

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-61526-6 - The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative

Edited by Audrey A. Fisch

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SLAVE NARRATIVE

The slave narrative has emerged as a fundamental genre within literary studies. This Companion examines the slave narrative's relation to transatlantic abolitionism, British and American literary traditions including captivity narratives, autobiography, and sentimental literature, and the larger African American literary tradition. The volume also explores the history of the genre, including its rediscovery and authentication, its subsequent critical reception, and its continued importance to modern authors such as Toni Morrison and Edward P. Jones. Attention is paid both to well-known slave narratives, such as those by Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, and to a wide range of lesser-known narratives. With its chronology and guide to further reading, the Companion provides both an easy entry point for students new to the subject and comprehensive coverage and original insights for scholars in the field.

AUDREY FISCH is Professor in the Departments of English and Elementary and Secondary Education at New Jersey City University.

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AUDREY A. FISCH  
*New Jersey City University*



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For Mark Flynn and Max Flysch

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*Boy Who Was Thrown Away* (1987), and *Other Nature* (1995), and the author of two critical studies, *Conceived By Liberty* (1995) and *Household Words* (2005).

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Finally, this book is dedicated, with love, to Mark and Max.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1510 The Spanish begin importation of African slaves into the Caribbean
- 1619 A Dutch ship sells twenty slaves kidnapped from Africa to the English settlers at Jamestown, Virginia, establishing slavery in the New World
- 1662 Virginia passes a law making slaves any children born to enslaved women
- 1701 Samuel Sewall writes *The Selling of Joseph*, the first antislavery document published in America
- 1702 *Adam Negro's Tryall* is recorded by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts
- 1712 Slave uprising in New York City
- 1713 The Treaty of Utrecht, concluding the War of the Spanish Succession, grants England the exclusive right to supply slaves to Spain's American colonies
- 1739 Slave rebellion in South Carolina
- 1750 Approximate population of the thirteen American colonies is 236,000 black slaves and 934,000 whites.
- 1754 John Woolman publishes *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*
- 1758 The Society of Friends in London and Philadelphia condemn slavery and the slave trade at their annual meetings
- 1760 Tacky's Revolt in Jamaica leads to the death of more than sixty whites and four hundred blacks; the first American slave

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narrative, Briton Hammon's *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man* is published in Boston

- 1767 Anthony Benezet publishes *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and the Colonies*
- 1769 Granville Sharp publishes *A Representation of the Justice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery in England*
- 1772 Lord Mansfield decides in favor of the slave James Somerset, and the *Somerset* decision declares that slavery cannot exist within England and that a slave brought to England is free and cannot be returned to slavery in the colonies (much slavery continued in England nonetheless)
- 1774 John Wesley publishes *Thoughts upon Slavery*; the US Continental Conference adopts a resolution banning the importation of slaves and American participation in the slave trade after December 1
- 1775 The royal governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, promises freedom to slaves who desert their American masters and fight in the King's service
- 1775–83 American Revolution
- 1776 Virginia slave owner Thomas Jefferson writes the Declaration of Independence; in it, he asserts that “all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”; Jefferson also writes in a draft statement that “the present King of England . . . has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation hither,” but these words are omitted in the final document
- 1777 Vermont prohibits slavery in its constitution; in subsequent years, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Rhode Island adopt gradual emancipation laws

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- 1781 The *Zong* massacre occurs, in which the captain of a slave ship orders 133 slaves thrown overboard and drowned so ship owners can collect insurance money
- 1783 Anthony Benezet publishes *The Case of Our Fellow Creatures, the Oppressed Africans*
- 1784 James Ramsay publishes *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the Sugar Colonies*
- 1786 Thomas Clarkson publishes *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*; the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor is established in London and begins planning a freed slave colony in Sierra Leone
- 1787 Quobna Ottobah Cugoano publishes *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*; the US Constitutional Convention forbids Congress from ending the slave trade until 1808, provides for the return of fugitive slaves, apportions representation for slaves as the equivalent of three-fifths of a free person, and enacts the Northwest Ordinance, prohibiting slavery in the territories north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi Rivers; the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade is established in London; Olaudah Equiano, Cugoano, and others campaign as “Sons of Africa” against slavery by sending letters to prominent people and periodicals
- 1788 John Newton publishes *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*
- 1789 Olaudah Equiano publishes in England *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*; William Wilberforce introduces in the British Parliament twelve resolutions against the slave trade, but Parliament decides to regulate, not end, the English slave trade
- 1790 Slave revolts and civil war in Saint Domingue
- 1791 William Wilberforce’s bill for the abolition of the slave trade is defeated in the House of Commons
- 1792 Freetown is founded in Sierra Leone with 1,190 blacks from Nova Scotia and 119 Europeans from England

