



National Archives and Records Administration

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408-0001

Slave Narratives Compiled by the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), 1936–1938

The collection of firsthand accounts of slavery, commonly referred to as the Slave Narratives, originated in 1936 as part of the Work Projects Administration's Federal Writers' Project (FWP). The mission of seeking and collecting interviews with former slaves began in spring 1937, with the encouragement of FWP consultant (and noted folklorist) John A. Lomax. Lomax circulated a list of suggested questions to the field writers to solicit information concerning the recollections of former slaves' older relatives, experiences during the Civil War and upon Emancipation, and the relating of folklore and everyday antebellum life. Lomax insisted that FWP writers were to record the stories "in the language of the ex-slave, without editorializing and 'artistic' introductions."

Published Volumes of Slave Narratives in the Archives Library Information Center (ALIC), National Archives Building, Washington, DC

_____*The American Slave: A Complete Autobiography*, edited by George P. Rewick, is divided into three editions, arranged by state. Consult the alphabetized name index preceding the narratives from each state, regardless of edition, as **there is no consolidated index**.

ALIC has complete or partial slave narratives for **Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia**.

The initial edition (Call Number **E444.A4 vols. 1–17, 1972**) provides exact copies of all the known unpublished transcripts of the slave narratives at that time. Each of the more than 2,000 narratives are headed by the informant's name, the date, and place of the interview, and consists of the transcribed answers to questions asked by FWP interviewers.

_____*Supplemental Series 1* (Call Number **E444.A4 suppl.1, vols. 1–10, 1977**) includes additional narratives collected from other archives and libraries. *Supplemental Series 2* (Call Number **E444.A4 suppl.2, vols. 1–9, 1979**) consists primarily of discovered narratives from Texas.

_____*The collected slave narratives from sources in Oklahoma* are in a separate publication: *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, eds. T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P. Baker, Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1996 (Call Number **E444.W82 1996**).

Selected Resources at the Library of Congress

_____*Born in Slavery*, a digital collection of over 9,500 images of keyword and name-searchable text, is available through the Library of Congress web site at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>

_____*Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*. Federal Writers' Project, ed. B.A. Botkin. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1945

____ *Voices From Slavery*, ed. Norman Yetman. New York: Holt, Rineheart, and Winston, 1970

____ *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project*, by Jerrold Hirsch. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2003

____ The nearly 2,000 assembled slave narratives and much of the administrative correspondence of the undertaking are housed in the Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

For more information, see the following reference reports:

- *African Americans and the Federal Census, 1790–1930*
- *Federal Census Records for the District of Columbia Relating to Slavery, 1800–1860*
- *Federal Court and Commission Records Relating to Slavery in the District of Columbia, 1820–1863*

Rev. December 2010