slave narrative,

American literary genre consisting of a former slave's memoir of daily plantation life, his sufferings as a slave, and his eventual escape to freedom. The narratives are filled with humorous anecdotes of the deception and pretenses that the slave was forced to practice in order to ingratiate himself with the master, expressions of religious fervour and superstition, and, above all, a pervasive longing for freedom, dignity, and self-respect.

The first example of the slave narrative, *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man*, appeared in Boston in 1760. This was followed by other early examples, such as *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with J. Murrant, a Black, Taken Down from His Own Relation* (1784) and *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789).

In the early and mid-19th century, when their publication was encouraged by the Abolitionists, the accounts, many of them based on oral relations, multiplied. Although some of these narratives, such as *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869), are factual autobiographies, many others were influenced or sensationalized by the writer's desire to arouse sympathy for the Abolitionist cause. Such reworkings and interpolations are usually obvious. In some cases, such as *The Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1856) by Mattie Griffith, the account was entirely fictitious. The slave-narrative genre reached its height with Frederick Douglass' classic autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845).

In the first half of the 20th century a number of folklorists and anthropologists compiled documentary narratives based on recorded interviews with former black slaves. A notable compilation of such narratives is B.A. Botkin's *Lay My Burden Down* (1945). In the second half of the 20th century the growth of black cultural consciousness stimulated a renewed interest in slave narratives as the embodiment of the slaves' point of view of a much-discussed social institution.