Remembering Slavery:  
The Pros and Cons of Oral History

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

INTRODUCTION:

In this exercise, students will use multiple accounts of an interview with a freed slave collected by a federally employed writer during the Great Depression to examine the strengths and weaknesses of oral history. Oral histories provide an invaluable window into the past and a highly engaging teaching resource because they make vivid the life choices and expectations of people long ago. They translate historical processes into the personal lived experiences of individuals explaining what various events and trends meant to someone living at the time. They show how people created their own worlds and controlled their own destinies even as they struggled with the complications and challenges of their generation. Because oral histories rely on real people in the real world, students can often “connect” with them in ways that they will not necessarily identify with other documents.

Yet oral histories are also tricky sources. People forget what happened, when, and why it happened. Even if they remember, some don’t want to tell the truth. Interviewees can be intimidated by their interviewers or want to impress them. Interviewers can direct the exchange by only asking certain questions or asking leading questions. They can mis-record what those they interview say or alter it to make it sound more eloquent, realistic etc.

Many of these complications apply to interviews with ex-slaves. How should students and scholars use the Slave Narrative Collection given that it both illustrates the minds and beliefs of ex-slaves while also reflecting the biases of encounters in the Jim Crow South between white southerners and elderly blacks?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Between 1937 and 1939, relief workers hired by the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) in seventeen states interviewed more than two thousand ex-slaves, approximately 2 percent of the total ex-slave population. These interviews are particularly powerful sources because they record the thoughts and feelings of non-elite and even illiterate freed slaves. Government employees collected a number of these interviews in a rare book housed in the Library of Congress, and the Slave Narrative Collection, which emerged out of this effort, has played an important role in shaping what folklorists, sociologists, and historians have written about slave culture and the master-slave relationship.

The Slave Narrative Collection, however, is a difficult set of sources to navigate. Most relief workers hired by the Writers’ Project were unemployed, white, white-collar journalists, teachers, librarians, and clerks. Some were even the children of former masters of the ex-slaves they interviewed. To complicate matters, many ex-slaves had been children at the time of Emancipation and octogenarians when they were interviewed. Most of them had been hard hit by the Depression and many of them believed that the Federal Writers who were asking them questions were relief agents who might be able to provide them with government funds. In
addition, few of the interviews were tape recorded, so they are based on interviewers’ efforts to recreate the encounters based on their notes.

The interviews included in the Slave Narrative Collection represent only a fraction of the total number of ex-slave interviews recorded by the Writers Project. In the 1970s, historian George Rawick working with civil rights and political activists Ken Lawrence and Jan Hillegas rescued hundreds of thousands of additional interviews that state editors from the Writers’ Project had failed to submit to the national office in Washington, D.C. Close textual analysis reveals differences between the interviews that the primarily white and female state editors submitted to Washington, D.C. and those they left in their own state archives despite repeated requests for the material from the national office.

This exercise illustrates both the opportunities and the shortcomings of oral history through a close reading of three interviews between Federal Writer Esther de Sola and ex-slave Charlie Moses from Brookhaven, Mississippi. De Sola interviewed Moses using an interview script created by the folklorist John Lomax. At a later date, she interviewed Moses a second time using an interview script developed by the poet and Director of Negro Affairs Sterling Brown. Although the Washington, DC-based administrators of the Writers’ Project warned government employees not to alter the interviews and to submit them directly to the national office, local officials often made their own editorial decisions; some withheld interviews, and others altered their language. Mississippi state editors Pauline Loveless and Clara E. Stokes did both. They only submitted twenty-six interviews to the national office, although they gathered some twenty-four-hundred pages of freed slaves’ testimonies. They also radically rewrote twenty-one out of twenty-six submitted interviews, including de Sola’s interview with Moses. Studying how Loveless and Stokes rewrote Moses’s interview will reveal the difficulties surrounding the Slave Narrative Collection and initiate a discussion regarding the pros and cons of using oral history to understand the past.

THEMES: Slavery, Reconstruction, New Deal, oral history

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After completing this lesson, students will understand:

1. How to analyze and interpret oral histories.
2. How to compare and contrast historical accounts of the same event.
3. How biases shape primary sources.
4. The pros and cons of using biased source material to research the past.

