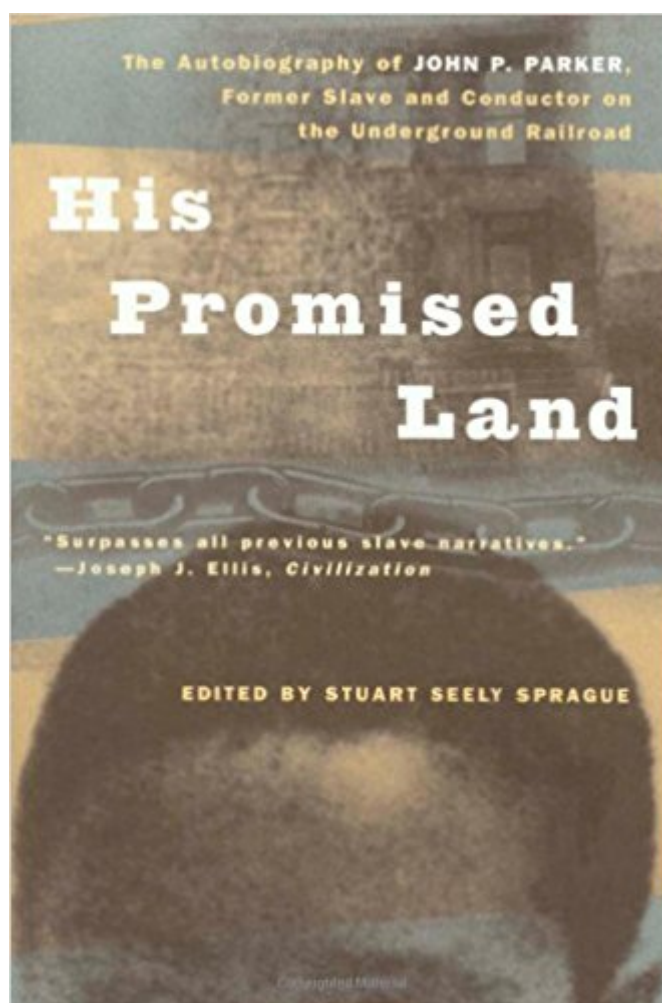


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His Promised Land: The Autobiography Of John P. Parker, Former Slave And Conductor On The Underground Railroad



Synopsis

"Surpasses all previous slave narratives" — "Usually we need to invent our American heroes. With the publication of Parker's extraordinary memoir, we seem to have discovered the genuine article." — Joseph J. Ellis, *Civilization*

In the words of an African American conductor on the Underground Railroad, *His Promised Land* is the unusual and stirring account of how the war against slavery was fought and sometimes won. John P. Parker (1827–1900) told this dramatic story to a newspaperman after the Civil War. He recounts his years of slavery, his harrowing runaway attempt, and how he finally bought his freedom. Eventually moving to Ripley, Ohio, a stronghold of the abolitionist movement, Parker became an integral part of the Underground Railroad, helping fugitive slaves cross the Ohio River from Kentucky and go north to freedom. Parker risked his life hiding in coffins, diving off a steamboat into the river with bounty hunters on his trail and his own freedom to fight for the freedom of his people.

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Customer Reviews

John Parker was born a slave in Virginia but managed to buy his freedom. He hated the injustice of slavery, and so for about 20 years before the Civil War devoted his life to the dangerous work of helping other blacks escape to freedom. This is one of only a few accounts of a black American's fight against slavery in his own words. Unpublished for nearly a century, it brings to life the American frontier of the mid-18th century in as thrilling a fashion as any John Ford film or historical novel. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This previously unpublished manuscript, resurrected from the Duke University Archive, tells a remarkable story. Parker's oral history, taken down by a journalist in the 1880s, provides a lively and indelible account of a man determined to escape slavery and to help others reach freedom. Parker's vigorous vernacular has echoes of Huckleberry Finn, but his tragicomic accounting of many death-defying episodes is freighted with truth and "an eternal hatred of the institution [of slavery]." Born in 1827 in Norfolk, Va., at eight Parker was sold and marched south in chains. He soon learned self-sufficiency and abhorrence of brutality. Though his master in Mobile, Ala., was kindly, Parker's apprenticeships put him in the path of cruel racists; indomitably, he began a series of escapes, all of which failed. He finally earned his freedom by working in an iron foundry; before moving north, he fought a white co-worker who stole an invention of his. In Ripley, Ohio, from 1845 to 1865, Parker, perpetually armed, helped smuggle slaves north. He persisted despite a \$1000 bounty on his head, heartened by the courage and sacrifice most fugitives showed. Over the years he variously owned foundry and milling businesses in Ohio. He had six children, all of whom became educated and middle class. Parker died in 1900. Sprague teaches at Morehead State University in Kentucky. Photos not seen by PW. Film option to Tri-Star. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Who would have thought that even the Underground Railroad would have its share of bloopers and laugh out loud moments? This powerful true story has some really funny moments that almost make you forget it was a life and death situation. Once you pick this up you won't be able to put this story back down as it moves non-stop through an unbelievable description of how one man fought for his own freedom and then risked his life to help others across the Mason-Dixon Line. Better written than most Civil War books, we were really impressed with both the writing, editing, and helpful notes that all blend together to keep you on the edge of your seat. This story really needs to be made into a movie, because it proves that real life is so much better than fiction.

