be known, the mystery surrounding Margaret remains an important part of Tubman's life.

Chapter 9, Crossroads at Harpers Ferry

Chapter 9, Crossroads at Harpers Ferry Summary

Even before she met him, Harriet had vision of John Brown. The two first met in Canada in the late 1850s. At the time, Brown was advocating a plot to stage an uprising against slavery in the South. Tubman was supportive of his plot. Brown and Tubman were both on a crusade against slavery. Brown had spent his early years in Ohio and his family grew up with his commitment to fostering racial equality.

Brown wanted to overthrow slavery. He went to Kansas after the Kansas-Nebraska act and joined in the border war there. He was one of the instigators in the Osawatomie Creek Massacre, which included the executions of some proslavery individuals. Brown became more convinced that it would take violence to overthrow slavery. In the late 1850s, he came up with the idea of creating an abolitionist army and invading the South. He thought that this would incite slaves to rise up against their owners. Many who heard about this plan didn't believe that it would work.

Brown told Tubman about his plan in 1858. She was supportive as they both hated slavery and disliked those who refused to take some form of direct action against slavery. Brown recruited fifty black men for his army, and he argued that bloodshed was the way to end the institution of slavery. He decided to do a trial run and made a raid in Vernon County, Missouri. A slave owner was killed. Harriet continued to stand behind Brown and promised to promote his cause in order to get more funding.

Harriet thought that July 4 would be an appropriate day for Brown's invasion into the South. His small army was prepared, but no one knew where or when to meet with Brown to begin. Brown finally revealed that his target was Harpers Ferry, a federal arsenal. Frederick Douglass, among others, tried to dissuade him, but Brown continued on with his plan.

On October 16, 1859, Brown and his men cut telegraph lines and took over the arsenal. Tubman's careful planning would have aided Brown's mission, but Brown continued to think that the slaves in the region would join him. After forty-eight hours, only Brown and three men were in the arsenal, holding hostages. The slaves had not joined them as he had hoped. With sixteen of his men dead or wounded, he tried to negotiate his way out of the situation. Troops stormed the arsenal and Brown was led out bleeding and defeated. He was found guilty of treason and hanged in December. Yet, despite the disaster, Brown became a martyr for abolitionists. Tubman saw his death as symbolic and viewed him as a sacrifice. She saw his death in religious terms and thought that his death meant that freedom for slaves was near.

Chapter 9, Crossroads at Harpers Ferry Analysis

Although much of this chapter focuses only indirectly on Tubman, much can be gleaned from it about her beliefs. Like Brown, Tubman believed that slavery had to end, and she seems to agree that violent measures might need to be taken in order to accomplish this goal. In addition, both individuals shared the idea that abolitionists needed to do something about slavery, rather than simply talk about its evils. Although they would choose different avenues in their activism, the idea of actively engaging in resistance was important to both of them. Tubman would demonstrate this throughout her life as she consistently sacrificed herself to help others.

Tubman's religious views and devotion are also tied up with John Brown. She saw his death in Biblical terms, as a sacrifice. Through religious eyes, Tubman would interpret much of what she saw and did through Biblical principals and visions from God. She believed that God was leading her and keeping her from danger. She saw in John Brown's death a sign that the institution of slavery was nearing an end.

Chapter 10, Arise, Brethren

Chapter 10, Arise, Brethren Summary

The North and South moved closer and closer to conflict. Tubman believed that she would see emancipation while she was still alive. She spoke at both abolition and women's suffrage meetings.

With Lincoln as president, slaveholders felt more pressure and they sought to create greater punishments and fines for those guilty of helping fugitives. They believed that Moses had to be stopped. Rewards between $12,000 and $40,000 were offered for Harriet's capture. If she were caught, she would probably be executed for her actions.

South Carolina seceded from the Union in December 1860 and other states were urged to join this action. Tubman made one more raid in the South, rescuing a group of fugitives. When she returned, her family and friends urged her to remain in Canada for her own safety, and she agree to stop her raids.