NEW JERSEY STANDARDS:

6.1.12.A.2. Formulate questions and hypotheses from multiple perspectives, using multiple sources. (Social Studies)

6.1.12.A.4. Examine source data within the historical, social, political, geographic, or economic context in which it was created, testing credibility and evaluating bias.
MATERIALS:
• Moses/de Sola interview #1
• Moses/de Sola interview #2
• Moses/de Sola interview #3

DETAILS OF ACTIVITY:

Homework Prior to Activity:

In preparation for this in-class activity, students should read the three interviews with Charlie Moses. They should be asked to imagine the interactions between Moses and Esther de Sola and mark in the text where de Sola might have asked Moses questions and guess what she might have asked him. Tell students that they will be re-enacting all three of these interviews in class.

PART I (10 minutes)

Give a brief history of the Slave Narrative Collection and ask students, based on this story, what might be some of the pros and cons of using it to study slavery. Make a chart of their answers on the board under the categories “pros” and “cons.”

Questions ask to stimulate discussion might include:

1. How much time had passed between slavery and the collection of these interviews?
2. How might this time lag affect their stories?
3. How old are the subjects when interviewed?
4. Does age affect memories?
5. Who interviewed the people and documented their stories?
6. Is it significant that interviewers were white, while the subjects were black? If so, why?
7. Does it matter that few of the interviews were tape recorded and most of the interview transcripts are really filled-in accounts from the notes Federal Writers took during interviews?

Part II (10 minutes)

Tell students that they will be re-enacting three interviews between a white southern woman named Esther de Sola and an 84-year old freed slave named Charlie Moses conducted by the Federal Writers’ Project during the 1930s. Their job will be to compare and contrast the interviews and consider how reliable they are as sources.

Divide the class into thirds and assign each group one of the three Moses interviews. Divide each group further into groups of 5 students. Have each group of 5 decide how they would act out the interview. Two people in each group should “play” Moses and de Sola. The group will need to imagine the questions that de Sola asked of Moses. They will also need to portray the subjective nature of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (i.e. what did they say to one another that wasn’t recorded, what was the nature of their body language, etc.). The other students should act out the other characters Moses mentioned during the interviews.
PART III (11 to 12 minutes for each performance and discussion, or 35 minutes total)

Have one group from each third perform each of the interviews. The other groups should comment on how their interpretations of the interview compared.

After the first performance, ask the other students in group one how their interpretations of this interview (especially the questions they imagined de Sola asking) compared to the performance they just saw. Ask them why the interview questions were not included in the transcript of the interview. How does their exclusion affect the reliability of the interview?

After the second performance, compare this interview (and its performed interpretation) with the first group’s interview (and interpretation). Write on the board the similarities and differences between the two. How did the students’ way of performing the interview compare to the last group’s performance? In terms of the interview themselves, did de Sola ask different questions? Did Moses answer differently? Why do you think de Sola returned?

After you’ve given students some time to speculate about how the interviews compare to one another, explain that de Sola was given a second interview script, this one written by the African-American poet and professor of literature at Howard University Sterling Brown, who was serving as the director of the Writers’ Project’s Negro Affairs Committee. Unlike the folklorist John Lomax, who directed the interviews with ex-slaves’ project and was primarily interested in the slaves’ clothing, folksongs, and folktales, Brown was more interested in their experiences of freedom after Emancipation, their encounters with violence both as slaves and afterwards, and their memories of Reconstruction. Federal Writers were instructed by the national office that they should incorporate Brown’s questions into the interviews they conducted. Ask students how this knowledge changes their perception of the first two interviews.

Before the third group presents, explain the circumstances surrounding this last interview. It never happened. Instead Mississippi state editors Pauline Loveless and Clara E. Stokes rewrote the first two interviews into this third interview. It was one of twenty-six interviews they sent to the national office of the Writers’ Project in Washington, DC. Despite repeated requests from DC, Mississippi’s State Editors did not send in most of the material they gathered. This included some twenty-four hundred pages of freed slaves’ testimonies.

Questions for discussion after the third presentation:
1. How did this third performance compare to the earlier two?
2. How did Loveless and Stokes change the two interviews to create this one?
3. How did they present Moses’s story differently?
4. How did they reorder his account?
5. Were their changes cosmetic, or did they alter the meaning of Moses’s words?
6. Why do you think they rewrote the first two interviews?
7. How do their revisions affect the reliability of this interview (and the Slave Narrative Collection more broadly) in capturing the thoughts and feelings of freed slaves?

