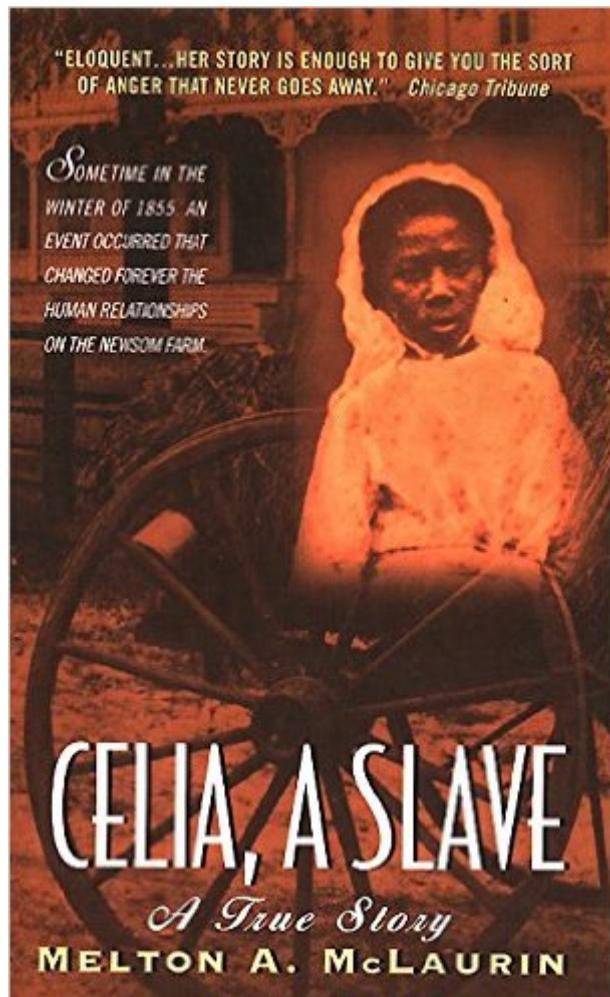


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Celia, A Slave



Synopsis

In 1850, fourteen-year-old Celia became the property of Robert Newsom, a prosperous and respected Missouri farmer. For the next five years, she was cruelly and repeatedly molested by her abusive master--and bore him two children in the process. But in 1855, driven to the limits of her endurance, Celia fought back. And at the tender age of eighteen, the desperate and frightened young black woman found herself on trial for Newsom's murder--the defendant in a landmark courtroom battle that threatened to undermine the very foundations of the South's most cherished institution. Based on court records, correspondences and newspaper accounts past and present, *Celia, A Slave* is a powerful masterwork of passion and scholarship--a stunning literary achievement that brilliantly illuminates one of the most extraordinary events in the long, dark history of slavery in America.

Book Information

Series: *Celia, A Slave* (Book 1)

Mass Market Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Avon; 1st edition (February 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0380803364

ISBN-13: 978-0380803361

Product Dimensions: 4.2 x 0.5 x 6.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (91 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #14,998 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 inÂ Books > History > World > Slavery & Emancipation #5 inÂ Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Abolition #6 inÂ Books > Law > Rules & Procedures > Civil Procedure

Customer Reviews

In this short book, Melton McLaurin has accomplished more than many historians accomplish in hundreds of pages. In this book the reader is drawn into the complicated world of antebellum America. In lucid prose, he simultaneously shows the ideology behind antebellum mastery, the connection between seemingly insignificant individuals and national politics, the hypocritical facade of the justice system, one woman's struggle to live under brutal oppression, and offers a compelling story that has a bit of mystery in it. He accomplishes this monumental task with clarity and transparency despite substantial holes in the documentary evidence. His work is a model to show

how historians can write for a popular audience and not oversimplify, nor fictionalize, the past. We cannot forget that America enslaved more than 4 million black people, tortured them, raped them, and stole their wages, then, after "freeing" them, forced them to live in apartheid-like conditions for nearly one hundred years. Every American must read books like Celia to confront their past. Even those who came more recently need to recognize that the wealth and the freedoms of the United States that drew millions to our nation, rests upon the back of four million involuntary laborers. Read more, learn more, do more.

Celia, A Slave, is a short yet powerful and sobering book. Suitable for age 15 and up, it is for anyone interested in women's/human rights, African-American History, and even Civil War buffs. It is a true story that is difficult to read in some places. Yet it is an important, very different book. I wish everyone would read this book. The story of Celia, a slave without even a last name, is the story of how impossible justice was for the African-American slaves of the antebellum South. Despite the valiant efforts of her defense attorneys, Celia's trial was a farce; she never had a chance at a fair trial. The judge had determined her fate before the trial commenced. Why did the trial take place even though it was predetermined? The answer lies in the institution of slavery itself. At the time of Celia's trial in 1885, slavery was tearing the country apart. In Missouri, where Celia killed her master, pro-slavery forces fiercely debated abolitionists over whether or not the Kansas Territory would be settled as a slave or a free state. The individual players in Celia belonged to the culture of slavery as much as Celia herself. Robert Newsom, Celia's master, was the patriarch of his household. His two adult daughters possessed more legal rights than slaves: albeit not much more. They depended upon their father for their support and survival. If the women felt any sympathy for Celia, who had approached them personally for help, it was likely surpassed by fear of being thrown out by their father. Rather than point fingers and shake heads in regret of the travesty of justice to Celia, we should think of the present-day inequities that need our attention and commitment. Will we have the courage to see the cause through to the bitter end? Hopefully our efforts will not also be in vain.

I was forced to read this short book in college. As I turned each page, I became more connected to the protagonist, Celia and her struggle to escape the control and degradation imposed on her by her master. This story sheds light on the antebellum South's lifestyle and mentality toward "Negroes" as property versus percentages of persons. A MUST READ, especially for African American youth seeking a personal understanding!

I feel that the story of Celia is better than the book. I say that because the book can be very vague and too narrow at the same time. The author will go on and on (for pages at a time) about an irrelevant political issue in great detail and frequently makes statements like, "it is possible that..." and "it is unknown what happened..." about Celia's story. To me, it felt like the author was trying to fill the holes left by Celia's lack of historical evidence with other, well-documented events of the time period. I understand some background information is important but that was too much and it happened too often. Despite some of the issues with the book, the story itself is great. I was completely sympathetic to Celia and wished that things turned out differently.

This book was purchased as required reading for a Freshman level - Junior College History Course. It was a good short read. Its most interesting part was the author's description of the socio-political climate in the years leading up to the Civil War - and to the causes leading up to the main event of the book. That said, it held my attention about half-way through the book - where the main event of the book occurred. After that - I found it difficult to stay engaged as the author trailed off into bland and overly wordy opinions and suppositions.

I read this for a history class and thought it was a really good and descriptive account of slavery and the justice system. If you're interested in history, then this would be a nice read because it doesn't read like a history book.

This riveting and slim book tells what it can of the story of Celia, a slave whose tragedy played out in rural Missouri in the 19th century. As he gives us Celia's story, McLaurin clearly explains the history of slavery in Missouri and how it intertwined with the national politics of slavery. Reading the book for that alone is well worth it. A Missouri farmer buys Celia from an owner whose name is still unknown. The evil of Celia's new bondage is cruelly and fatefully enforced, even as she and her new master travel back to his farm. What happens to her from then on is a reflection of all the evils of slavery. And the fact that there is so much about Celia's life and her identity that cannot be recovered is one of those very evils. Not to be missed!

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