

0. Not-Guilty Verdicts at Trial - 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 Tibbatts

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 is rescued from a life of slavery after Henry B. Northup investigates a letter, about Solomon, from Samuel Bass. When the newly freed slave makes it back to New York state, he is reunited with his family. That joyous scene is depicted in a drawing from his book, *12 Years a Slave*, which appears between pages 320 and 321 of Northup's original book. [Image online](#), courtesy "Documenting the American South," via University Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

After all the legal formalities were concluded, and Epps had acknowledged "Platt's" status as a free man, Solomon Northup continued with his life in New York. His wife and children were alive, although his Mother had died during his years of captivity.

Solomon brought charges against the still-alive people who had been responsible for his twelve years in slavery. Merrill and Russell spent seven months in jail, but ... since black people (even if free) could not testify against white people, in an American court of law at that time ... no one was found guilty of any criminal charges.

Abraham Lincoln referred to American slavery as that "peculiar institution," but he seems not the first to do so. Solomon Northup also uses that phrase in the closing words of his story:

My narrative is at an end. I have no comments to make upon the subject of Slavery. Those who read this book may form their own opinions of the "peculiar institution." What it may be in other States, I do not profess to know; what it is in the region of Red River, is truly and faithfully delineated in these pages.

This is no fiction, no exaggeration. If I have failed in anything, it has been in presenting to the reader too prominently the bright side of the picture. I doubt not hundreds have been as unfortunate as myself; that hundreds of free citizens have been kidnapped and sold into slavery, and are at this moment wearing out their lives on plantations in Texas and Louisiana. But I forbear. Chastened and subdued in spirit by the sufferings I have borne, and thankful to that good Being through whose mercy I have been restored to happiness and liberty, I hope henceforward to lead an upright though lowly life, and rest at last in the church yard where my father sleeps.

(Northup, *12 Years a Slave*, at [page 321](#).)

When people learned about his experience, they wanted to hear Solomon's story firsthand. He joined [Frederick Douglass](#) and other abolitionists in speaking events to audiences in the Northeast. He was even able to buy some property in [Glens Falls, New York](#).

But Solomon's life after slavery was not easy. A play he wrote, based on his book, was unsuccessful. Lenders reportedly foreclosed on his property, in 1854. Creditors won judgments against him for failure to repay loans (perhaps taken out to finance his speaking engagements or to help slaves seeking freedom via the [Underground Railroad](#)).

After the furor of Solomon's story died down, he dropped from sight. The surviving newspaper record tells us that he was last-seen, in public, in 1857.

No one knows, for sure, how Solomon finished his life. He wanted to "rest at last in the church yard where my father sleeps," but that did not happen.

At the time, and later, slaves sang about taking their "rest." The meaning, for them, was different than one might think. For a slave, after all, the only true resting place—where they could escape the endless toil of

enslavement—was in the ground.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Not-Guilty-Verdicts-at-Trial-12-Years-a-Slave>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Not-Guilty-Verdicts-at-Trial-12-Years-a-Slave>

Questions 2 Ponder

Is Rest Ever a Goal Worth Achieving?

In *12 Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup concludes his book with the hope that he will be able to rest at the end of his labors. What he seems to mean is not a rest, while he is still alive, but a rest, after he is gone.

Why did Solomon look forward to resting “at last in the church yard where my father sleeps?”

Do you think that was a reasonable goal, after all he had endured and overcome in his lifetime? Explain your answer.