When the South fired on Fort Sumter, the Civil War began. Lincoln called for volunteers and soldiers marched to war. The President did not intend to free slaves in the beginning. He simply wished to restore the Union. African Americans, however, often believed that slavery would end with the war.

At Fort Monroe, a white general claimed that fugitives were "contraband" and offered them the protection of the Union army. Tubman went to the Fort in May 1861. Her role was unofficial and involved helping with the throngs of fugitives who arrived at the fort. Although the fugitives worked for the Union Army, they were denied wages.

In August 1861, Congress passed the First Confiscation Act, allowing for the seizure of all property, including slaves, in aid of rebellion. Tubman welcomed the flood of refugees to the fort and took on the role of caregiver, cook, nurse and so on.

With the start of the War, it became difficult for the Underground Railroad to operate because of the movement of the Rebel army. Abolitionists were excited at news of the Union army finding plantations abandoned and slaves left behind. The government organized a program to help refugees learn to be self-supporting and ease their transition to freedom.

Tubman was asked to go with other volunteers to South Carolina to help with the war effort there. She agreed to go to Port Royal, another location were slaves were seeking refugee at. Some abolitionists helped her with her finances.

In South Carolina, Union troops held some coastal lands, but they were generally surrounded by the Confederate army. General Hunter of the Union army held strong abolitionist views and believed that blacks should be used as soldiers. In 1862, he declared the slaves in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida free. Lincoln later voided his

policy, but several months later, the Confiscation act freed all slaves whose owners were participating in the rebellion. It also allowed blacks to work as paid laborers in the Union Army.

After arriving in South Carolina, Harriet worked with the medical doctor for the freedman's hospital. Her blackness both set her apart from other volunteers and allowed her contact with contrabands. She used her skills as a root doctor to keep soldiers healthy. She also supervised the creation of a laundry house and helped to protect young women refugees.

Chapter 10, Arise, Brethren Analysis

During the Civil War, Tubman exhibited a great deal of activism and agency once again. She chose, yet again, to place herself in danger in order to help others. She spent a great deal of time and effort caring for "contrabands" at the camps and nursing sick soldiers. Her actions also show her willingness to do what needed to be done. When asked to go into South Carolina, a much more dangerous place for her than in the upper South, she went without hesitation.

The Civil War signaled a potential transformation for the country. If the South won, two countries would exist. If the North won, many believed that the institution of slavery would end. Thousands of slaves fled their homes, looking for protection and help at Union camps or in the North. Tubman continued her activism by remaining in the thick of the resistance to slavery and in aiding the Union Army.

Chapter 11, Bittersweet Victory

Chapter 11, Bittersweet Victory Summary

After the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the commander at Port Royal was urged to create a spy network in the region using local refugees. Tubman had a great deal of experience in planning clandestine journeys, and she was given authority to recruit scouts and map the interior of South Carolina. This operation was under the authority of the secretary of war.

In June 1863, the Combahee River Raid took place. It was an important turn for Tubman since she would be named as someone who helped in the plan. The plan was for three boats of Union troops, including 150 black soldiers, to travel up the Combahee River and surprise slaveholders there. The soldiers burned buildings and took what goods they could find. Over 750 slaves were freed.

Encouraged by this raid, Union troops continued to infiltrate the interior. Black soldiers were happy to be able to prove themselves. Harriet continued to care for new refugees at Port Royal.

Information about spies during the Civil War is mainly anecdotal. Most Union spies were probably men, but others were also used. Some black men served as agents and several white women gained fame for their actions as spies and smugglers. There are also several black women who could be defined as spies. Tubman continued her resistance to slavery. She often showed up when the enemy least expected it and the Union army came to depend on her. Her name, however, was kept from official documents.

There were many casualties as the war went on. The peak time for illnesses was in the summer and Tubman worked consistently during this time. Yet, she also worried about her parents back in New York. When her own health declined, she decided to go home, and she traveled back in 1864. After she recovered, she traveled around to see friends and was introduced to Sojourner Truth. There is little information about this meeting, but the two had very different views of Lincoln and this topic probably surfaced.

