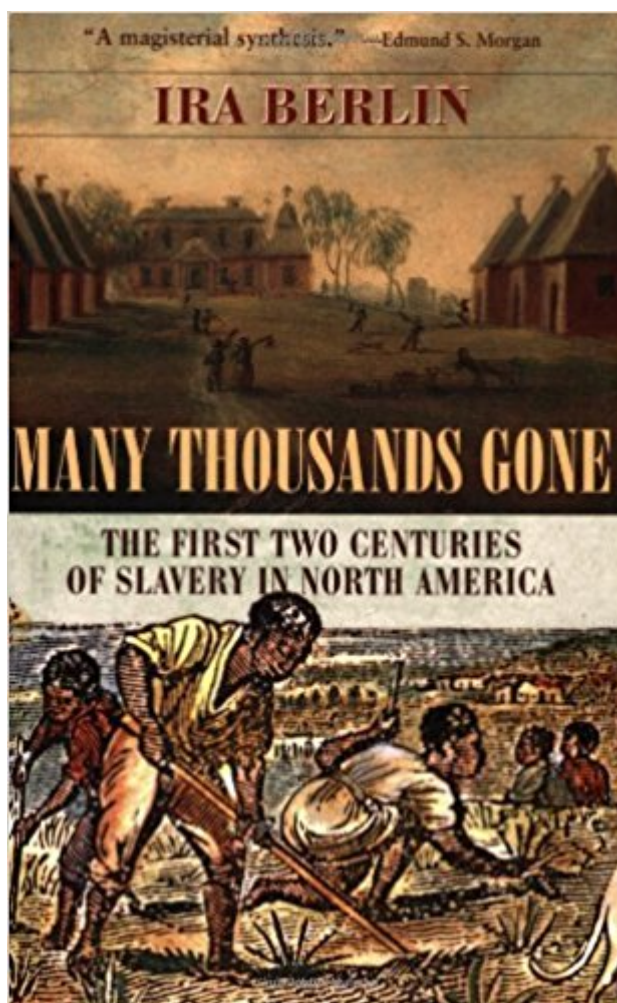


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# Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries Of Slavery In North America



## Synopsis

Today most Americans, black and white, identify slavery with cotton, the deep South, and the African-American church. But at the beginning of the nineteenth century, after almost two hundred years of African-American life in mainland North America, few slaves grew cotton, lived in the deep South, or embraced Christianity. *Many Thousands Gone* traces the evolution of black society from the first arrivals in the early seventeenth century through the Revolution. In telling their story, Ira Berlin, a leading historian of southern and African-American life, reintegrates slaves into the history of the American working class and into the tapestry of our nation. Laboring as field hands on tobacco and rice plantations, as skilled artisans in port cities, or soldiers along the frontier, generation after generation of African Americans struggled to create a world of their own in circumstances not of their own making. In a panoramic view that stretches from the North to the Chesapeake Bay and Carolina lowcountry to the Mississippi Valley, *Many Thousands Gone* reveals the diverse forms that slavery and freedom assumed before cotton was king. We witness the transformation that occurred as the first generations of creole slaves--who worked alongside their owners, free blacks, and indentured whites--gave way to the plantation generations, whose back-breaking labor was the sole engine of their society and whose physical and linguistic isolation sustained African traditions on American soil. As the nature of the slaves' labor changed with place and time, so did the relationship between slave and master, and between slave and society. In this fresh and vivid interpretation, Berlin demonstrates that the meaning of slavery and of race itself was continually renegotiated and redefined, as the nation lurched toward political and economic independence and grappled with the Enlightenment ideals that had inspired its birth.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When Americans look at slavery, they conjure up images of tired black bodies picking cotton from sunup to sundown under Southern skies. That image is partly true, but, as the noted history professor Ira Berlin details, the lives of slaves in America's racist system were complex and diverse. "Viewing slavery through the perspective of what slaves did most of the time," Berlin writes, "provides a means to draw some fundamental distinctions and find some essential commonalities among the various experiences of North America." Berlin reveals the color-caste codes of the Afro-Creoles of the Chesapeake, the survival of African culture in the South Carolina-Georgia-Florida coastal area, and the intermingling of Africans with French and Spanish in the Mississippi Delta area. He weaves a woeful and wondrous tale of the mores, occupations, conflicts, wars, and rebellions that made up the ongoing relationships between masters and slaves. *Many Thousands Gone* is an excellent companion to Philip D. Morgan's *Slave Counterpoint*, revealing the influence the "peculiar institution" of slavery had on those of African and European descent alike. --Eugene Holley Jr. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The history of slavery in North America is not as simple, clear-cut or tidy as is often believed. That is the message of this impeccably presented history of American slavery from 1619, when John Rolfe brought "twenty Negars" to the Jamestown colony, to the 1820s, when the spirit of emancipation began to take hold in the North. Berlin, a history professor at the University of Maryland, shows how at different times and at different places, slavery was a very different thing. He makes a great distinction, for example, between slave societies such as the Carolina low country in the 17th century (in which both the economy and the social structure was built upon slavery) and societies with slaves (the lower Mississippi of the same era) where slavery was only part of a more complex structure. He shows how slavery was different for those born in the West Indies, Africa and North America, and for those serving in urban settings (which encouraged a certain entrepreneurial spirit) and in rural. These distinctions have continuing resonance, as Berlin shows that once a society with slaves became a slave society, all blacks?free or not?could come to be regarded as slaves: in short, how an economic system became racism. Although the prose is serviceable more than

