

Document 5: Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad



Harriet Tubman was an African American abolitionist, humanitarian, armed scout, and spy for the Union Army during the American Civil War. Born into slavery in Maryland, Tubman escaped to freedom in the North in 1849. Despite experiencing physical abuse and injury in her youth, she was determined to break free from the horrors of slavery and assist others in doing the same. Instead of settling into a peaceful life, she became a staunch advocate for abolitionism and felt a sense of responsibility towards individuals who remained individuals, repeatedly risking her life and freedom to help others do the same.

Tubman was active in the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes and safe houses used by enslaved African Americans to escape into free states or Canada. With the help of other abolitionists, she made at least 13 missions back to Maryland to rescue approximately 70 enslaved people, including family and friends, using her intimate knowledge of the Underground Railroad network and the land. She walked long distances by night, avoiding bloodhound dogs that searched for runaway slaves, and relied on signals from Quakers and other abolitionists to navigate through the South. Tubman also provided medical care and assistance to the sick and dying, even after the Civil War.

Even with the passage of stricter laws and the threat of fines and capture, Harriet remained committed to her mission of helping others escape to freedom, rerouting the Underground Railroad to Canada to ensure their safety. During the Civil War, Tubman worked for the Union Army as a cook, nurse, and even a spy. She became the first woman to lead an armed expedition in the war, guiding the Combahee River Raid in 1863, which liberated more than 700 enslaved people in South Carolina. She also served as a nurse and cook for the Union Army. After the Civil War, she continued to feel a sense of responsibility towards others and opened the Home for the Aged in Auburn, New York, and in recognition of her bravery and lifetime of service, Tubman was awarded a pension from Congress in 1899.

Throughout her life, Tubman put others before herself. Despite the dangers of being a slave, escaping slavery, and then helping others to escape, she continued to fight for the rights of African Americans, women, and the poor. She even served as a suffragist, campaigning for women's right to vote. Tubman's selfless actions and dedication to the cause of freedom and equality have inspired generations of activists and humanitarians, and she is remembered as one of America's most courageous and heroic figures.

Adapted from:

<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/harriet-tubman-follow-the-north-star-to-freedom-handout-a-narrative>

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