Harriet made the decision to return to South Carolina, but she missed her ride back there. She went to Washington, where she got permission for transportation by the military. When she stopped in Philadelphia, however, she was convinced to return to Virginia instead. She returned to the area around Fort Monroe.

With the end of the war, blacks faced an important turning point. Tubman knew that struggles would continue for equal rights and citizenship. She stayed in Virginia for a time, trying to help newly freed slaves.

Tubman returned to Auburn, New York later that summer. During Reconstruction after the War, blacks became scapegoats for many things in both the North and the South. Tubman would continue to try to help those that she could.

Chapter 11, Bittersweet Victory Analysis

Although Tubman is most famous for her role of leading slaves out of the South to safety in Canada, she also participated in the Civil War as a spy. Using the skills and knowledge that she had gathered after years of leading clandestine activities in the South, Tubman was able to put together a ring of spies to help the Union Army. Her status as a black woman often made her almost invisible, allowing her to overhear the private conversations of whites and to travel in areas where others would have been suspect. Other African Americans in her ring were able to give her information about the Confederate Army and slaveholders.

Clinton includes a brief comparison of Tubman and Sojourner Truth. Both women were former slaves, active abolitionists, and involved in women's suffrage movements. Yet, despite their similarities, the two differed in some areas. Clinton suggests, for example, that their different stances on Abraham Lincoln may have kept them from becoming closer allies in the fight against slavery and for women's suffrage. On a small scale, this illustrates the divergent ideas, even within the abolitionist communities, about what should be done.

Chapter 12, Final Battles

Chapter 12, Final Battles Summary

When the war ended, Harriet settled down in Auburn, but she continued to help others. Her household contained not only her own family members, but also others who also needed help. She spoke on the suffrage circuit and attended meetings on the topic. She was held in high esteem.

Harriet continued to ask others to help newly freed blacks. She raised funds for schools and hospitals, concentrating her effort on the Finger Lakes region. She also tried to obtain a pension for her service to the military. William Seward tried to help her with this.

The financial aspects of not only caring for her parents, but also her charities fell heavily on Harriet. She asked abolitionist friends for loans and support. She continued to petition the government for a pension. Some abolitionist friends sponsored an authorized biography of Tubman and gave her the proceeds amounting to around $1,200. Friends gave Congress a detailed account of her service, but it would take years for the documents to work through the bureaucracy.

In the mid 1860s, Private Nelson Charles reappeared in Tubman's life. She had first met him in South Carolina while he was serving in the Union army. Nelson Davis, as he was also known, came to Auburn after the war and moved into Harriet's house to recuperate from tuberculosis. Shortly after, Harriet heard about John Tubman's death, leaving her free to marry.

On March 18, 1869, Tubman married Davis in Auburn. Although there was a large age difference between the two, it seems not to have bothered them. They appeared to have a happy relationship and were married for almost twenty years.

Tubman continued with her charity and money remained tight for the couple. Both Tubman and Davis were active in various organizations. They were together when her father and later her mother died. Davis also helped Tubman rebuild the house after a fired destroyed it in the 1880s. Harriet continued to try to get compensation from the government. When Nelson Davis died in 1888, Harriet was eventually granted a widow's pension of $8 a month.

Harriet wanted to create a home in Auburn to care for needy blacks. She bought land next to her house and received donations from various sources. The federal government also increased her pension to $20 a month. She donated the property she bought to the AME Zion Church. The board of the church named the project the Harriet Tubman Home, and it opened in 1908.

In 1911, Tubman moved from her home to the Harriet Tubman Home next door. In early March 1913, she became ill and told those around her that she was going to die soon. She died on March 10, 1913.

Chapter 12, Final Battles Analysis

Even after slaves gained their freedom through the Emancipation Act, Tubman continued her activism by helping freed people who were needed help of some kind. Although she could have said that she had done enough and retired to enjoy a more leisurely life, she continued to put others before herself. She continued to solicit funds from her abolitionist friends and to put whatever she earned to use by helping others. She pushed to have the charitable home she had dreamed of become a reality, even when financially it must have seemed impossible.

