



# Slave Narratives in the Newberry Collection

## How to Use Our Collection

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## Slave Narratives at the Newberry Library

Slave narratives recount the personal experiences of antebellum slaves or former slaves, and comprise one of the most extensive and influential traditions in African American literature and culture. Slave narratives were hugely popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with many going through multiple reprintings and selling tens of thousands of copies. In fact, until the 1930s slave narratives outnumbered novels written by African Americans.

The Newberry Library owns many original slave narratives, as well as the United States Works Progress Administration (WPA) Slave Narrative Collection: *American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, **Call #: Local History Ref E444.A45 1972**.

This pathfinder provides a selection of slave narratives, as well as reference sources that identify individual narratives. Also included are suggestions for how to go about finding items in our collections. While the library holds many sources concerning slavery (e.g. periodicals, newspapers, music), this pathfinder concentrates primarily on autobiographies and biographies published in book or pamphlet form.

## Some Background Reading

Andrews, William L., Frances Smith Foster, Trudier Harris, eds. *The Oxford companion to African American literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. **Call #: Ref PS153.N5 O96 1997**.

This book gives a very general, but helpful overview. It is arranged alphabetically, so you can check the main entries under slave narratives and slavery; or you can check the index for entries that cross-reference slave narratives or slavery.

Andrews, William L. *To Tell a Free Story: the First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986. **Call #: E 185.96 .A57 1986**

Foster, Frances Smith. *Witnessing Slavery: the Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994. **Call #: PS 366 .A35 F6 1994**. These two books examine slave autobiographies as a literary genre. Andrews provides an annotated bibliography of slave autobiographies and biographies; Foster provides a particularly helpful selective bibliography of secondary sources.

## Selected Slave Narratives

Addington, Thomas (Rev.). Jim Baker. *A Thrilling Episode of Ante-Bellum Days. A True Story of the Oppressed Among Friends and Foes.* Winchester, IN: A. C. Beeson & Sons, 1898. **Call #: H5832.065**

*Aunt Sally; or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams, of Detroit, Michigan.* Cincinnati: American Reform Tract and Book Society, 1858. **Call #: H5832.965**

Ball, Charles. *Fifty Years in Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave.* Indianapolis, IN: Asher, 1860. **Call #: H5832.068** (Several editions—consult catalog.)

Berlin, Ira, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller, eds. *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk about their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Freedom.* New York: The New Press, 1998. **Call #: E443.R46 1998**

Brown, John. *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings and Escape of John Brown, A Fugitive Slave.* London, 1855. **Call #: H5832.12**

Clarke, Lewis Garrard. *Narrative of the Sufferings of Lewis Clarke, During a Captivity of More than Twenty-five Years, Among the Algerines of Kentucky...* Boston: David H. Ela, 1845. **Call #: H5832.169**

Furman, Jan, ed. *Slavery in the Clover Bottoms: John McCline's Narrative of His Life During Slavery and the Civil War.* Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1998. **Call #: E514.5 13<sup>th</sup> .M38 1998**

Griffiths, Mattie. *Autobiography of a Female Slave.* New York: Redfield, 1857. **Call #: H5832.373**

Hughes, Louis. *Thirty Years a Slave. From Bondage to Freedom. The Institution of Slavery as Seen on the Plantation and in the Home of the Planter.* Milwaukee: South Side Printing Co., 1897. **Call #: H5832.424**

Mars, James. *Life of James Mars, A Slave Born and Sold in Connecticut.* Hartford, CT: Case, Lockwood & Co., 1865. **Call #: H5832.553**

Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave. A Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841 and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation near the Red River, in Louisiana.* Buffalo: Derby, Orton and Mulligan, 1853. **Call #: H5832.63**

Richards, John. *Anecdotes and Memoirs of William Boen, A Coloured Man, Who Lived and Died near Mount Holly, New Jersey, to Which Is Added, The Testimony of Friends of Mount Holly Monthly Meeting Concerning Him.* Philadelphia: J. Richards, 1834.

**Call #: Case E444.B56 no. 2.**

Singleton, William Henry. *Recollections of My Slavery Days.* Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1999. **Call #: E445.N8 S56 1999**

Smith, Harry. *Fifty Years of Slavery in the United States of America.* Grand Rapids, MI: West Michigan Printing Co., 1891. **Call #: H5832.823**

Smith, James L. *Autobiography of James L. Smith, Including Also Reminiscences of Slave Life, Recollections of the War, Education of Freedmen, Causes of the Exodus, etc.* Norwich, CT: Bulletin Co., 1881. **Call #: H5832.825**

Steward, Austin. *Twenty-two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman.* Rochester, NY: Wm. Alling, 1857. **Call #: H5832.837**

Thompson, John. *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave, Containing His History of 25 Years in Bondage and His Providential Escape.* Worcester, MA: John Thompson, 1866. **Call #: H5832.875**

Twelvetrees, Harper, ed. *The Story of the Life of John Anderson, the Fugitive Slave.* London: Wm. Tweedie, 1863. **Call #: H5832.04**

Watson, Henry. *Narrative of Henry Watson, a Fugitive Slave.* Boston: Bela Marsh, 1848. **Call #: H5832.95**

Webb, William. *The History of William Webb.* Detroit: Egbert Hoekstra, 1873. **Call #: H5832.96**

Webster, Delia Ann. *Kentucky Jurisprudence. A History of the Trial of Miss Delia A. Webster at Lexington, Kentucky Dec'r 17-21, 1844...on a Charge of Aiding Slaves to Escape...* Vergennes, VT: E.W. Blaisdell, 1845. **Call #: H5832.093**

## Bibliographies

North American Slave Narratives:

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/biblintro.html>. Put together by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the North American Slave Narratives collection includes all the existing autobiographical narratives of fugitive and former slaves published as broadsides, pamphlets, or books in English up to 1920. Also included are many of the biographies of fugitive and former slaves and some significant fictionalized slave narratives published in English before 1920. Although this collection does not claim to be complete and final, it is fairly comprehensive. It is particularly helpful in that the bibliography can be viewed both alphabetically and chronologically. Many of the narratives have also been digitized.

