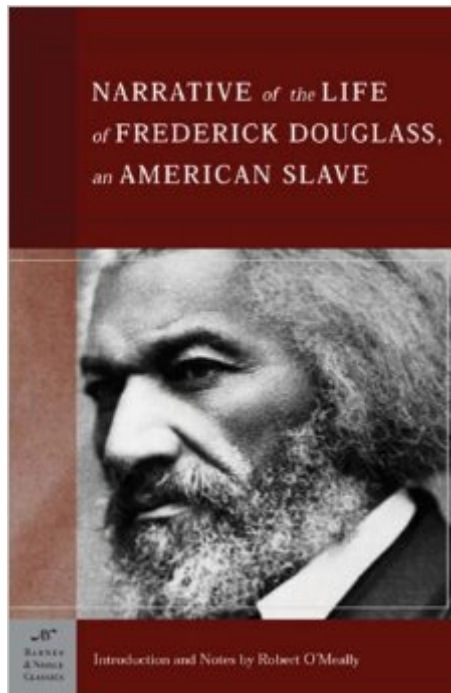


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Narrative Of The Life Of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (Barnes & Noble Classics)



Synopsis

Narrative of Frederick Douglass, *An American Slave*, by Frederick Douglass, is part of the Barnes & Noble Classics series, which offers quality editions at affordable prices to the student and the general reader, including new scholarship, thoughtful design, and pages of carefully crafted extras. Here are some of the remarkable features of Barnes & Noble Classics: New introductions commissioned from today's top writers and scholars; Biographies of the authors; Chronologies of contemporary historical, biographical, and cultural events; Footnotes and endnotes; Selective discussions of imitations, parodies, poems, books, plays, paintings, operas, statuary, and films inspired by the work; Comments by other famous authors; Study questions to challenge the reader's viewpoints and expectations; Bibliographies for further reading; Indices & Glossaries, when appropriate. All editions are beautifully designed and are printed to superior specifications; some include illustrations of historical interest. Barnes & Noble Classics pulls together a constellation of influences—biographical, historical, and literary—to enrich each reader's understanding of these enduring works.

No book except perhaps *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had as powerful an impact on the abolitionist movement as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. But while Stowe wrote about imaginary characters, Douglass's book is a record of his own remarkable life. Born a slave in 1818 on a plantation in Maryland, Douglass taught himself to read and write. In 1845, seven years after escaping to the North, he published *Narrative*, the first of three autobiographies. This book calmly but dramatically recounts the horrors and the accomplishments of his early years—the daily, casual brutality of the white masters; his painful efforts to educate himself; his decision to find freedom or die; and his harrowing but successful escape. An astonishing orator and a skillful writer, Douglass became a newspaper editor, a political activist, and an eloquent spokesperson for the civil rights of African Americans. He lived through the Civil War, the end of slavery, and the beginning of segregation. He was celebrated internationally as the leading black intellectual of his day, and his story still resonates in ours.

Robert O'Meally is Zora Neale Hurston Professor of Literature at Columbia University and the Director of Columbia University's Center for Jazz Studies. He wrote the introduction and notes to the Barnes & Noble classics edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

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Customer Reviews

Harriet Jacobs' (1813-1897) "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" is one of the few accounts of Southern slavery written by a woman. The book was published in 1861 through the efforts of Maria Child, an abolitionist who edited the book and wrote an introduction to it. The book had its origin in a series of letters Jacobs wrote between 1853 and 1861 to her friends in the abolitionist movement, notably a woman named Amy Post. Historically, there was some doubt about the authorship of the book and about the authenticity of the incidents it records. These doubts have largely been put to rest by the discovery of the letters. The book indeed has elements of a disguise and of a novel. Jacobs never uses her real name but calls herself instead "Linda Brent." The other characters in the book are also given pseudonyms. Jacobs tells us in the Preface to the book (signed "Linda Brent") that she changed names in order to protect the privacy of individuals but that the incidents recounted in the narrative are "no fiction". Jacobs was born in slave rural North Carolina. As a young girl, she learned to read and write, which was highly rare among slaves. At about the age of 11 she was sent to live as a slave to a doctor who also owned a plantation, called "Dr. Flint" in the book. Jacobs book describes well the cruelties of the "Peculiar Institution -- in terms of its beatings, floggings, and burnings, overwork, starvation, and dehumanization. It focuses as well upon the selling and wrenching apart of families that resulted from the commodification of people in the slave system. But Jacobs' book is unique in that it describes first-hand the sexual indignities to which women were subjected in slavery. (Other accounts, such as those of Frederick Douglass, were written by men.

This autobiographical condemnation of the south's Peculiar Institution puts a face on the suffering of the enslaved. American history is full of accounts of slavery which tend to broad overviews of the institution, whereas this book is written by an escaped slave who does not flinch at sharing every detail of her miserable life. Unlike other narratives which distorted the slave's voice through the

perspective of the interviewers/authors who were notorious for exaggerating the uneducated slaves' broken english, this book is largely Ms. Jacobs' own words. She was taught to read and write as a child by a kind mistress, so she was able to put her thoughts on paper with clarity that surprised many. Ms. Jacobs had an editor, but this book seems to be her unfiltered view of the world. It is one thing to hear about how slaveholders took liberties with female slaves, it is quite another to read in stark detail about women being commanded to lay down in fields, young girls being seduced and impregnated and their offspring sold to rid the slaveholder of the evidence of his licentiousness. The author talks about jealous white women, enraged by their husbands' behavior, taking it out on the hapless slaves. The white women were seen as ladies, delicate creatures prone to fainting spells and hissy fits whereas the Black women were beasts of burden, objects of lust and contempt simultaneously. Some slave women resisted these lustful swine and were beaten badly because of it. It was quite a conundrum. To be sure, white women suffered under this disgusting system too, though not to the same degree as the female slaves who had no one to protect them and their virtue. Even the notion of a slave having virtue is mocked.

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