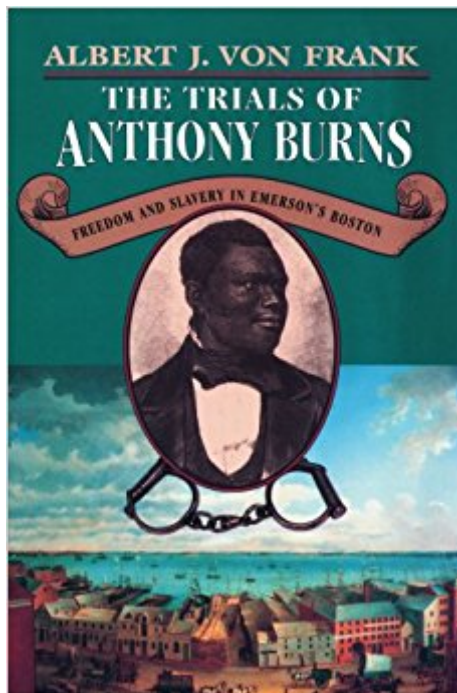




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The Trials Of Anthony Burns: Freedom And Slavery In Emerson's Boston



Synopsis

Before 1854, most Northerners managed to ignore the distant unpleasantness of slavery. But that year an escaped Virginia slave, Anthony Burns, was captured and brought to trial in Boston--and never again could Northerners look the other way. This is the story of Burns's trial and of how, arising in abolitionist Boston just as the incendiary Kansas-Nebraska Act took effect, it revolutionized the moral and political climate in Massachusetts and sent shock waves through the nation. In a searching cultural analysis, Albert J. von Frank draws us into the drama and the consequences of the case. He introduces the individuals who contended over the fate of the barely literate twenty-year-old runaway slave--figures as famous as Richard Henry Dana Jr., the defense attorney, as colorful as Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Bronson Alcott, who led a mob against the courthouse where Burns was held, and as intriguing as Moncure Conway, the Virginia-born abolitionist who spied on Burns's master. The story is one of desperate acts, even murder--a special deputy slain at the courthouse door--but it is also steeped in ideas. Von Frank links the deeds and rhetoric surrounding the Burns case to New England Transcendentalism, principally that of Ralph Waldo Emerson. His book is thus also a study of how ideas relate to social change, exemplified in the art and expression of Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Theodore Parker, Bronson Alcott, Walt Whitman, and others. Situated at a politically critical moment--with the Whig party collapsing and the Republican arising, with provocations and ever hotter rhetoric intensifying regional tensions--the case of Anthony Burns appears here as the most important fugitive slave case in American history. A stirring work of intellectual and cultural history, this book shows how the Burns affair brought slavery home to the people of Boston and brought the nation that much closer to the Civil War.

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Customer Reviews

Anthony Burns was a slave in Virginia who escaped by ship to Boston in 1854. His owner demanded his return to slavery under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, and his arrest and eventual return to Virginia created a sensation throughout the nation. Albert J. von Frank does a masterful job of telling the story of a legal case that resonated and no doubt helped accelerate the nation's inevitable drift toward Civil War. As gripping as a classic novel, the true story of the Burns case involves the leading abolitionists of the day, as well as observers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and even a Brooklyn journalist named Walt Whitman. The story of Anthony Burns (whose freedom was eventually purchased by abolitionists and who later died free in Canada) is a great American saga that deserves to be read, and which will greatly add to anyone's understanding of the root causes of the Civil War. --Robert McNamara --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Like Barbara Tuchman, von Frank makes history read like fiction. With the immediacy of a reenactment, he tells of the Northerners who protested when Anthony Burns, a Virginia slave, ran away to Boston and was ordered returned under the Fugitive Slave Law. He makes it seem like all of Boston got involved in Burns' case, and he clearly describes the personal investments, political balances, and ideological subtleties at stake. His lively sources span from notes on scrap paper to published poetry. The ending loses some momentum as the reader learns of the fallout after the trial, and some readers may need reminders about what "Hunker Whigs" and "Know-Nothings" were. Nonetheless, this is a most entertaining and informative view of history and an excellent study of the 1850s in Boston. Von Frank should also be commended for arguing that history is affected by ideas as much as by people. If ideas lead, as in this instance, to personal freedom and social equality, we can only hope he is right. Kevin Grandfield --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

great book

I enjoyed this book from beginning to end. This is a monumental piece of writing and extremely

important for anyone interested in American history particularly relating to slavery and abolition. it really does not get any better. Anyone in the civil rights movement , activist or attorney, should get a copy of this book. Get 10 copies and pass them around. It reads like a Dumas novel and informs like an encyclopedia. A masterpiece. Thank you professor Von Frank. Randy Credico Director William Moses Kunstler Fund For Racial Justice

Looking for an exciting book that you can't put down? Anthony Burns would be a great one. A slave who has been accused for stealing and he is on trial, fighting for his life and freedom. It's a sad book because he's in jail with water once a week, food twice a day (which is raw meat, cornbread, and really just scraps of food. The end is shocking and it's a great book that I recommend reading. You will never put it down.

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