Arksey, Laura, Nancy Pries, and Marcia Reed. *American Diaries. Volume 1: Diaries written from 1492 to 1844; Volume 2: Diaries written from 1845-1980.* Call #: Ref Z5305.U5 A74 1983. These two volumes are guides to more than 5000 *published* diaries and journals; there is a focus on books that are day-to-day records as opposed to narratives or memoirs. The entries are arranged chronologically. In volume one, many of the entries concerning the subject of slavery will not be by slaves, but by slave owners and traders, visitors to the South, and abolitionists; check the index under the subject headings of slave; slavery; and slaves. In volume two, check under the same headings in the index, as well as civil war, contrabands and freedmen.

*Bibliography of American Imprints to 1901.* New York: K.G. Saur, 1993. Call #: Ref Z1215 .B47 1993. An extremely handy resource for finding printed materials. In the Subject Index, check under a variety of Headings, including:

- Slave Narratives
- Slaves
- Slaves. Autobiography
- Slaves. Country. Biography (e.g. Slaves. United States. Biography)
- Slaves. State. Biography (Slaves. Illinois. Biography)
- Slaves. Personal Narratives

You can also check for titles in the Main Index: for example, "Narrative of . . ." yields some possibilities. You can also check the Date and Place Indexes if you are interested in narratives from a particular year(s) or place.

Brignano, Russell C. *Black Americans in Autobiography.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1984. Call #: Ref Z1361 .N39 B67 1984. While this bibliography broadly covers all African-American autobiography, it can still be helpful in searching out the narrower category of slave narratives. Arranged alphabetically by Author, each entry includes information about reprints; symbols for up to ten known library locations; and cross-references to other autobiographical volumes by the author or by a member of his or her family. Brignano adds short but informative descriptions for each entry as well. Also included is a checklist of post-World War II reprintings of autobiographies published before 1865.

Dumond, Dwight Lowell. *A Bibliography of Antislavery in America.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, c1961. Call #: Ref Z1249 .S6 D8. This bibliography includes literature written and circulated by those active in the antislavery movement. It includes not only American publications, but also British ones that were widely circulated in the U.S. The bibliography is arranged alphabetically by author.

Matthews, Geraldine O. *Black American Writers, 1173-1949: A Bibliography and Union List.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1975. Call #: Ref Z1361 .N39 M35. This bibliography is an attempt to identify African-American materials held in repositories in six southeastern states: Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. It includes a section on "Slavery, Anti-Slavery, Slave Trade, and Personal Narratives" which is organized alphabetically by author.

Parrish, T. Michael and Robert M. Willingham, Jr. *Confederate Imprints: A bibliography of Southern Publications from Secession to Surrender.* Call #: Ref Z1242.5 .P37 1987. This is a bibliography of Confederate publications, and one can find some slave narratives in the section titled "Politics, Economics, and Social Aspects." Although this section is arranged alphabetically by author, it is a bit difficult to skim because of the variety of subjects included.

Southern, Eileen and Josephine R.B. Wright. *African-American Traditions in Song, Sermon, Tale, and Dance, 1600s-1920: an Annotated Bibliography of Literature, Collections, and Artworks*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1990. **Call #: Ref Z5956 .A47 S68 1990**. While not a bibliography of slave narratives per se, this book is still immensely useful, as it provides a unique perspective to writings by and about African-Americans. It is a compilation of both primary and secondary sources, and includes works known for their explication and interpretation of African-American culture; the compilers also give priority to “firsts” in various areas – first collection of slave songs, first compilation of Brer Rabbit tales, first description of a black church religious service. It is organized by time period, and then sorted into the categories of “Social Activities” (incl. items related to social customs, and holiday festivals); “Religious Experience;” and “Song.” Short descriptions are given for each entry, and the book is fairly easy to browse.

Work, Monroe N. *A Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America*. New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1928. **Call #: Ref Z1361.N39 W8**. Despite the early publication date, this book remains a standard used by researchers. Work devotes an entire section to slave narratives, as well as publications concerning other facets of slavery including: economic aspects, social aspects, the abolition movement, fugitive slaves and the underground railroad, and African-Americans as soldiers. Entries are arranged alphabetically by author within each section.

Yellin, Jean Fagan. *The Pen is Ours: a Listing of Writings by and about African-American women before 1910 with secondary bibliography to the present*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. **Call #: Ref Z1229. N39 Y44 1991**. Part II of this bibliography contains a list of writings by and about women who had been held in slavery and whose dictated narratives or biographies were published before the end of 1910. Entries are arranged alphabetically by author.

## Searching the Online Catalog

If you know the author or title of the item you want, simply search using the Browse Author, or Start of Title commands within the online catalog. If you do not know the author or title, you may try searching under the following subject headings:

Slaves' writings, American  
Slaves--United States—Biography

You may also want to consult one of the bibliographies listed above to find specific authors or titles.

This quick guide was created for programs associated with the exhibition *Photographing Freetowns: African American Kentucky through the Lens of Helen Balfour Morrison, 1935-1946*, shown at the Newberry from January 20 through April 15, 2017.

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