PART IV (5 minutes)

Ask the class if this exercise has changed their understanding of slavery and/or of the reliability of oral history.
PRACTICES/REINFORCEMENT

In groups of three, formulate a question regarding slavery or Reconstruction that you wish to learn more about (examples include the experiences of children during slavery, freed slaves’ memories of learning they were free, who and how slaves resisted slavery, etc.). Using the following two websites from the Library of Congress’s American Memory Project, select at least five interviews that address the given question and see how each answers it. Analyze the biases of each source. Which is most reliable? How might you further verify your findings? Students might write up their findings and/or present them to the class.

“Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938,”
http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html

“Voices from the Days of Slavery,” http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/

You might wish to use the Library of Congress’s “Using Oral History” Learning Page as model. It can be found at http://lcweb2.loc.gov/learn/lessons/oralhist/ohhome.html.

REFERENCES AND WEBSITES:


Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller, eds., Remembering Slavery: African American Talk about Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation (New York: The New Press, 1998). Note Remembering Slavery includes two audiotapes of actors performing interviews with freed slaves collected in the 1930s as part of the Slave Narrative Collection.

Unchained Memories: Readings from the Slave Narratives, prod. by Jacqueline Glover and dir. by Ed Bell, 75 min. HBO Documentary Films, 2003, DVD.
Other helpful websites include:

“Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938,” American Memory Project of the Library of Congress, [http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html](http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html): The website contains more than 2,300 first-person accounts of slavery and 500 black-and-white photographs of former slaves. These narratives were collected in the 1930s as part of the Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and assembled and microfilmed in 1941 as the seventeen-volume *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*. This online collection is a joint presentation of the Manuscript and Prints and Photographs Divisions of the Library of Congress and includes more than 200 photographs from the Prints and Photographs Division that are now made available to the public for the first time. *Born in Slavery* was made possible by a major gift from the Citigroup Foundation.

“Voices from the Days of Slavery,” American Memory Project of the Library of Congress, [http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/](http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/): The almost seven hours of recorded interviews presented here took place between 1932 and 1975 in nine Southern states. Twenty-three interviewees, born between 1823 and the early 1860s, discuss how they felt about slavery, slaveholders, coercion of slaves, their families, and freedom. Several individuals sing songs, many of which were learned during the time of their enslavement. All known recordings of former slaves in the American Folklife Center are included in this presentation. Some are being made publicly available for the first time and several others already available now include complete transcriptions.

“Using Oral History,” The Library of Congress Learning Page, [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/learn/lessons/oralhist/ohhome.html#teacher](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/learn/lessons/oralhist/ohhome.html#teacher): This website draws on primary sources from the American Memory Collection, American Life Histories, 1936-1940. Students study various social history topics through interviews with diverse working and middle-class Americans gathered by relief workers during the Great Depression. Based on their findings and further research through the on-line collection, students then develop their own research questions. Finally students plan and conduct oral history interviews within their local communities to investigate further their area of interest. This website could be used to adapt this lesson for younger learners.
Moses/de Sola Interview #1

Charlie Moses, age 84, residing in North negro quarters of Brookhaven, is an exceptionally intelligent old negro, possessing the eloquence and abundant vocabulary of all negro preachers, to which vocation he was called. At present, confined to his bed because of the many ailments of old age, his mind is nevertheless clear and his speech intelligible. Emaciated in form his weight appears to be about 140 pounds, height 6 feet 1 inch. He lives in a neat, five room cabin and is lovingly waited on by his daughter, Celia. The civil war and slavery days are not pleasant topics to him. His story unfurls the bitterness that lies in many an old slaves' heart.

"When I gets ta' thinkin' back on them days I feels like risin' out o' this heah' bed an' tellin' everybody 'bout the harsh treatment us colored folks was given. My Marster was mean an' cruel an' I hates him, hates him. The God Almighty has condemned him to eternal fiah', of that I is certain. Even the cows and horses on his plantation wuz scared out o' their minds when he comes' neah' to them. Oh Lordy! I can tell you plenty 'bout the things he done to us po' niggahs."
We wuz no better than one of his hound dawgs to him. An' sometimes he didn't treat us as good as he did them.

His name wuz Jim Rankin an' he lived out on a plantation ovah' in Marion county. I wuz born an' raised on his place an' I specks I wuz 'bout 12 yeah' old at the time of the wah.

Ole' man Rankin wuked us like animals. He had a right smart plantation an' he kep' all his niggahs out in the fiel a'wukin', ceptin' one house boy. He say------

'Niggahs is ment to wuk'. Dats' what I paid my good money for 'em ta' do.'