Tubman also became involved in the women's suffrage movement. Although this work would be overshadowed by her abolitionist work, Tubman was also dedicated to this cause. Throughout her life, she fought for equality and justice for all people, particularly those who had been disenfranchised by society.

Epilogue, Harriet Tubman's Legacy

Epilogue, Harriet Tubman's Legacy Summary

Harriet Tubman was buried with military honors in Auburn, New York. For countless blacks, she is not just a mythical figure but also a liberator, who delivered their ancestors to freedom. Her name adorns schools and a museum. "Born into an age of darkness, an age when America was in thrall to slavery, Harriet Tubman freed herself and was reborn. She renamed her liberated self - and hoped to lead others into Canaan as well" (pg. 221).

Epilogue, Harriet Tubman's Legacy Analysis

Clinton ends her examination of Tubman's life by discussing briefly Tubman's legacy. As she discussed in the preface, Tubman has in many ways become more of a symbol or mythic figure than a real person. As a real person who lived, breathed, and put others before herself, Tubman presents an important model for behavior. Yet, this is often lost when she is placed in the mythical role, presenting a figure that seems too large for life.

Characters

Harriet Tubman

Tubman was born a slave sometime around 1820. Her parents, Harriet Green and Benjamin Ross, named the baby Araminta. Tubman would change her name when she escaped to freedom. She received a head injury as a girl from a thrown brick, and she was farmed out to many different households, some of which treated her better than others. She preferred outdoor work and worked in a lumber business for a while. Sometime around 1844, she married John Tubman, who would later refuse to go to the North with her.

Tubman escaped slavery in September 1849, fleeing to Philadelphia. Shortly after this, she made her first journey back into slave territory to help her niece and children escape. She began making one or two journeys a year to help fugitives escape via the UGRR. She would rescue slaves in the fall, spend the winter in Canada, work during the spring and summer to finance her raids, and make another raid the following fall. She was often called "Moses" during this time for leading her people to safety.

When the Civil War began, Tubman traveled to Fort Monroe, Virginia where she volunteered as a cook, laundress, and nurse. She helped care for the hundreds of "contrabands" that came to the fort for protection and freedom. She also served in South Carolina, where she helped organize a spy network. She organized and participated in the Combahee River Raid in 1863.

After the war, Tubman returned to Auburn, New York where she had bought a house. She married Nelson Davis on March 18, 1869. She continued to help former slaves in the Finger Lakes region, often taking individuals into her home. She dreamed of building a charity home. With the help of the AME Zion Church, her dream was realized in June 1908. She died on the evening of March 10, 1913.

Harriet Green

Harriet Green was Harriet Tubman's mother. She was married to Benjamin Ross, although they spent much of their married life unable to live together due to different owners. Ben Ross eventually was able to purchase his wife, making her a free black. Tubman brought her mother and father from Maryland to Canada in 1857 and they would later join her in Auburn to live. She died in 1880.

Benjamin Ross

Benjamin Ross was Harriet Tubman's father. He was married to Harriet Green. His birth date is believed to be in 1795. He was owned by Anthony Thompson and was given his freedom in 1840, at the age of forty-five. He continued to work for Thompson's son, Dr.

Anthony Thompson. Tubman brought her mother and father from Maryland to Canada in 1857 and they would later join her in Auburn to live. He died in the early 1870s.

William Seward

Seward was born in 1801 in Orange County, New York. He married Frances Miller in 1824, making him a member of one of the town's most prominent families. His law practice thrived, and he served in the New York state legislature and was elected governor in 1838. He was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1848 and became a champion of antislavery there.

Seward lived in Auburn, New York, and he sold Tubman a house there, offering her flexible terms that she could manage. Tubman had often stayed at the Seward home and knew the family well. When Tubman brought to New York an eight-year-old girl, the Sewards took her in. He died in 1872 at the age of seventy-one.