I love biographies, and non fiction finding the truth is sometimes so interesting fiction only can copy it. This is one of those books you cannot put down, even though it was written in a time when it was still excepted by educated people that whites had a superior intellect. John Parker credits his white father for that, his imagination and ability to hate. His intellect was as superior as anyone's, but his imagination and courage were in a class of it's own and a credit to those like him escaping bondage. This story is so good I visualized the whole thing as I read it like I was watching a movie. It is too

good for one movie, more like a mini series. In this John Parker moved to Ripley after buying his own freedom in Alabama. After living in Indiana and Cincinnati first, he is closely pursued one night with his "passengers" going into Ripley, a stranger secures the group under a bridge with seconds to spare, the stranger Thomas Collins would become his neighbor and his boatman on other runs, once hiding in coffins Collins had built. His encounters with the white conductors in Ripley prompted him to move there. He is remembered in many recollections from Ripley that didn't get told in his book about his bravery in Ohio's historical Archives. His earlier attempts at escaping north were worthy of its own book. His later life after freedom and getting married starting a family and a prosperous business, and inventor (robbed of his first invention as a slave). He risked everything almost nightly to go into the slave state of Kentucky and bring out fellow freedom seekers, knowing how hard that was his own attempts failing, he bought his freedom for \$1,800. He took the road few UGRR operators ever did he went behind the lines. More prolific than Harriett Tubman mostly working alone, but supported by the other abolitionists in Ripley who would help those who crossed the river but wouldn't cross into there to get them out. Parker stood alone perhaps because he lived that life of a slave desperate to escape that most the others had not. He was a large, strong, distant man who never bragged was educated by proxy from the children of his master. He always armed himself and walked in the middle of the street so that he was not jumped by the many who wanted to kill him, this man would go further and take more risks than most any man alive. The UGRR was driven by the escaping Freedom seekers, the slaves themselves were often conductors who could have freed themselves but stayed to help others out first. Some of the stories are funny and others inspiring, and others far better than fiction. The White abolitionists could speak out and offer respite to the fugitives and they risked everything too, but the ones most often unnamed or overlooked in the UGRR story were the black conductors, even years after the war they faced racism and kept a low profile. John Parker never allowed himself to be photographed, it is amazing that a man this courageous and fearless had to worry his image might be used to settle an old grudge. The passion that was on both sides of the issue didn't end with the war, but the men (and women) who fought "the war before the war" as Parker called it put everything on the line for people they never met. All of their stories deserve to be heard, I am so glad Frank Gregg the original source of the story asked his former neighbor John Parker about his life, or we would never have it today. Frank Gregg couldn't sanitize the story enough for the 1880's audience to find a publisher, but Parker's own words are left so we can appreciate him today and his words are what makes it so real. It will be hard to top this!

I ordered this book after seeing an interesting reference to it in an article in Smithsonian Magazine. I am so very glad I did. It is an amazing book, a very rare combination of thought provoking historical narrative, and Indiana Jones-ish excitement. I only wish it had been ten times as long-I would have devoured it. If I hadn't read the preface, which gives the background, I would have thought it was fiction, and pretty darn nail biting fiction at that. I have given quite a bit of thought to this book, wondering what I would have done, given the same situation, and concluded that you can only hope you would be strong enough to rise to the circumstances, but fear is a powerful deterrent. I am giving my copy to the history department chair at my daughters' high school, and will ask them to consider making it a part of the curriculum.

Excellent read. Very exciting and encouraging to read about the will of the human spirit.

Well written. Good prose meets interesting history.

John B. Parker is an American hero who ought to be an icon but whose name means nothing to Americans. His memoir is more compelling than a best-selling spy story or political thriller -- and much shorter.

If you are at all interested in the Underground Railroad or are looking for a book full of excitement, this is the one for you. It's a fairly quick read, but explores the heights and depths of the human spirit. I would highly recommend this book. After finishing this book, I was reminded that although we all face adversities, we all can achieve. John Parker proved that.

This book is a series of adventures by John Parker that were dictated to a young reporter who turned it into a manuscript. It has wonderful action and gives a realistic understanding of what a conductor on the Underground Railroad had to experience to assist freedom seekers to the north. He was a real American hero. Check out our project on John Parker at [...]

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