

American slave narratives. Internet Resource. Reviewed in 1999nov CHOICE.

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/wpahome.html>

During the late 1930s writers of the Works Progress Administration, a federal government jobs program, interviewed thousands of former slaves throughout the American south. This Web site offers transcripts of selected interviews. Developer Bruce Fort, currently a PhD candidate in history at the University of Virginia, provides a readable introduction to the sources, commenting on their research value and explaining inconsistencies and lapses in the narratives. Annotations also accompany each of the site's ten narratives, profiling the slave's age, background, and recollections. These firsthand accounts of life on plantations and small farms are a rich commentary on the nature of American slavery and its physical, mental, and emotional destructiveness. They also illustrate the remarkable strength of African Americans. The interviews tend to speak for themselves, but visitors to the site would nonetheless benefit from additional author insight and analysis. Concerning one female slave who witnessed whippings and brutality but fails to criticize her owners, for example, Fort simply suggests that she possibly feared retribution or became forgiving in her old age. The site is small, easily navigated, and contains a list of related readings and links on the antebellum period. Moreover, *American Slave Narratives* is unique. Although the Library of Congress *American Memory* site (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro/wpahome.html>) contains many transcriptions of slave interviews in its WPA Life Histories (all available through keyword search), it offers little interpretation and organization. Therefore, unless readers choose to examine the entire collection of WPA narratives in *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, ed. by George P. Rawick (12 v., CH, Jul'78), they will greatly benefit from the organization, content, and interpretation of this site. All levels. -- R. J. Palin, St. Thomas University