Margaret Tubman or Margaret Stewart

Tubman brought Margaret as a young girl to New York from Maryland. Margaret claimed that she had been living in a free black family and had a twin brother before this. Later, it was said that she was the daughter of one of Harriet's brothers. Her identity and relation to Harriet are unknown and mysterious and Clinton suggests that she may have been Tubman's daughter. In any case, Tubman adopted her and raised her, with the help of William Seward and his family.

John Brown

Brown was born in Torrington, Connecticut in 1800. He spent his early years on the Ohio frontier, and he moved back to Ohio in 1835 with his family. Brown had strong antislavery convictions and became obsessed with overthrowing slavery by whatever means necessary. He moved to Kansas in 1855 and on May 24, 1856, he was the instigator of the Osawatomie Creek Massacre, which killed several slaveholders in Missouri. He returned east that year.

In 1858, Brown revealed a plan to recruit an abolitionist army to invade the South and generate a slave uprising. Tubman supported his vision when they met in April 1858. He chose the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry as his attack point. On October 16, 1859, Brown began his attack. After forty-eight hours, only Brown and three men remained within the arsenal and the slave uprising that he had expected had not happened. He was wounded in the final assault on October 18. On November 2, he was sentenced to death by hanging. He was hanged on December 2, 1859. Tubman viewed his death as symbolic and sacrificial and Brown's heroic stature grew in the North.

Sojourner Truth

Truth was born Isabella Baumfree, a slave in rural New York. Her birth date has been estimated as 1797. She escaped slavery in 1826 and moved to New York City in 1828. She took the name Sojourner Truth in 1843 and began to preach and travel throughout the North. Her *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* was published in 1850, and she spent most of the 1850s on the road speaking. In 1857, she made Battle Creek, Michigan her permanent home. Truth met Tubman in 1864. They had conflicting views on Lincoln and this may have kept them from forming a closer bond.

Nelson Davis

Davis, also known as Nelson Charles, married Tubman on March 18, 1869. Davis had been born a slave in North Carolina, but escaped and moved to upstate New York. He enlisted in the Union Army in September 1863 and first met Tubman when his unit was stationed in South Carolina. He was honorably discharged in November 1865.

In the winter of 1866-1867, David moved into Tubman's home in Auburn to recover from a bout of tuberculosis. He remained there afterward and on March 18, 1869, he and Tubman married. He was active in a number of organizations in Auburn and encouraged Tubman's philanthropic causes. He died in October 1888.

Frederick Douglass

Douglass was born into slavery, escaped, and eventually bought his freedom. He became a spokesperson for the abolitionist movement. In 1854, he published *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. His Rochester, New York home was used as a station on the UGRR.

Thomas Garrett

Garrett was a legendary UGRR stationmaster in Wilmington, Delaware. In Wilmington, he owned a blacksmith shop, a hardware store, and a cobbling operation. He may have helped Tubman escape on her first journey north, and he later became a great help to her as she brought fugitives through the UGRR to Canada.

Sarah Bradford

Bradford was an abolitionist who wrote an authorized biography of Harriet Tubman in 1869. She lived in Geneva, New York. The autobiography provided support for Tubman and her charitable works.

John Tubman

Tubman was Harriet Tubman's first husband. He was born near White Marsh, Maryland and was a free black when he married Harriet in 1844. There is little or no information about his background or how he made his living. He didn't go with Harriet to the North when she escaped and refused to go with her when she later returned for him. After Harriet left, he had taken another wife and they later had four children together. A white man, who was later acquitted, murdered him in October 1867.

Keziah (Kizzy)

Keziah was Tubman's niece and one of the first slaves that Tubman led to safety. She settled in Chatham, Canada. She was married to John Bowley, a free black, and they had several children together.

Anthony Thompson

Thompson owned Benjamin Ross and looked after his stepson's, Edward Brodess, interests, including Harriet Green and her children. He died in 1836 and left the wish that Ben Ross be given his freedom at the age of forty-five.

Edward Brodess

Brodess owned Harriet Green and Harriet Tubman. He married Elizabeth Anne Keene and they lived on his late father's estate near Bucktown. Tubman made her escape after he died in 1849.

Objects/Places

Eastern Shore of Maryland

Harriet Tubman was born here and after escaping, she made many trips into the area to rescue family members.

