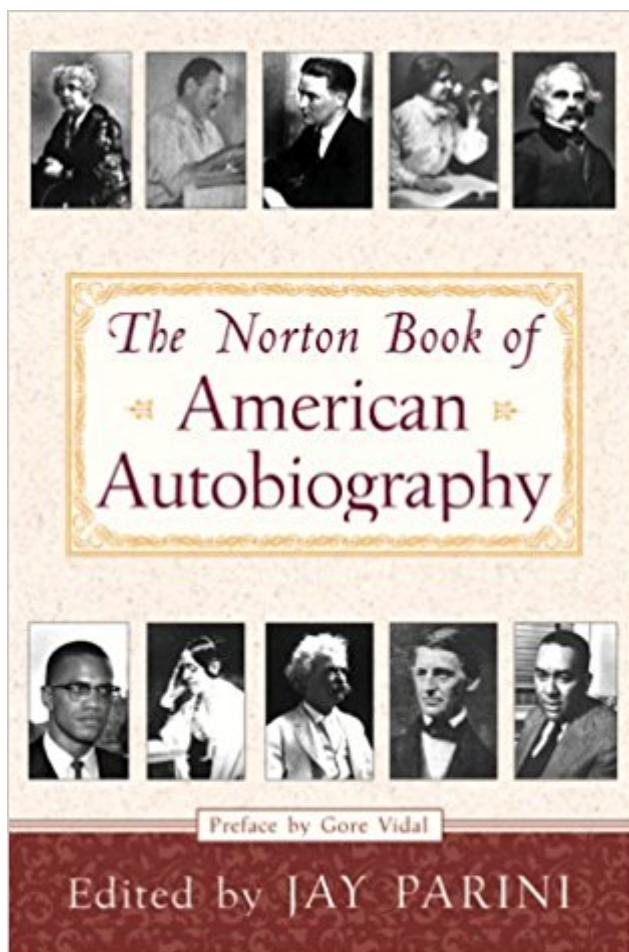


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# The Norton Book Of American Autobiography



## Synopsis

"The essential American form of expression." —from the Introduction by Jay Parini From Mary Rowlandson's story of her capture by Indians in the mid-seventeenth century to Mary Paik Lee's story of being a pioneer Korean woman in America at the beginning of the twentieth century, the autobiographical form has provided our most vivid, intimate glimpses of daily American life and self-understanding. In this groundbreaking anthology, respected writer and critic Jay Parini brings together an abundant selection from over three centuries of "the democratic voice . . . discovering itself." Here are the voices of the Founding Fathers and African American slaves; of transcendentalists and suffragists; of ancestors such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Mark Twain, Henry James, Helen Keller, Zora Neale Hurston, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, James Baldwin, and many others; and of a wide range of contemporaries, including Maxine Hong Kingston, Gore Vidal, Julia Alvarez, and Mark Doty. The rich, continuous influence of autobiographical writing in our culture is clear, and as memoirs continue to fascinate readers, this invaluable anthology provides an essential guide to our foremost American literary tradition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Rounding up all the usual suspects (Benjamin Franklin to Mary Karr) as well as some once-popular authors now criminally neglected (Ulysses S. Grant, Lucy Larcom), editor Jay Parini has assembled 62 entries that amply attest to both the diversity of American autobiography and its essential coherence. It's been a long two and a half centuries from the majestic, near-biblical cadences of

Jonathan Edwards's chronicle of his striving towards God to the intimate (some might say whiny) tone in which Elizabeth Wurtzel examines her generation's reliance on friends to heal the wounds inflicted by family. But both of these writers and most of those in between delineate a very American process of self-discovery and enlightenment. Parini manages to represent most of the genre's important contributors: African Americans (including W.E.B. Du Bois and Malcolm X); women (from Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Terry Tempest Williams); nature writers (Thoreau, of course, and Annie Dillard); and today's nothing-is-off-limits confessors (Caroline Knapp on booze, Paul Monette on AIDS). Those readers who are familiar with the books from which most of these pieces are excerpted may find their brevity frustrating, but Parini has gone for breadth rather than depth. Consider this a collection of tasty hors d'oeuvres designed to whet individual readers' appetites for full-course offerings from the chefs they find most appealing. --Wendy Smith