He had two daughters an' two sons an' them an' his po' wife had all the wuk' in the house ta' do, 'cause he won't waste no niggah on 'em to help out. His family wuz as scaired o' him as we wuz an' they live all their lives under his whip. No suh! No suh! There warn't no meaner man in the world than ole' man Rankin.

We had our separate cabins an' at sunset all of us would go in an shet' the door an pray the Lord, Marster Jim don' call us out.

Iffen one o' the niggahs done some thin' ta' displease the Marster, which wuz mos' ever' day, he whip 'em till they
mos' die an' then he'd kick 'em 'roun in the dust. He even take his gun and before the niggah have to time to open his mouth he'd jest stan' there an' shoot him down.

We'd get up at dawn to go to the fiels and we'd take our pails of food wid us an' hang 'em up in a row long by the fence. Many a time when noon come an' we go ta eat our vittals the Marster ud' come walkin' t rough the fiels wid 10 or 12 o' his houn' dawgs an' iff'en he looks in de pails an' is dis-pleased wid' what he sees in 'em he takes 'em an' dumps 'em out before our very eyes an' lets the dawgs grap it up. We don' gets nothin' to eat then till we comes home late in the evening. After he leaves we pick up bits o' the food that the dawgs leaves an' eats it. Hongry- hongry- we wuz hongry.

When the wah' came, Marster wuz a Captain of a regiment an' he went away an' staid for a year. When he comes back he even meaner than before. An' now I tells you how he died.

When he comes home, from the wah he staid fuh' two weeks. The night fore he leaves to go back he came out on his front porch to smoke his pipe an' he wuz a'stadin' leanin' up agin the railing, when somebody sneak up in the darkness an' shoot him three times. Oh my Lord! He died the nex' mawmin'. We nevah knowed who done it.
Sometimes the calvary come stay at the house an' the Missus 'ud have to tend to 'em an' see they gets plenty food an' fresh horses.

The Missus come to us an' told us one day, we is free. My Pappy wuz Allen Rankin, an' my Mammy wuz Caline. There wuz twelve o' us chillun. Nine boys an' 3 girls. When we free, our Pappy wuz daid. Soon after that my Mammy pak' all us chillun up an' we travel on a cotton wagon to Covington La. We all wuk on a farm there for 'bout a year. Then we move to Mandeville, La. an' wuk on a farm there, all cept me. I hired out to Mr. Charlie Dusan, a baker. Then we move to a farm above Baton Rouge an' wuk' for Mr. Abe Manning. We jest travel all ovah frum one place to the other.

Then I gets a letter from a fren' o' mine in Gainesville Miss. sayin' he has a job for me on a boat, haulin lumber up the coast to Bay St. Louis, Pass. Christian, Long Beach, Gulfport, an' all them coast towns. So I wuked out of Gainesville on dis boat for bout two years. I lost tract of my family then an' nevah sees them anymo'.

In the year 1870 I gets the call from the Lord to go out an' preach. So I left Gainesville an' traveled to Summit,
Miss. where another fren' o' mine lives. I preached the
words o' the Lord an' traveled all over frum one place to
'nother.

In 1873 I got married an' decided to settle in Brookhaven.
I preached an' all my flock believe in me. I bought up this
house an' the other two on each side of it, an' heah' I raise
my 7 chillun in the way of the Lord. They is all in different
pahts o' the country now, but I sees one o' em every now an'
then.

Las' April de' Lord sees fit to put me a' bed an' I been
ailin with the misery ever since.

Slavery days wuz bitter, bitter, an' I shall never fo'git
the sufferin'. The young 'uns now a'days is happy an' don'
know 'bout wah' times, but I does, an' I want to tell you now
I pray the Lord to let us be free always. God Almighty nevah
ment human beings to be lak animals. Us niggahs has a soul,
an' a heart, an' a mine an we is'nt lak a dawg or a horse.
I didn't spec' nothin' outten freedom septin' peace an'
happiness an' the right to go my way as I please. Ar' that
is the way the Almighty wants it.
Charlie Moses is seriously ill at this writing but he did his best to talk about slavery times and his recollections of it. His story is a bit disconnected at this interview and his speech halting and barely discernable.

"Ah' hates to think 'bout wah times. Marster whip me. Mean, cruel to us'! Ah' prays to the Lor' not to let me see him (Rankin) whin' ah dies. Ah'm' glad they shot him down! He wuz' a no good man. Had the devil in his heart.

Ah' never see no fightin'. Ah staid on the plan'tation till the wah' wuz ovah, an' Ah don' see none o' the fightin'.

