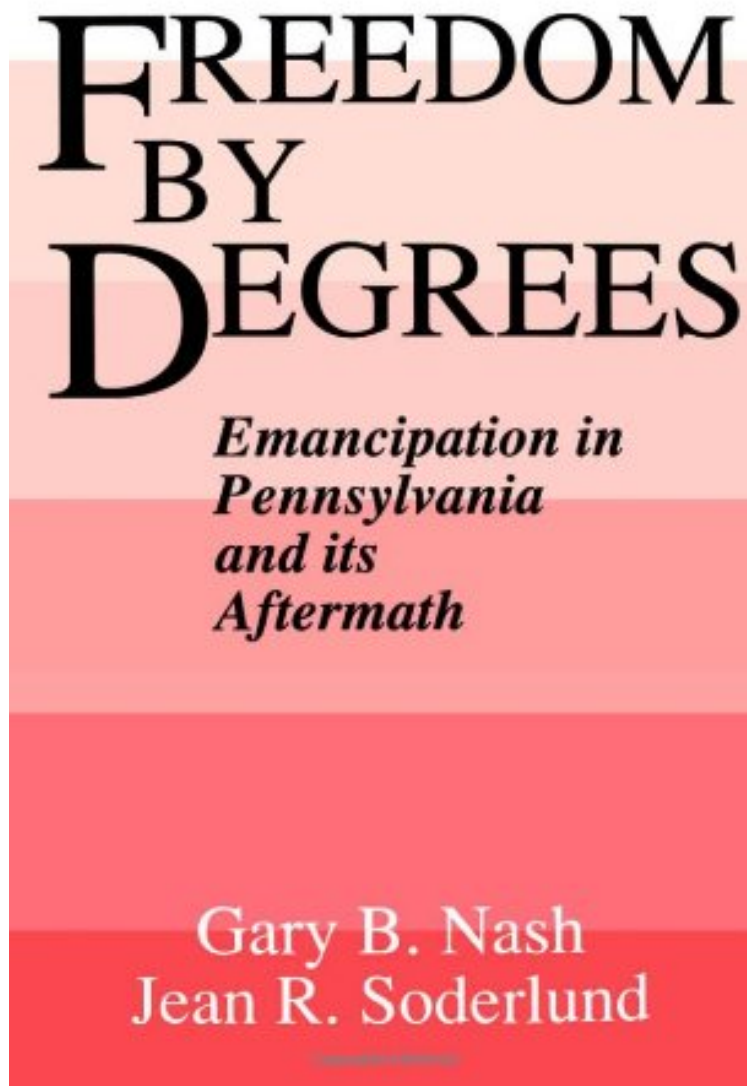


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# Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath

Gary B. Nash, Jean R. Soderlund  
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During the revolutionary era, in the midst of the struggle for liberty from Great Britain, Americans up and down the Atlantic seaboard confronted the injustice of holding slaves. Lawmakers debated abolition, masters considered freeing their slaves, and slaves emancipated themselves by running away. But by 1800, of states south of New England, only Pennsylvania had extricated itself from slavery, the triumph, historians have argued, of Quaker moralism and the philosophy of natural rights. With exhaustive research of individual acts of freedom, slave escapes, legislative action, and anti-slavery appeals, Nash and Soderlund penetrate beneath such broad generalizations and find a more complicated process at work. Defiant runaway slaves joined Quaker abolitionists like Anthony Benezet and members of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to end slavery and slave owners shrewdly calculated how to remove themselves from a morally bankrupt institution without suffering financial loss by freeing slaves as indentured servants, laborers, and cottagers.

"Deserving of a prominent place beside the best of the southern volumes. Freedom By Degrees, based on a motherlode of documentation including probate and manumission records, abolitionist society papers, and runaway slave literature, masterfully delineates the forces that brought about the gradual death of slavery in Pennsylvania and the subsequent transition to a semi-free black labor system....Cogent and sophisticated analysis."--Georgia Historical Quarterly"This is an important and stimulating study of slavery and abolition, resistance and reform in America."--Journal of Southern History"A valuable, thought-provoking study on the complex nature of emancipation in Pennsylvania."--New York History"A valuable, insightful work."--Pennsylvania History"The authors have produced a useful and revealing analysis. It aptly captures the ambiguities, half-steps, and uneven progress of the history of freedom in Early America."--The American Journal of Legal HistoryFrom the Back CoverWith exhaustive research of individual acts of freedom--such as suicide and slave escapes, legislative action, and antislavery appeals--Nash and Soderlund penetrate beneath such broad generalizations and find a more complicated process at work. Freedom by Degrees shows that the cessation of slavery in Pennsylvania was due not only to ideological commitment, but to economic viability for the masters and efforts on the part of the slaves as well.About the AuthorGary B. Nash is at University College at Los Angeles. Jean R. Soderlund is at Swarthmore College.