

Telling the Story:

Enslavement of African People in the United States

Recommended Fiction and Nonfiction Books

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Fiction

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman

Ernest J. Gaines
1971

Miss Jane Pittman is one of the most unforgettable heroines in American fiction, a woman whose life has come to symbolize the struggle for freedom, dignity, and justice. Ernest J. Gaines's now-classic novel--written as an autobiography--spans one hundred years of Miss Jane's remarkable life, from her childhood enslaved on a Louisiana plantation to the Civil Rights era of the 1960s.

Beloved

Toni Morrison
1987

This novel looks unflinchingly at the history of slavery and turns it into a powerful story. Sethe, born into slavery and now living in Ohio, is haunted by the ghost of her baby whose tombstone is engraved with a single word: Beloved.

Book of Night Women

Marlon James
2009

The *Book of Night Women* is the story of Lilith, born into slavery on a Jamaican plantation, who has a dark power both revered and feared. Set in the late 1700s, this sweeping novel is a brutally honest portrayal of the horrors of enslavement.

Cane River

Lalita Tademy
2001

Beginning with her great-great-great-great grandmother who was enslaved by a Creole family, Lalita Tademy chronicles four generations of strong, determined black women as they battle injustice to unite their family and forge success on their own terms

Clotel: or, The President's Daughter

William Wells Brown

1853

Originally published in 1853, *Clotel* is the first novel by an African American. In *Clotel*, the author focuses on the experiences of an enslaved woman, treating the themes of gender, race, and slavery in distinctive ways.

Freeman

Leonard Pitts

2012

Freeman takes place in the first few months following the Confederate surrender and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Upon learning of Lee's surrender, Sam-- an escaped slave who once worked for the Union Army -- first returns to his old plantation and then walks across the ravaged South in search of his lost wife.

Homegoing

Yaa Gyasi

2016

Gyasi's debut novel begins with the stories of two half-sisters from different villages in Ghana, one married off to a British slave trader on the gold coast and one sold into slavery. This sprawling epic traces the families from generation to generation through three hundred years of history and shows the legacy of slavery from very different perspectives.

Kindred

Octavia Butler

1979

Dana, a black woman, finds herself repeatedly transported to the antebellum South, where she must make sure that Rufus, the plantation owner's son, survives to father Dana's ancestor. Butler tackles a subject that is very real, but manages to stay true to her sci-fi roots in *Kindred*.

The Known World

Edward P. Jones

2003

An ambitious, luminously written novel that ranges seamlessly between the past and future and back again to the present, this Pulitzer Prize winner weaves together the lives of freed and enslaved blacks, whites, and Indians -- and allows for a deeper understanding of the enduring multidimensional world created by the institution of slavery.

A Mercy

Toni Morrison

2008

Set in the Americas in the 1680s *A Mercy* reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery. It is the ambivalent, disturbing story of a mother who casts off her daughter in order to save her, and of a daughter who may never escape that abandonment.

Price of a Child

Lorene Cary
1995

With *Price of a Child*, the story of Ginnie Pryor and her quest for freedom, Cary has drawn a vivid portrait of survival and the struggle for self-worth against a backdrop of one of the bleakest periods in American history.

Underground Railroad

Colson Whitehead
2016

In Whitehead's ingenious conception, the Underground Railroad is no metaphor--engineers and conductors operate a secret network of tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil. In the antebellum South Cora embarks on a harrowing state-by-state flight, seeking true freedom.

Washington Black

Esi Edugyan
2018

Washington Black is a boy who survives the vestiges of slavery to become a free man of the world. Edugyan tells a story of self-invention and betrayal, of love and redemption, of a world destroyed and made whole again, and asks what is true freedom?

Wench

Dolen Perkins-Valdez
2010

Lizzie, Rennie, Sweet and Mawu reunite every summer when they accompany their enslavers to an Ohio resort. This debut novel is a startling and original fiction that raises provocative questions of power and freedom, love and dependence as it tells the story of four black enslaved women in the years preceding the Civil War.