The Underground Railroad (UGRR)

The Underground Railroad was an informal, clandestine series of networks that helped slaves to freedom in the North. UGRR "conductors" would help move the fugitive slaves from "depot" to "depot."

Philadelphia

Harriet arrived in Philadelphia after escaping from slavery. She lived her before beginning her raids to free other slaves. By 1847, the city had a black population of 20,000.

Fugitive Slave Law of 1850

This law provided financial incentives for northern slave catchers. Many fugitives migrated to Canada with the law's passing.

Wilmington, Delaware

Thomas Garrett was an important UGRR stationmaster in Wilmington. Tubman often brought fugitives through this place on their way to Canada.

St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

Tubman first came to St. Catharines in 1851 and this town would become her home in Canada where she would return each winter. A number of her family members settled her as well.

Harpers Ferry

John Brown began his ill-fated invasion of the South to end slavery at the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. He was hanged for his actions.

Fort Monroe, Virginia

Tubman volunteered at Fort Monroe at the start and end of the Civil War. She helped care for the "contrabands" that came to the fort.

Port Royal, South Carolina

Tubman also volunteered and worked with the Union Army at this southern post. She helped organize a ring of spies and the Combahee River Raid in 1863.

Auburn, New York

Auburn became Tubman's adopted home. She bought a house here and lived in it with her parents and others who needed her help after the Civil War. She also established the Harriet Tubman home in Auburn.

Harriet Tubman Home

Established in June 1908, the home was a lifelong dream of Tubman. The Harriet Tubman Home was dedicated to the shelter and care of African Americans.

Themes

Freedom

For slaves living in the South, like Harriet Tubman, freedom was the primary goal in their lives. Slavery presented situations where slaves were mistreated and sold away from their spouses, parents, and children. Finding freedom for oneself and one's family became one of the few ways to prevent this from happening.

The importance of freedom, both in reality and symbolically can be seen through the Biblical references that were used to describe the North. Slaves and others referred to the North and Canada as Canaan, a reference to the Biblical land that the Israelites were promised. In both cases, "Canaan" was a haven, a place of freedom and goodness for former slaves. Tubman became known as "Moses," furthering the perceived connections between the Bible and the situation in antebellum society.

Tubman viewed freedom as an important goal. She risked her life to escape from her masters and then she continued to risk her life to help other slaves out of bondage. She believed that freedom would bring better lives for herself and for those that she helped. The Underground Railroad was also devised as a way to help slaves to freedom. The conductors, like Tubman, risked their lives and livelihoods in order to do what they thought was right.

Oppression and Racism

Tubman was born into slavery to two parents who were also slaves. Her experiences in slavery, fighting to free other slaves, and in helping slaves with the transition to being free illustrate the oppression and racism that African Americans experienced in the United States during this time. During slavery, African Americans were considered little better than commodities, pieces of property to be bought and sold. Even after slavery ended, African Americans remained second-class citizens, experiencing severe racism.

The system of slavery itself was designed to oppress a race of people. Considered virtually non-human, African Americans faced lives of hard work, long hours, little resources, and little to no say in their own lives. Clinton suggests that the greatest sign of the inhumanity of slavery was that parents were often separated from their children. This was done often without thought as to the lives or the emotions of the parents and children.

Tubman also saw racism and oppression when she worked with the Union Army in the Civil War. She saw blacks forced into labor at the Union camps without pay, and she witnessed the inferior treatment that blacks received, as soldiers and refugees. Black soldiers were paid less than white soldiers in the Union Army, for example, despite also serving on the front lines.

After the war, Tubman continued to fight for equal treatment and rights for African Americans. She helped ease the transition from slavery to freedom at Fort Monroe and again when she returned to Auburn, New York. The desire for a charitable home for African Americans points to the different treatment that blacks received from society.

Resistance

Throughout the work, Clinton addresses the theme of resistance over and over again. Although slavery severely restricted African Americans from living the lives that they wished to live and although laws like the Fugitive Slave Act made live dangerous for those who escaped, slaves and free people resisted the institution of slavery in various ways. Clinton shows through Tubman and her family some of the ways that slaves were able to gain some measure of control over their lives and situations.

