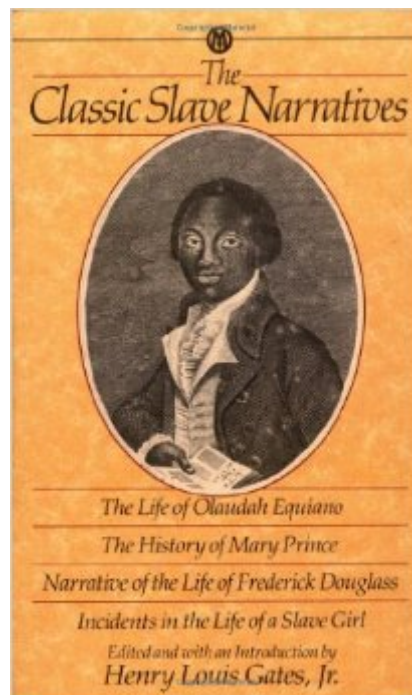


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# The Classic Slave Narratives: The Life Of Olaudah Equiano / The History Of Mary Prince / Narrative Of The Life Of Frederick Douglass



## Synopsis

These autobiographical narratives are the first texts in which black slaves began to proclaim themselves as human beings. The literature forms an intriguing personal tapestry, encompassing varied stories but inevitably depicting the horrors of human bondage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The practice of enslavement in the Americas is a phenomenon of staggering proportions. It is also one of the most thoroughly documented systems of human rights abuse in history. "The Classic Slave Narratives" brings together four powerful testaments of individuals who survived enslavement in the Americas. The book also contains an insightful introduction by scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. As Gates notes in the introduction, it has been estimated that more than 6,000 ex-slaves left some form of written testament between 1703 and 1944--an amazing body of literature. "The Classic Slave Narratives" is thus just a tiny part of a vast genre. Specifically, this anthology contains "the Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano," "The History of Mary Prince," "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," and Harriet Jacobs' "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." Each of the four powerful texts offers an effective complement to the others in the collection. In other words, each narrative illuminates at least one unique and important aspect of the American slave experience. Olaudah Equiano, for example, tells what it was like for a native African to be enslaved and transported across the Atlantic in a slave ship. Prince illuminates the life of a slave woman on the Caribbean islands. Douglass, born to a slave mother and a white father, describes in detail his

quest for literacy. And Jacobs offers an incisive window into the sexual pathology of the slaveowning society. These four texts are both valuable historical documents and fascinating works of literature. Much American literature--autobiography, poetry, novels, essays, and other genres--demonstrates the influence of, or parallels to, these pivotal texts. "The Classic Slave Narratives" is a necessary text for those interested in United States and Caribbean history, in American literature, in literacy, or in human rights.

These are stories of courage against great odds, first-hand accounts of an incredible institutionalized holocaust that was standard operating procedure in this country for hundreds of years. Some of these writings were best sellers of their time, but today they are too much an ill-kept secret. Yet I bet the average person living in the U.S. today only knows the name of one of the authors of these narratives. Read a first-hand account of the middle passage. Learn about the woman who spent almost a decade in a crawl space to escape the life of a slave. Find out the story of a man who risked life and limb to give public lectures against slavery, while he himself was still not legally free. You will never know what has been hidden from you, you owe it to yourself, your mother, and your child to read these stories told by Black people who lived through, and fought against, slavery. I also highly recommend *Beloved*, both the movie and the book, as well as the recent PBS series on slavery.

Dr. Henry Louis Gates continues his important work in this volume. It should be mandatory in every middle school in America, without exception. Besides breathing emotional life into the lives of slaves - which is always missing in the broader historical context - one comes to realize how England, France, America and Portugal became such wealthy nations: through many generations of people consigned to labor from early childhood until they died. Dr. Gates doesn't need to make this political observation - the reader arrives at that conclusion from the narratives themselves. The narrators communicate how their minds and hearts stayed on freedom. Such thoughts occur while walking to the fields, while forced to observe others being brutalized, or when they have been promised freedom, only to find themselves sold to another owner and bound for the West Indies instead. When the last page is turned, not only does the reader feel a profound gratitude - for the narrators, for those whose stories were not recorded, for those who died on the middle passage or jumped overboard instead, and for our own relative freedom - but one understands that the issue of reparations from England, France, and the U.S. isn't far-fetched at all. It would have been the only decent thing to have done. I felt deep gratitude to Dr. Gates also for helping to ensure that this

history is preserved, made available, and told over and over again. The loving care with which this volume has been edited is evident.

Very moving and just kind of "tell it like it is". The writing style is very easy to read and understand. I had to purchase this for a college class, and found that I didn't have an easy time putting it down. Not for the very depressed or light of heart. Also, it's interesting to do some background research on the slaves in the narratives and see what happened to them and what happened to their owners.

This is such an important book. I truly believe that every person should read slave narratives in their lives and remain educated on the subject of slavery so humanity doesn't regress back to this type of evil. Although we're slightly better in 2016, there's still so many issues with racism, and I believe that if more people were educated or less ignorant, things could improve.

Henry Louis Gates provides readers with an important contribution to the many first-hand accounts of enslavement. His scintillating introduction ties together the life and times of four African Americans who narrated their own story of slavery: Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs. The diversity chosen by Gates allows readers to gain a comprehensive perspective of the horrors of slavery: women/men, South/North, born in Africa/born in America. Readers desiring additional first-hand accounts are encouraged to consider compilations by Yetman of the slave interviews. Reviewer: Bob Kelleman, Ph.D. is the author of *Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*, *Spiritual Friends: A Methodology of Soul Care And Spiritual Direction*, and *Soul Physicians*.

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