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Young Adult Fiction

Send 'Em South (Young Heroes of History, Book 1)
Alan N. Kay
White Mane Kids
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After her mother is wrenched from the family and sold, twelve-year-old Lisa and her father flee the Georgia rice plantation where they have been slaves. They head north, hoping to find freedom and Lisa's mother. Their travels, aided by abolitionists, are perilous. Lisa is concealed in a box filled with cotton and stowed on a ship before they hide on land. Slave catchers are soon on their trail.

Just when freedom seems within grasp, and with the slave catchers and their dogs nearby, Lisa and her father try to cross the raging Connecticut River. In one of the most emotionally wrenching moments of this historically based novel, the father is swept away and Lisa must continue the journey alone.

This ambitious tale examines prejudice in both the North and the South during pre-Civil War times. Lisa makes it to Boston, where she is rescued by two young Irish immigrant cousins, David and George, who offer to hide her. David's abolitionist parents are in Kansas helping that free state enter the Union, so the boys are living with a bigoted uncle who encourages prejudice in his children. The family is as deeply divided in its feelings as the nation will soon be.

The novel demonstrates how prejudice extends beyond black and white: the Irish are having trouble assimilating, and even other free blacks cannot be trusted to help runaway slaves. David offers Lisa his mother's explanation: people need to feel respected and when they are put down by one group, they will "find another group to hate and make fun of" so they can feel better about themselves.

In this book, with its themes of courage, friendship that ignores skin color, and the love between parent and child, the author does not flinch from portraying bigotry and the cruelty and evil of slavery and the slave trade, nor from words of prejudice such as “nigger.” Its historical authenticity is slightly marred, however, by Lisa’s and David’s use of modern slang words like “wow” and “cool.”

An award-winning social studies teacher and author of Jamestown Journey, Kay weaves historical characters into the story and devises a realistic, rather than a happy, ending. This is the first in a series designed to let readers “experience” history. If nothing else, this story should make them think.