Within Tubman's life, the escape from slavery was the largest act of resistance. Tubman fled from slavery to a safer place in Philadelphia and then in Canada. She returned time after time to help other slaves escape. The Underground Railroad played an important part in this resistance, helping to hide fugitives from slave catchers and from their masters. Those who participated believed that slavery was wrong and worked to undermine its hold over the lives of individual slaves.

Yet, slaves also resisted slavery while they were still slaves. Clinton discusses an incident where Tubman's mother protected on of her sons from being sold. Although this was an isolated event, it does illustrate that at times, slaves were able to influence their masters at a degree. Slaves also contrived ways of keeping their families together when possible. Although the law did not recognize their marriages, slaves formed relationships and had children, while working to create situations that kept them from being totally separated. Clinton also suggests that slaves used short absences as a form of resistance.

Resistance of any sort for slaves was often contingent on their individual situations. Those living on isolated plantations in the South may have used different means of resistance than those that Tubman and her family used living on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. One's owner probably also contributed to the form of resistance taken, as some were much more brutal than others.

Style

Points of View

Clinton uses an omniscient, third person point of view in *Harriet Tubman: Road to Freedom.* This voice is typical of historical biographies and allows Clinton to place Tubman within the context of the time period in which she lived. While the focus of the work is on Tubman, Clinton also uses this voice to trace several other individuals and their relationships to Tubman. For example, Clinton discusses other historical figures such as Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, including their backgrounds and how their lives intersected with Tubman's.

The third person point of view also gives the work an authoritative and knowledgeable voice, which provides a great deal of interpretation for the reader. Clinton does discuss some speculative points and offers that, because of the lack of knowledge, some aspects of Tubman's life will probably remain unknown. She usually makes clear when she is offering speculation based on various sources and when she is giving acknowledged facts about Tubman's life.

Setting

Much of *Harriet Tubman: Road to Freedom* is set in the antebellum and Civil War periods of American History. Clinton also includes several chapters that examine Tubman's life and activities during Reconstruction until her death in 1913.

Clinton traces Tubman's life from her birth on the Eastern Shore of Maryland through her escape to freedom in Philadelphia, her time in Canada, and her eventual home in Auburn New York. She also traces Tubman's activities during the Civil War, which took Tubman into Virginia and South Carolina. The Eastern Shore of Maryland and Auburn, New York are described in the most detail, as Tubman spent the greater parts of her life in these two areas.

Language and Meaning

Clinton writes in a clear, accessible language. She appears to be targeting a popular audience, in addition to an academic audience, and uses a fast-paced and simple language and organization to accomplish this. Overall, the book contains little technical jargon and does not use strong, violent or vulgar language.

Clinton makes use of a variety of sources in putting together Tubman's narrative. She uses letters, newspaper accounts, and other archival materials. It appears that she also consulted with Tubman's extended family. Due to Tubman's life in slavery and her clandestine activities afterward, much of Tubman's life remains shrouded in mystery. Clinton uses secondary material to put Tubman's experiences into a wider context and

speculates about the events and experiences that Tubman may have had. For example, Clinton discusses some of the stationmasters and depots that Tubman probably used in her work for the Underground Railroad, yet, no records of this exist and definitive knowledge is unattainable.

Structure

Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom consists of a preface, twelve chapters, and an epilogue. Clinton includes a bibliography, an index, and a section of notes on the chapters. Eight pages of photographs are also present in the book. The photographs range for Harriet Tubman to artists' depictions of fugitive slaves to photos of those close to Tubman and her town of Auburn.

Clinton follows a more or less chronological, linear pattern in the book. She begins with Tubman's early childhood in slavery and ends with Tubman's death in Auburn, New York. At times, some of the time periods overlap slightly as Clinton examines particular events and themes.

