

to the growing literature examining the international manifestations of this conflict.

DONALD R. SHAFFER is the author of *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (2004) and

a co-author of *Voices of Emancipation: Understanding Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction through the U.S. Pension Bureau Files* (2008). He teaches college-level history online and maintains a regular blog at: cwe-mancipation.wordpress.com/.



Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad

By Eric Foner

(New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2015. Pp. 1, 230. Illustrations, notes, index. \$26.95.)

This illuminating book is poorly served by its misleading subtitle. Although the history of the Underground Railroad was long ignored by established scholars, it is no longer “hidden,” thanks to the enterprising work of many local historians and others who have documented its operation in many parts of the North. Nor is *Gateway to Freedom* a history of the Underground Railroad as a whole, but rather of just one of its corridors: the path from Philadelphia through New York City toward points north. Foner barely mentions underground activity west of the Appalachian Mountains, where probably the largest number of fugitive slaves en route to safe havens in the North and Canada passed through western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois. Nationally significant Indiana activists, such as Levi Coffin and George de Baptiste, also go unmentioned.

Foner also seems to believe that the Underground Railroad—as a definable system—came into being only after the founding of the American Antislavery Society in the 1830s. Although traveling AASS agents facilitated the expansion of the underground, its roots stretch back to systematic collaboration between Quaker activists and African Americans in and around Philadelphia at the turn of the nineteenth century, if not before.

In New York City, however, Foner is on much firmer and very interesting ground. New York was then a hotbed of antiblack sentiment, and probably the most dangerous large city in which the underground operated. Foner acknowledges the work of David Ruggles, the bold Connecticut-born founder of the New York Vigilance Committee whose activities have been detailed in Graham Russell Gao Hodges’s excellent biography,

David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City (2012). However, Foner's focus is on the white anti-slavery lecturer Sidney Howard Gay and his African American collaborator Louis Napoleon—a porter—who were pivotal underground figures in the late 1840s and 1850s. Their pairing epitomizes the human dynamic that made the Underground Railroad successful: blacks were trusted by fugitives to a degree that few whites ever were, while whites brought legal protection, financial resources, and overland connections that blacks rarely could command. Relying heavily on Gay's previously under-utilized diary, Foner provides insight into the machinery and personal relationships of the underground in New York. He also provides many riveting stories of fugitives who passed through New York, including Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Henry "Box" Brown, among others.

Gay's circle was not the only underground operation in the city. A second well-established group centered on the radical merchant Lewis Tappan, who personally bankrolled

much of the radical abolitionist activity around the country. The two groups vied with each other in finding ways to assist both fugitives and free blacks. As Foner puts it, "the relationship between the two stations of the underground railroad in New York City might best be described as mostly friendly, occasionally unfriendly, competition" (p. 100). It is an apt description of the highly decentralized nature of the underground almost everywhere. Surprisingly, Foner ignores the work of historian Judith Wellman, who has exhaustively explored the settlement of fugitives in present-day Brooklyn; her work is ably summed up in *Brooklyn's Promised Land: The Free Black Community of Weeksville, New York* (2015). Nevertheless, in *Gateway to Freedom*, Foner has made a valuable new contribution to scholarship on the Underground Railroad.

FERGUS M. BORDEWICH's most recent book is *America's Great Debate: Henry Clay, Stephen A. Douglas, and the Compromise that Preserved the Union* (2012).

