

0. A Plan for Freedom - Story Preface

1. Slave Pens in Washington

2. Platt's Journey to Slavery in Louisiana

3. Life as a Louisiana Slave

4. Life as the Slave of John Tibbeats

5. Life as a Slave of Edwin Epps

6. The Beating of Patsey, the Slave

7. Platt Meets Bass

8. Bass Helps Platt (Solomon Northup)

9. A Plan for Freedom

10. Solomon Northup Goes Home

11. Not-Guilty Verdicts at Trial



Solomon Northup (portrayed by Chiwetel Ejiofor) never gave-up hope that he could be rescued from slavery. In this scene, we see him (known, at the time, as "Platt") with fellow slaves at the Epps plantation. Still-shot from the film, copyright Fox Searchlight, all rights reserved. Image online, via Fox Searchlight, and provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

In 1853, it was not so simple to pull a man from enslavement, in America's Deep South, by just asserting he was a "free man." Documents had to prove it.

One week after Christmas, two men from the North arrived in Marksville, Louisiana. They were searching for the anonymous person who had written the letter of August 15.

Asking around, they learned an interesting fact from a Marksville resident:

We have ... in Marksville, an eccentric creature, who preaches abolitionism as vehemently as any fanatic at the North. He is a generous, inoffensive man, but always maintaining the wrong side of an argument. It affords us a deal of amusement. He is an excellent mechanic, and almost indispensable in this community. He is a carpenter. His name is Bass. (12 Years a Slave, page 296 of an online version of Solomon Northup's book.)

About to leave on a two-week trip, Samuel Bass was still in the general neighborhood. The men from the North were able to find him and asked whether he'd written a letter on behalf of Solomon Northup in August of 1852.

After determining that he could trust these people, Bass acknowledged that he had written the letter. He was able to tell the men where to find Solomon. Then ... he became very afraid, for his own safety, and decided to leave town.

Placing his affairs in the hands of someone he thought he could trust, Bass said that he was planning to leave Louisiana. Rumors started to spread that perhaps one of Epps' slaves was the subject of an inquiry. If Epps heard the rumor, he would likely suspect that "Platt" was the relevant slave.

The Northerners had to move-up their timetable for visiting the Epps' plantation.

Henry B. Northup—to whom John Manning had written a letter about Solomon's predicament in the early summer of 1841—was the person who'd met with Bass. He was the one leading the charge to free Solomon (and was a descendant of the man who had once "owned" Solomon's father ... hence, the shared last name).

Henry's plan was to file a lawsuit naming himself as Solomon's guardian, with Edwin Epps as the defendant. The case would allege that Solomon, a/k/a Platt, was being wrongfully detained as a slave.

With rumors floating about, however, there was no time for legal formalities. Instead, Henry Northup and the local sheriff made a different plan. Arriving at the Epps plantation, they would ask for the slave known as "Platt." Then the sheriff would ask Platt a series of questions which only the real Solomon Northup could answer.

If Epps asserted ownership over Platt, the sheriff could testify at trial that he had questioned the slave (who had appropriately answered his questions).

Sometimes plans really do come together.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/A-Plan-for-Freedom-12-Years-a-Slave>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/A-Plan-for-Freedom-12-Years-a-Slave>

Questions 2 Ponder

How Does a Person's Reputation Help to Assess Character?

In *12 Years a Slave*, Bass seems to be a man of his word since his reputation (among other people) confirms what he has told Epps (about slavery) and what he has told Northup (about his willingness to help free him).

What sentence—in the quote from the chapter entitled “A Plan for Freedom”—shows Bass to be a man of his word? Explain your selection.