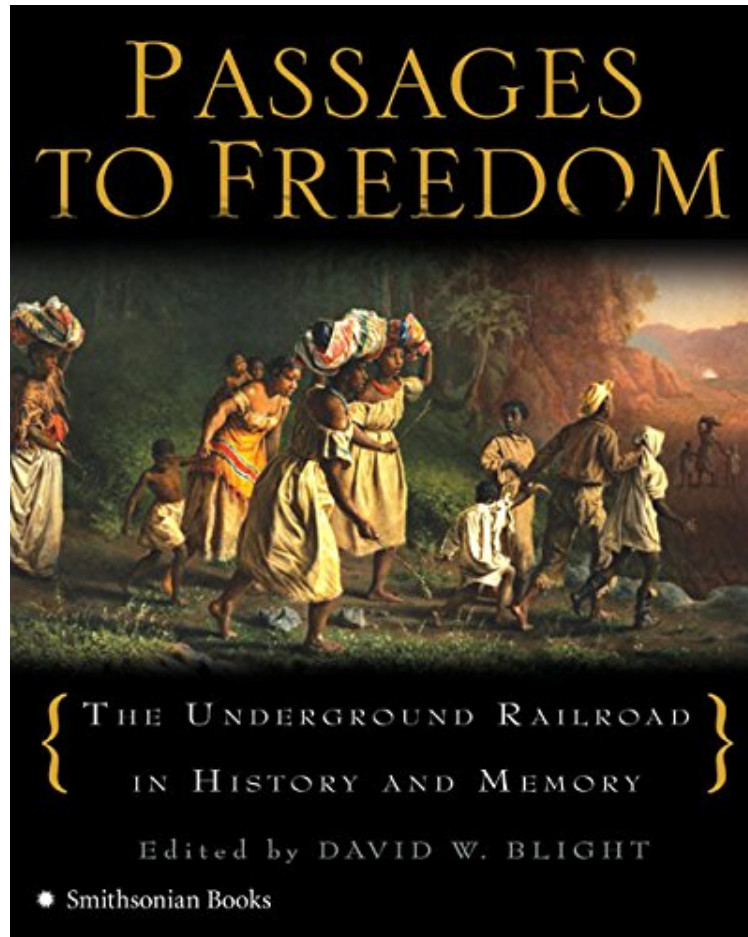


# Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory

David Blight

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**David Blight : Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory:

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Few things have defined America as much as slavery. In the wake of emancipation the story of the Underground Railroad has become a seemingly irresistible part of American historical consciousness. This stirring drama is one Americans have needed to tell and retell and pass on to their children. But just how much of the Underground Railroad is real, how much legend and mythology, how much invention? *Passages to Freedom* sets out to answer this question and place it within the context of slavery, emancipation, and its aftermath. Published on the occasion of the opening of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, *Passages to Freedom* brings home the reality of slavery's destructiveness. This distinguished yet accessible volume offers a galvanizing look at how the brave journey out of slavery both haunts and inspires us today.

From Publishers Weekly Myth and metaphor, the Underground Railroad was also real in the lives of escaping slaves, in the activities (legal and illegal) of black and white people, free and slave, who aided and abetted them and in the structures in which they found refuge. Bountifully illustrated with 78 color and 174 bw photos and other images, this collection also comprises highly, readable essays by 15 distinguished historians. The first section, "Slavery and Abolition," lays a historical foundation with cogent accounts of slavery in the colonial years and in the 19th century and of the antislavery movement. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the Civil War, William Still and Harriet Tubman are all carefully treated. Short-term stay escapes and long-term fugitive communities within slave territory, escape by water, escape into Northern free black communities, escape to South Florida and escape to Western Canada are all freshly covered, as are "current uses of the Underground Railroad in modern thought, tourism, and public history." (Sadly, the work does not list the recognized Underground Railroad sites.) In closing, Eddie S. Glaude Jr. discusses the African-American appropriation of the Exodus story, with the U.S. being Egypt rather than the Promised Land. Although inevitable redundancies occur in the separate essays, Blight (*Race and Reunion*) brackets this coherently arranged collection with two thought-provoking essays exploring the role of history and memory and probing the current attention to the Underground Railroad that "says much about who we are as well as who we say we want to be." Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist \*Starred\* In an effort to provide a more accurate account of what was, by necessity, a clandestine operation, the National Underground Railroad Center in Cincinnati offers a collection of essays, photographs, and illustrations from scholars to document the enterprise in as much detail as possible. Writing with respect for the history and with caution about the mythology, contributors detail the contributions of famous abolitionists, including Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass, and those who are less well known. Scholars examine the origin of the term Underground Railroad, the double meaning of spirituals and other signals used in the secret society, and the operations of at least 150 antislavery societies existing in Ohio (the locus of the movement) at the peak of abolitionist activism. Scholars also examine the passion and courage of abolitionists, and the dilemma of the lasting appeal of the Underground Railroad as an archetypal image of a freedom-seeking, freedom-supporting nation, and, at the same time, the shame of slavery that necessitated such heroic efforts. Among the contributing scholars are Ira Berlin, David Blight, Eddie S. Glaude Jr., and Deborah Gray White. This is a scholarly but thoroughly accessible resource on the Underground Railroad. Vanessa Bush Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved About the Author David W. Blight is Class of 1954 Professor of American History at Yale University. His books include *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* and *Frederick Douglass's Civil War*.