anything else, the book holds many surprises gleaned from the facts, whether in its portrait of New York as a major slave city or its descriptions of free enterprise at work among slaves. The economic and historical research presented here is impressive. But what gives the book an additional dimension is its deftly employed social insights. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
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Ira Berlin in "Many Thousands Gone" has made a very important contribution to the growing literature attempting to understand both the big picture and the daily details of slavery. As his subtitle suggests, his work focuses on the first two centuries of slavery in North America. Berlin's primary (and well-documented) thesis is that slave culture was not one monolithic culture, but several different cultures depending upon the era and the area of North American enslavement. Additionally, Berlin highlights that slavery was racist and classist, an interpretation which does not minimize the evils of racism, but also exposes the evils of classism. Though in other works by the same author, readers find first-hand accounts of the horrors of slavery in the words of the enslaved, such documentation is less evident in this work. An increase in such documentation would have strengthened the already excellent "Many Thousand Gone." Still, the overall message and "feel" of "Many Thousands Gone" does accurately and powerfully depict the agony and inhumanity of African American slavery. Berlin engages the important issue of the slave's choice of or refusal to choose the master's religion. Including a small sampling of the slave narratives (the majority of which evidence acceptance of Christianity) and the myriad slave conversion accounts, would have provided added depth to this fine book. Converting slaves, by their own accounts, did not see themselves as converting to their masters' religion. Instead, they saw themselves rejecting their masters' hypocritical distortion of Christianity and receiving Christ and Christianity, cleansed of lies and replete with the message of eternal freedom spirituality and internal freedom in Christ. For the broad panorama of early enslavement, look no further than "Many Thousands Gone." Reviewer: Bob Kellemen, Ph.D., is the author of Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction , Soul Physicians, and Spiritual Friends.

please except star rating

Very sad and important book

Excellent. Intensively researched and referenced, but highly readable. Hard to read only because

the material is so tragic.

they dont teach this stuff in school--wonder why?

Outstanding!

Berlin easily challenges thinking of other historians to make this more than synthesis. An excellent introduction and further resource for research on American slavery.

I love this book. The previous reviewers who gave it 4+ stars are right on. Alas, for some reason the Kindle editors did not see fit to make the footnote numbers link to the footnotes. I'm a graduate student, I have to write a paper on the book, and reading the references after I've read the book is spoiling the experience for me. And it won't help my writing the paper! Kindle needs to get on the ball with footnotes and make them accessible for all books. I've read some non-fiction/history that have easily accessible footnotes, but I would rather have bought the hard copy of this one.

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