

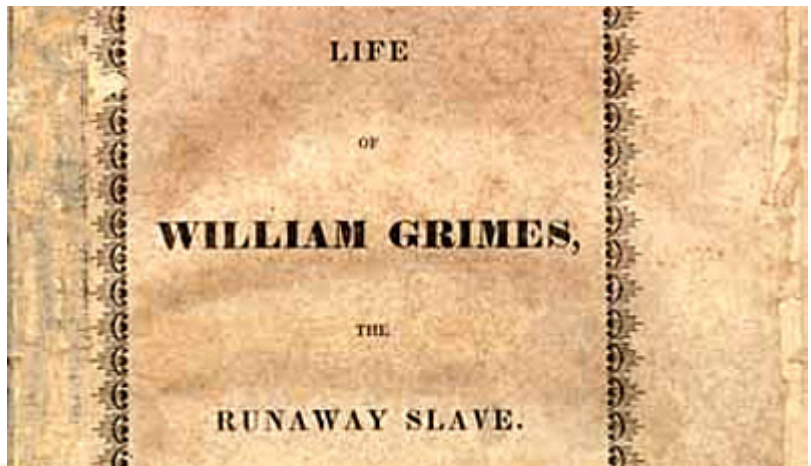
Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave

New York: [W. Grimes], 1825
North American Slave Narratives
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William Grimes, born a slave in
Virginia, escaped to Connecticut,
where he found work, among other



places, as a barber at the Tapping Reeve Law School in Litchfield, and at Yale College in New Haven. Forced to purchase his freedom after he was found by an agent of his former master, Grimes' autobiography documents the plight of many fugitives from slavery who made their way to Connecticut, and, through its tale of trials and setbacks, the harsh social and economic conditions of members of Connecticut's free black community. Yet *The Life of William Grimes* also reveals the close-knit nature of that community, for ironically it is while working for William Lanson's New Haven livery stable that he is discovered by a relative of his former master.

His 1825 narrative ends with this telling indictment of American liberty:

If it were not for the stripes on my back which were made while I was a slave, I would in my will leave my skin as a legacy to the government, desiring that it might be taken off and made into parchment, and then bind the constitution of glorious, happy and free America. Let the skin of an American slave bind the charter of American liberty!