



# Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman: Portrait of an American Hero

*By Kate Clifford Larson*

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Harriet Tubman is one of the giants of American history—a fearless visionary who led scores of her fellow slaves to freedom and battled courageously behind enemy lines during the Civil War. And yet in the nine decades since her death, next to nothing has been written about this extraordinary woman aside from juvenile biographies. The truth about Harriet Tubman has become lost inside a legend woven of racial and gender stereotypes. Now at last, in this long-overdue biography, historian Kate Clifford Larson gives Harriet Tubman the powerful, intimate, meticulously detailed life she deserves.

Drawing from a trove of new documents and sources as well extensive genealogical research, Larson reveals Tubman as a complex woman— brilliant, shrewd, deeply religious, and passionate in her pursuit of freedom. The descendant of the vibrant, matrilineal Asanti people of the West African Gold Coast, Tubman was born into slavery on the Eastern Shore of Maryland but refused to spend her life in bondage. While still a young woman she embarked on a perilous journey of self-liberation—and then, having won her own freedom, she returned again and again to liberate family and friends, tapping into the Underground Railroad.

Yet despite her success, her celebrity, her close ties with Northern politicians and abolitionists, Tubman suffered crushing physical pain and emotional setbacks. Stripping away myths and misconceptions, Larson presents stunning new details about Tubman’s accomplishments, personal life, and influence, including her relationship with Frederick Douglass, her involvement with John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, and revelations about a young woman who may have been Tubman’s daughter. Here too are Tubman’s twilight years after the war, when she worked for women’s rights and in support of her fellow blacks, and when racist politicians and suffragists marginalized her contribution.

Harriet Tubman, her life and her work, remain an inspiration to all who value freedom. Now, thanks to Larson’s breathtaking biography, we can finally appreciate Tubman as a complete human being—an American hero, yes, but also a woman who loved, suffered, and sacrificed. *Bound for the Promised Land* is a magnificent work of biography, history, and truth telling.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Few American historical figures are as familiar in legend as Tubman (1822?-1913), and as little known in fact. Although at least 30 juvenile biographies have treated her, Larson's is the first adult biography to appear since Earl Conrad's *Harriet Tubman* (1943). This pedestrian (in the neutral sense) account presents new investigative sources, utilizing court records and contemporary local newspapers, wills and letters, along with legal and illegal transactions. Larson directs tangled traffic as Tubman and her relatives are "passed down through several generations"; she traces the lives of the white owners as well the black "blended community of free and enslaved people" on Maryland's Eastern Shore, where Tubman grew up in slavery and where she returned time and again to spirit slaves to freedom. In recounting Tubman's routes and ruses, as the figure known as "Moses," Larson freshly identifies many of the escapees as she delineates the solid role of free and enslaved blacks in the Underground Railroad. She identifies Tubman's "sleeping spells, periods of semi-consciousness," as temporal lobe epilepsy. With Tubman's support of John Brown and her activities during the Civil War, Larson arrives where the Tubman legend usually ends with Tubman immortalized "forever as an Underground Railroad Agent and Civil War spy." As in the only other adult biography, Sarah Bradford's *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869), Larson follows her subject into her post-Civil War life supporting freedmen in the South and tending to a large household, including a young woman Larson speculates may have been Tubman's daughter. While this history is well done, competition will arrive in February, when Little, Brown publishes Catherine Clinton's *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom*.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Araminta Ross, better known as Harriet Tubman, was born a slave in 1822 on Maryland's Eastern Shore. In 1849, after hearing that she might be sold to settle her late master's debt, she escaped and began a life of sacrifice to help others escape as well. But Tubman's efforts didn't stop there. She played a vital role in the events of the Civil War and, in her later years, supported the fight for women's rights. Until the end of her life, she fought against the bigotry and injustice faced daily by African Americans. Using a clear writing style, Larson does an excellent job of placing Tubman in the context of her times. After finishing this book, readers will feel a greater appreciation for this woman's accomplishments and awareness that one person really can make a difference.—*Peggy Bercher, Fairfax County Public Library, VA*

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From [Booklist](#)

Larson, a first-time author who is working with the National Park Service to create a memorial park dedicated to Tubman, presents a full portrait of a complicated woman with deep religious convictions, incredible courage, and a passion for freedom. Tubman suffered from seizures and narcolepsy because of a head injury sustained when she tried to help an escaping slave. Her condition might have contributed to the constant visions she reported of fleeing harrowing circumstances and of danger signs that she often heeded to her benefit. Larson treats Tubman's vital role in the Underground Railroad; her relationship with other prominent antislavery activists of the time, including Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, and Sojourner Truth; her espionage and other services provided to the Union during the Civil War; and her later involvement in women's rights issues. She also recounts Tubman's early marriage, her many rescues of enslaved family members, the mysterious abduction of a fair-skinned girl who may have been her

own daughter, and her later marriage to a man nearly 20 years her junior; and she disputes the reported \$40,000 reward for Tubman's capture and reduces the number of slaves she rescued from more than 100 to about 70. *Vanessa Bush*

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