We never had much clothes ceptin' what wuz given us by the marster or the Missus. Winter time we nevah had nough to wear or nough to eat. We wears homespun all de time. The marster don' think we needs anything, but jest a little. We din' go to church, but Sundays we gather 'roun an' listen to the Missus read a little outten' the Bible. The Marster say we don' need religion an finally he stop her frum' readin' to:

We had meal an' pok' an' beef an' greens mostly to eat.

Ma' Pa wuz born in Miss. an' sold to Marster Rankin when he wuz a young man. Ma' Mammy wuz married in S. C. an' sold to Marster Rankin ovah' in Columbia an' had to leave her famili.
But she warn't long in gettin' another man.

Oh Lordy! Missey iffen you'd a knowed how de' treated us colored folkies. Marster beat, knock, kick, kill, done everything he could but eat 'em. We work to death. Work all Sunday, all day, all night. Whip us till some jest lay down n' die. It wuz a poor life. I knows it ain't right to hev' hate in de' heart, but God Almighty, it's hard to be forgivin'.

De young folks today don' know nothin'; don know nothin'. De don' mak de mark in de worl like de' old people did. Old people made de first roads in Miss. De niggars' today wouldn't know how ta' act on a plant'ation. But de is happy. We wuz' miserable.

Songs? I only recalls one right now. It went like this some.

Free at las',
Free at las',
Thank God Almighty
I se free at las'.

Ah don' know nothin' bout Jefferson Davis. Lincoln wuz' de man what free uz. He wuz a big general in de' wah you know.

Ah only sees de Klu Klux Klan onct'. De wuz parading de streets here in Brookhaven an' de had a niggah de wuz gwine tar an' feather.

Slavery times! Oh God ah hates, hates 'em. Mean, cruel, hard.
Charlie Moses, 84 year old ex-slave, lives at Brookhaven. He possesses the eloquence and the abundant vocabulary of all Negro preachers. He is now confined to his bed because of the many ailments of old age. His weight appears to be about 140 pounds, height 6 feet 1 inch high.

"When I gits to thinkin' back on them slavery days I feels like risin' out o' this here bed an' tellin' everbody 'bout the harsh treatment us colored folks was given when we was owned by poor quality folks.

"My master was mean an' cruel. I hates him, hates him! The God Almighty has condemned him to eternal fish. Of that I is certain. Even the cows and horses on his plantation was scared out o' their minds when he come near 'em. Oh Lordy! I can tell you plenty 'bout the things he done to us poor Niggers. We was treated no better than one o' his houn' dogs. Sometimes he didn't treat us as good as he did them. I prays to the Lord not to let me see him when I die. He had the devil in his heart."

"His name was Jim Rankin an' he lived cut on a plantation over in Marion County. I was born an' raised on his place. I spec I was
'bout twelve year old at the time o' the war.

"Old man Rankin worked us like animals. He had a right smart plantation an' kept all his Niggers, 'cept one house boy, out in the fiel' a-workin'. He'd say, 'Niggers is meant to work. That's what I paid my good money for 'em to do.'

"He had two daughters an' two sons. Them an' his poor wife had all the work in the house to do, 'cause he wouldn' waste no Nigger to help 'em out. His family was as scared o' him as we was. They lived all their lives under his whip. No Sir! No Sir! There warn't no meaner man in the world than old man Jim Rankin.

"My pappy was Allen Rankin an' my mammy was Catline. There was twelve o' us chillun, nine boys an' three girls. My pa was born in Mississippi an' sold to Master Rankin when he was a young man. My mammy was married in South Carolina an' sold to Master Rankin over at Columbia. She had to leave her family. But she warn't long in gittin' her another man.

"Oh Lordy! The way us Niggers was treated was awful. Master would beat, knock, kick, kill. He done ever'thing he could 'cept eat us. We was worked to death. We worked all Sunday, all day, all night. He whipped us 'til some jus' lay down to die. It was a poor life. I knows it aint right to have hate in the heart, but, God Almighty! It's hard to be forgivin' when I think of old man Rankin.
"If one o' his Niggers done something to displease him, which was mos' ever' day, he'd whip him 'til he'd mos' die an' then he'd kick him 'roun' in the dust. He'd even take his gun an', before the Nigger had time to open his mouth, he'd jus' stan' there an' shoot him down.