Nonfiction

Barracoon: the Story of the Last "Black Cargo"

Zora Neale Hurston
E444 .H897 2018

In the late 1920s, Zora Neale Hurston interviewed and recounted the story of one of the last-known survivors of the Atlantic slave trade, Cudjo Lewis, who also later helped found Africatown in Alabama.

Bound for Canaan : the underground railroad and the war for the soul of America

Fergus M. Bordewich
E450 .B735 2005

An important book of epic scope on America's first racially integrated, religiously inspired movement featuring Harriet Tubman, the brave leader of the Underground Railroad.

Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities

Craig Wilder
LC212.42 .W53 2013

A leading African American historian of race in America exposes the uncomfortable truths about race, slavery, and the American academy, revealing that leading universities, dependent on human bondage, became breeding grounds for the racist ideas that sustained it.

The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism

Edward E. Baptist
E441 .B337 2014

The author reveals how the expansion of slavery in the first decades after American independence drove the evolution and the lasting economic dominance of the United States. His arguments remind us that America was built on the backs of the enslaved and they deserve remembrance.

The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832

Alan Taylor
E445.V8 T38 2013

Drawn from new sources, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian presents a gripping narrative that recreates the events that inspired hundreds of enslaved people to pressure British admirals into becoming liberators by using their intimate knowledge of the countryside to transform the war.

Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America

Ira Berlin
E446 .B49 1998

Rather than focusing on antebellum South, Berlin examines the earlier history of slavery throughout North America, showing how it changed over time and differed from state to state.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass
E449 .D749

Frederick Douglass published his stirring memoir in 1845, sharing his humble beginnings as a boy who painstakingly taught himself to read in secret, to his escape and rise as a great writer, orator, and social reformer. This masterpiece is one of the most powerful indictments of slavery ever recorded.

Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge

Erica Armstrong Dunbar
E444 .D86 2017

This award-winning book by African-American history professor Dunbar, expertly tells the story of Ona Judge who longed for freedom and George Washington's determination to recapture his "property" by whatever means necessary.

Notes of a white Black Woman: Race, Color, Community

Judy Scales-Trent
E185.625 .S26 1995

University at Buffalo Law professor Scales-Trent explores the question of what is really meant by “race” in this country and addresses how race and color interact in relationships and in the larger community.

The Peculiar Institution

Kenneth M. Stampp
E441 .S8 1956

Stampp's classic study of American slavery as a purposefully designed, practical system of controlling and exploiting labor is one of the most important works of American history written in our time. He analyzes the system from multiple perspectives, describing the daily lives of the enslaved and enslavers, the Southern economy, and the abolition movement.

Roots: The Saga of an American Family

Alex Haley
E185.97.H24 A33 2007, 1976

Tracing the author's ancestry back to Gambia, West Africa, in the mid-1700s, *Roots* illustrates the horrors of slavery through Haley's discovery and interpretation of family history and created an important political, racial, social and cultural dialogue.

Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market

Walter Johnson
F379.N59 N38 1999

This work tells the story of slavery in antebellum America by moving away from the cotton plantations and into the slave market itself, the heart of the domestic slave trade.

Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America

Ibram X. Kendi
E185.61 .K358 2016

This finely researched, National Book Award winning book argues that racist ideas have a long and lingering history, deeply rooted in American society.

Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
E185.61 .G253 2019

In his new book, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a leading chronicler of the African-American experience, uncovers the roots of structural racism in a history that moves from the Reconstruction Era to the Jim Crow Era, through to World War I and the Harlem Renaissance.

Twelve Years a Slave

Solomon Northup, 1853
E444 .N87 2013

One of the best written of all the slave narratives, *Twelve Years a Slave* is a chilling memoir about one of the darkest periods in American history. Born a free man in New York, Solomon Northup was abducted in Washington, D.C., in 1841 and spent the next twelve years of his life enslaved on a Louisiana plantation.