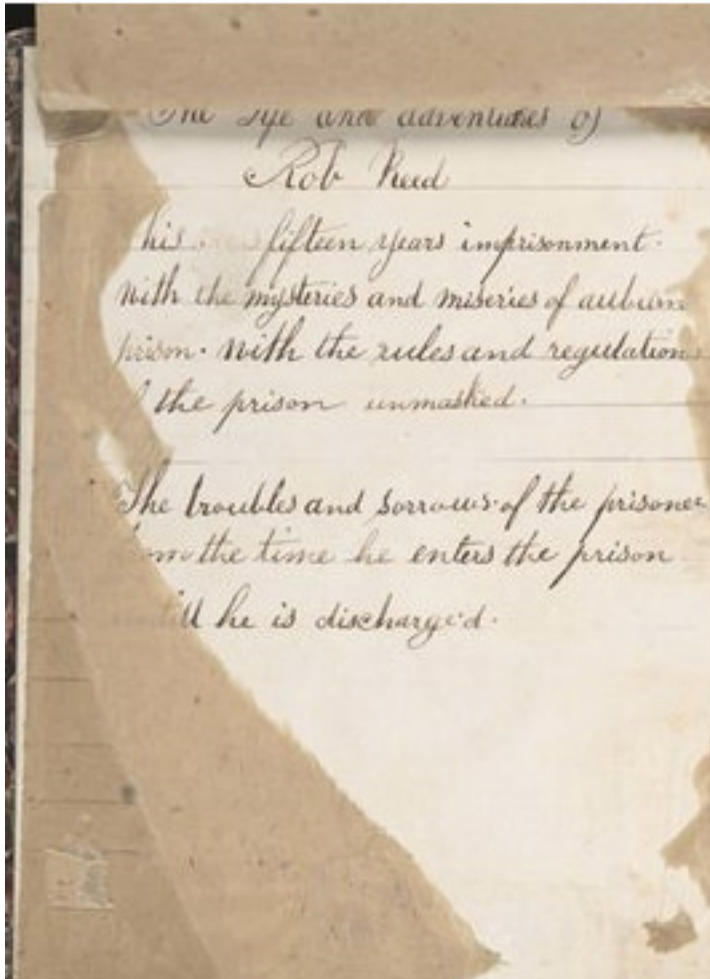


## First-known prison narrative by an African-American writer discovered at Yale's Beinecke Library



Scholarly detective work has revealed that an 1858 manuscript, housed at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, is the earliest-known prison memoir written by an African American. Acquired by the Beinecke in 2009, the book-length manuscript, titled "The Life and Adventures of a Haunted Convict" and written under the name Robert Reed, eloquently describes the author's experiences while incarcerated in New York State from the 1830s through the 1850s. The memoir provides an insider's account of the prison system and race relations in the mid-nineteenth century. Caleb Smith, professor of English and American Studies, has authenticated the manuscript and identified its author as Austin Reed, a free black man who was born in upstate New York. "Finding any new text by an African-American author of the 19th century is significant, but this memoir has so much to say about captivity, freedom, and human rights. It is a truly remarkable discovery," says Smith. "Today, our country's sprawling prison system draws comparisons to plantation slavery. Reed's narrative shows how an especially gifted prisoner in the 1850s was already making the same connection. It's also a beautiful and haunting piece of writing." Read more in an article by the New York Times published today: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/12/books/prison-memoir-of-a-black-man-in-the-1850s.html?hpw&rref=books&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/12/books/prison-memoir-of-a-black-man-in-the-1850s.html?hpw&rref=books&_r=0). [1]

**External link:** [http://www.library.yale.edu/librarynews/2013/12/firstknown\\_prison\\_narrative\\_by.h...](http://www.library.yale.edu/librarynews/2013/12/firstknown_prison_narrative_by.h...) [2]

## First-known prison narrative by an African-American writer discovered at Yale's Beinecke Library

Published on Yale University Library (<https://web.library.yale.edu>)

---

**URL:** <https://web.library.yale.edu/news/2013/12/first-known-prison-narrative-african-american-writer-discovered>

### Links

[1] [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/12/books/prison-memoir-of-a-black-man-in-the-1850s.html?hpw&\\_rref=books&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/12/books/prison-memoir-of-a-black-man-in-the-1850s.html?hpw&_rref=books&_r=0) [2]

[http://www.library.yale.edu/librarynews/2013/12/firstknown\\_prison\\_narrative\\_by.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/librarynews/2013/12/firstknown_prison_narrative_by.html)