"We'd git up at dawn to go to the fiel's. We'd take our pails o' grub with us an' hang 'em up in a row by the fence. We had meal an' pork an' beef an' greens to eat. That was mos'ly what we had. Many a time when noon time come an' we'd go to eat our vittles the marster would come a-walkin' through the fiel with ten or twelve o' his houn' dogs. If he looked in the pails an' was displeased with what he seen in 'em, he took 'em an' dumped 'em out before our very eyes an' let the dogs grab it up. We didn' git nothin' to eat then til we come home late in the evenin'. After he left we'd pick up pieces of the grub that the dogs left an' eat 'em. Hungry - hungry - we was so hungry!

"We had our separate cabins an' at sunset all of us would go in an' shut the door an' pray the Lord Marster Jim didn' call us out.

"We never had much clothes 'captin' what was give us by the marster or the mistis. Winter time we never had 'nough to wear nor 'nough to eat. We wore homespun all the time. The marster didn' think we needed anything, but jus' a little.

"We didn' go to church, but Sundays we'd gather 'roun' an' listen to the mistis read a little out o' the Bible. The marster said we didn' need no religion an' he finally stopped her from readin' to us.

"When the war come Marster was a captain of a regiment. He went away an' stayed a year. When he come back he was even meaner than before.
"When he come home from the war he stayed for two weeks. The night 'fore he was a-fixin' to leave to go back he come out on his front porch to smoke his pipe. He was a-standin' leanin' up ag'in' a railin' when somebody sneaked up in the darkness an' shot him three times. Oh my Lord! He died the nex' mornin'. He never knew who done it. I was glad they shot him down.

"Sometimes the cavalry would come an' stay at the house an' the mistis would have to 'tend to 'em an' see that they got plenty to eat an' fresh horses.

"I never seen no fightin'. I stayed on the plantation 'til the war was over. I didn't see none o' the fightin'.

"I don't 'member nothin' 'bout Jefferson Davis. Lincoln was the man that set us free. He was a big general in the war.

"I 'member a song we sung, then. It went kinda like this:

'Free at last',
Free at last,
Thank God Almighty
I'm free at last'.
Mmmmmmmm..."

"I only seen the Ku Klux Klan once. They was a-paradin' the streets here in Brookhaven. They had a Nigger that they was a-goin' to tar an' feather.

"When the mistis tol' us we was free (my pappy was already dead, then) my mammy packed us chillum up to move. We travelled on a cotton wagon to Covington, Louisiana. We all worked on a farm there 'bout a year. Then all 'cept me moved to Mandeville, Louisiana an' worked on a farm there. I hired out to Mr. Charlie Duson, a baker. Then we moved to a farm above Baton Rouge, Louisiana an' worked for Mr. Abe
Manning. We jus' travelled all over from one place to another.

"Then I got a letter from a frien' o' mine in Gainesville, Mississ-
ippi. He had a job for me on a boat, haulin' lumber up the coast to Bay
St. Louis, Pass Christian, Long Beach, Gulfport, an' all them coast towns.
I worked out o' Gainesville on this boat for 'bout two year. I lost
track o' my family then an' never seen 'em no more.

"In the year 1870 I got the call from the Lord to go out an' preach.
I left Gainesville an' travelled to Summit, Mississippi where another
frien' o' mine lived. I preached the words o' the Lord an' travelled from
one place to another.

"In 1873 I got married an' decided to settle in Brookhaven. I
preached an' all my flock believed in me. I bought up this house an' the
two on each side of it. Here I raised seven chillun in the way o' the
Lord. They is all in different parts o' the country now, but I sees one
of 'em ever' now an' then. Las' April the Lord seen fit to put me a-bed
an' I been ailin' with misery ever since.

"The young folks now-a-days are happy an' don't know 'bout war an'
slavery times, but I does. They don't know nothin' an' don't make the
mark in the worl' that the old folks did. Old people made the first
roads 'in Mississippi. The Niggers today wouldn' know how to act on a
plantation. But they are happy. We was miserable.

"Slavery days was bitter an' I can't forget the sufferin'. Oh,
God! I hates 'em, hates 'em. God Almighty never meant for human beings
to be like animals. Us Niggers has a soul an' a heart an' a min'. We
aint like a dog or a horse. If all marsters had been good like some,
the slaves would all a-been happy. But marsters like mine ought never
been allowed to own Niggers.
"I didn' spec nothin' out o' freedom 'ceptin' peace an' happiness an' the right to go my way as I pleased. I prays to the Lord for us to be free, always.

"That's the way God Almighty wants it."