Norton anthologies, well respected and widely used in classrooms and libraries, cover a variety of literary forms—poetry, essays, interviews, and short stories. For Norton's most recent addition, poet and novelist Parini has compiled over 60 selections from autobiographies and memoirs published since the 17th century. His original manuscript was three times its present size, simply because there was so much to choose from in "a tradition quintessentially American in its forms and performance." The final result includes works by such diverse writers as Henry David Thoreau, U.S. Grant, Gertrude Stein, Malcolm X, Mary McCarthy, and Richard Rodriguez. Among other topics, these excerpts discuss childhood, immigration, spiritual enlightenment, and racial, social, and ethnic issues. The selections are arranged chronologically, and each is prefaced by an introduction on its author and its merit. This well-rounded and enjoyable collection is recommended for both academic and public libraries. Allse Heidmann, San Marcos, TX  
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I teach in a jail setting and am limited as to how much can be stored in the classroom office. Some of the students have expressed interest in reading autobiographies. We're not allowed use of the internet, so I needed to resort to books. Yet, they couldn't agree on which autobiographies to read. Thus, I ordered three copies of "The Norton Book of American Autobiography". The book contains autobiographies of a lot of famous people, and of some people whom I never heard of before. Each autobiography is a few to possibly 20 pages along. It is enough information to give a good overall picture of the individual, and not so long that the reader wants to give up on reading it. I had a couple of reluctant students who thought autobiographies would be boring to read. However, they

quickly found the book to be interesting. I gave the book a 3 star ranking. Although the content is good, the presentation is bland. The type font is on the small side. So sometimes you're looking at hundreds of words on a page with no sort of visual to go along with it. Even if the chapter titles could be a little jazzed up, that would help. I also think that the book could have included more famous people. I noticed that if one of my students didn't recognize a name, then he or she would skip that autobiography and find a different one. If you have any questions about the book, feel free to ask.

Purchased this book for a class but I have actually enjoyed it. It is a compilation of excerpts of various autobiographies, which can be disappointing, but it is a great introduction to discovering people who you might be interested in reading further. One complaint about the seller is that the spine was broken on my book, although that was not covered in the description. Not sure if it damaged in transit, but since I plan on keeping it, it wasn't too big of a deal for me.

One of the best and most comprehensive collections of autobiography. From the 1700s to the present, this book has it all. A very important and understandable book!

I truly enjoyed how this book gives us the most tasty morsels of some of the greatest writers in America. This book will encourage anyone to find out more about the author and read all of his works. I give this two thumbs up very easily!

You can read the whole book in one sitting. A nice read if you're maybe on vacation and still want to feel a sense of education while having a not too difficult read.

The many excerpts in this book are too short for the reader to get any type of feel for the author or the era. Basically just a book of teasers.

I bought this book because I was interested in the autobiography. I had just finished reading a few "shorts" in different anthologies, and I decided to do a search to see if there was anything larger out there. I found The Norton Book of American Autobiography and was pleased. I just finished this massive 711 paged book, and I would recommend it to anyone who's just interested in other people's lives. There are some stand-out writers included (Malcolm X, Benjamin Franklin, etc.), but also some contemporary writers as well (Julia Alvarez, Caroline Knapp, Paul Monette, etc.). This is a great book to read on your own, but I can really see it benefiting a lit. class at the same time.

Autobiography isn't always just the blathering of B-list celebrities. Much of it is some of the finest American literature ever produced. Some say Americans are egotistical and self-involved. Well, fine, maybe so, but it makes for great autobiography. And the informative and literary life synopsi (synopsises?) make for great reading by themselves!!! Huzzah to the editor and his minions!!!

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