



Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery

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The first edition of *Bearing Witness* brought together for the first time 176 slave narratives from the state of Arkansas. Now, this new edition adds ten previously undiscovered accounts. No one knew the truths of slavery better than the slaves themselves, but no one consulted them until the 1930s. Then, recognizing that this generation of unique witnesses would soon be lost to history, the Works Progress Administration's Federal Writers' Project acted to interview as many former slaves as possible. In a continuation of the project's interest in the life histories of ordinary people, writers interviewed over two thousand former slaves, more than a third of them in Arkansas. These oral histories were first published in the 1970s in a thirty-nine-volume series organized by state, and they transformed America's understanding of slavery. They have offered crucial evidence on a variety of other topics as well: the Civil War, Reconstruction, agricultural practices, everyday life, and oral history itself. But some former Arkansas slaves were interviewed in Texas, Oklahoma, and other states, so their narratives were published in those other collections. And more than half of the testimonies in the Arkansas volume were interviews with people who had moved to Arkansas after freedom. Folklorist George Lankford combed all of the state collections for the testimonies properly belonging to Arkansas and deleted from this state's collection the testimony of later migrants

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