



Race and Revolution (Merrill Jenson Lectures in Constitutional Studies)

Gary B. Nash

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The most profound crisis of conscience for white Americans at the end of the eighteenth century became their most tragic failure. *Race and Revolution* is a trenchant study of the revolutionary generation's early efforts to right the apparent contradiction of slavery and of their ultimate compromises that not only left the institution intact but provided it with the protection of a vastly strengthened government after 1788.

Reversing the conventional view that blames slavery on the South's social and economic structures, Nash stresses the role of the northern states in the failure to abolish slavery. It was northern racism and hypocrisy as much as southern intransigence that buttressed "the peculiar institution." Nash also shows how economic and cultural factors intertwined to result not in an apparently judicious decision of the new American nation but rather its most significant lost opportunity.

Race and Revolution describes the free black community's response to this failure of the revolution's promise, its vigorous and articulate pleas for justice, and the community's successes in building its own African-American institutions within the hostile environment of early nineteenth-century America.

Included with the text of *Race and Revolution* are nineteen rare and crucial documents—letters, pamphlets, sermons, and speeches—which provide evidence for Nash's controversial and persuasive claims. From the words of Anthony Benezet and Luther Martin to those of Absalom Jones and Caesar Sarter, readers may judge the historical record for themselves.

"In reality," argues Nash, "the American Revolution represents the largest slave uprising in our history." *Race and Revolution* is the compelling story of that failed quest for the promise of freedom.

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