Quotes

"Slave parents lived in abject terror of separation from their children. This fear, perhaps more than any other aspect of the institution, revealed the deeply dehumanizing horror of slavery." Chapter 1, pg. 10

"The majority of slaves struggled against this tide of indifference to their desires. They engineered love matches and cemented unions with ceremonies. Marriages among slaves could be grand and festive." Chapter 2, pg. 26

"The year 1849 became a turning point. To best fulfill her destiny, Tubman realized, she must actively seek a role in God's plan, rather than letting others dictate her path. For Araminta, this was an important step forward, a significant leap of faith, especially faith in herself." Chapter 2, pg. 31

"Once freed, Araminta decided to take a new first name: Harriet. This was the name of her mother and may also have been the name of one of her sisters who disappeared in the South. Perhaps as a sign of her continued devotion to her husband, she kept his last name." Chapter 3, pg. 33

"Absenteeism and running away were part of day-to-day resistance within the slave community." Chapter 3, pg. 43

"Tubman's growing realization that all people of color - slave, fugitive, or free, in both North and South - were imperiled by the very existence of racial bondage made 1850 a critical turning point in her life, as her own personal journey to freedom expanded to include the aspirations of all slaves." Chapter 4, pg. 60

"Her unique vantage point - being black, fugitive, and female, yet willing to risk the role of UGRR abductor - is what allowed her to become such a powerful voice against slavery during the years leading up to the Civil War." Chapter 5, pg. 73

"This first rescue demonstrates Tubman's powers of adaptability. Within a year of her own escape, she was able to head into the new and strange streets of Baltimore, locate assistance, find a safe house, and navigate the shoals to freedom." Chapter 6, pg. 81

"She alone took these risks, eventually bringing hundreds out along liberty lines to freedom. Even with a concealed identity and clandestine partnerships, her aboveground fame grew. With her spectacular achievements, she was likened to the biblical hero of her code name, Moses." Chapter 6, pg. 85

"First and foremost, Tubman shared Brown's impassioned hatred of slavery, which gave them a strong emotional and intellectual bond. Tubman had long viewed slavery as a sin, but under Brown's influence, she came to perceive slavery as a state of war." Chapter 9, pg. 128

"Tubman interpreted flight from the Confederacy as the rising of a race. She welcomed the tide of refugees and took on the challenges of caregiving without complaint - as cook, as laundress, as nurse." Chapter 10, pg. 149

"Because keeping soldiers free of disease was a military aim, Tubman's medical proficiency took on an enhanced urgency. Tubman used local plants to concoct her remedies." Chapter 10, pg. 157

"A sneak attack in the dead of night, to catch slaveholders off guard in their own backyards, was vintage Tubman. It resembled the days when she would return to Maryland under the nose of her former slaveholder and steal her brothers to freedom." Chapter 11, pg. 165

"Tubman wanted African Americans to be granted the freedom and dignity they deserved, as well as the legal status they had won. For those who could not care for themselves or claim what they had a right to, Tubman would become a friend and protector." Chapter 11, pg. 189

"She steadfastly held on to her dream: to establish a separate charitable institution in Auburn for the needy and neglected of her race." Chapter 12, pg. 206

Essay Topics

Describe Araminta's life in slavery. What kinds of work did she do? What was slavery like for her and her family? How do her experiences compare and contrast to other slaves' experiences?

Discuss Harriet Tubman's escape into freedom. What events or situations led to her escape? Where did she go? What is known about her escape, and why isn't more known?

Describe the Underground Railroad in the United States before the Civil War. How did the network work? What were some of the dangers that slaves and conductors faced because of their participation?

Discuss John Brown's quest to end the institution of slavery. What were his beliefs on this topic? What actions did he take? What was the outcome? Why do you think Harriet Tubman supported his plan?

Discuss Harriet Tubman's involvement in the Civil War. What roles did she fill? Why do you think she continued to place herself in danger by serving in the Civil War rather than helping people in Auburn?

Compare and contrast the social and political situation for African Americans in the United States and Canada in the years before the Civil War.

Clinton states the Tubman "became in some ways a symbol rather than a flesh-and-blood figure." What does she mean by this? What are the dangers of this?