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1793 Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin, a machine that separates the seed from the cotton fiber, and thus paves the way for large-scale cotton cultivation and the need for slave labor throughout the South; William Wilberforce's second bill for abolition passes the House of Commons but is defeated in the House of Lords
- 1800 US census lists 108,395 free colored people, 893,041 slaves, and 4,304,489 whites
- 1804 Haiti becomes an independent nation
- 1807 A bill abolishing the slave trade within the British colonies is passed in the House of Lords, and Britain abolishes the slave trade; the United States also bans the importation of slaves
- 1808 Thomas Clarkson publishes *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*; Henri Grégoire publishes *De la littérature des nègres*, subsequently translated and published as *An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties and Literature of Negroes*
- 1810 Portugal adopts gradual abolition of the slave trade
- 1812 War between the USA and Britain
- 1815 Spain adopts gradual abolition of the slave trade
- 1816 The American Colonization Society is formed to promote the colonization of Africa by freed slaves; George Bourne publishes *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable*; slaves revolt in Barbados
- 1820 As part of the Missouri Compromise, the USA admits Missouri as a slave state and forbids slavery north of the 36° 30' latitude
- 1822 Founding of a colony for freed slaves (later named Liberia) on the West African coast
- 1823 The Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery is formed under Thomas Folwell Buxton and establishes *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*; William Wilberforce publishes *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire*; Thomas Clarkson publishes

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*Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves in the British Colonies*; slaves revolt in Demerara and Guyana

- 1824 Robert Wedderburn publishes *The Horrors of Slavery*
- 1826 James Stephen publishes *England Enslaves by Her Own Colonies*
- 1828 Lord Stowell rules, in the case of an Antiguan slave named Grace, that residence in England does not guarantee freedom for a slave who voluntarily returns to the colonies
- 1829 Mexico abolishes slavery; David Walker publishes *Walker's Appeal in Four Articles*
- 1831 William Lloyd Garrison begins publishing *The Liberator*; Mary Prince dictates her story to Susanna Strickland and the first slave narrative authored by a woman is published to public controversy in London as *The History of Mary Prince*; the largest slave rebellion in the British West Indies, known as the "Christmas Rebellion" or the "Baptist War" and led by Samuel Sharpe, takes place in western Jamaica; Nat Turner leads a slave rebellion in Virginia which ends with the deaths of 57 whites, 100 blacks, and the death by hanging of Turner and 19 of his followers
- 1833 Parliament passes the Emancipation Act, emancipating 780,000 slaves in the West Indian colonies but requiring them to serve their masters for six years as apprentices; William Lloyd Garrison forms the American Anti-Slavery Society
- 1834 The British Emancipation Act begins to take effect
- 1838 The British abandon apprenticeship and give full freedom to former slaves
- 1839 Theodore Weld publishes *Slavery as It Is*
- 1840 The World Antislavery Convention takes place in London, with Thomas Clarkson presiding
- 1845 Frederick Douglass publishes *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

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- 1848 Slavery is abolished in the French Caribbean
- 1850 The US Congress passes the Compromise of 1850, which includes the Fugitive Slave Law
- 1851 Harriet Beecher Stowe begins publishing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *National Era*, an abolitionist weekly newspaper; the novel is published in full in 1852 and becomes a world-wide bestseller
- 1857 The US Supreme Court in the *Dred Scott* case rejects the claim of freedom of Scott, a slave, after being taken to a free territory; instead, the Court rules that the federal government cannot outlaw slavery in the US territories and that African Americans have “no rights which the white man was bound to respect”
- 1859 Abolitionist John Brown executes a raid on a federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in order to arm nearby slaves and begin a slave revolt; Brown is captured by Marines, tried for treason and murder, and executed
- 1860 Abraham Lincoln is elected president of the USA on a platform that opposes the extension of slavery; Southern states begin seceding from the Union
- 1861 Harriet Jacobs publishes *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, the first slave narrative written by a woman
- 1861–65 American Civil War
- 1862 Congress abolishes slavery in Washington DC and passes a law freeing slaves who escape from the Confederacy
- 1863 President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves
- 1865 The 13th Amendment to the US Constitution declares “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction”
- 1901 Booker T. Washington publishes *Up from Slavery*
- 1936 The Federal Writers' Project begins a two-year project of interviewing and recording the stories of more than 2,000 former slaves



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- 1967 William Styron receives the Pulitzer Prize for *The Confessions of Nat Turner*
- 1976 Alex Haley publishes *Roots* and wins the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award
- 1987 Toni Morrison wins the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved*
- 2004 Edward P. Jones wins the Pulitzer Prize for *The Known World*