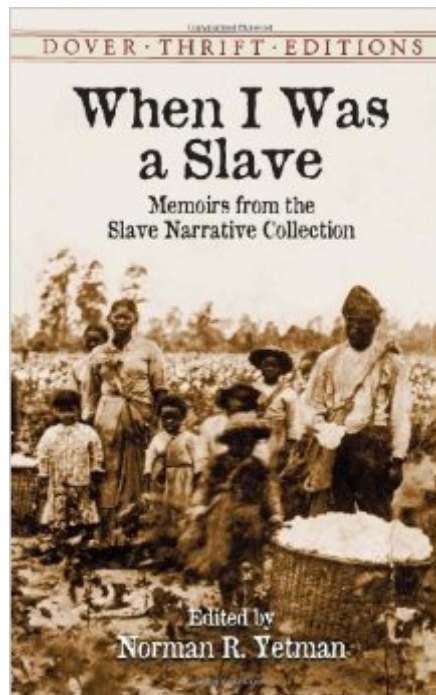


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# When I Was A Slave: Memoirs From The Slave Narrative Collection (Dover Thrift Editions)



## Synopsis

In an effort to provide unemployed writers with work during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the United States Government, through the Works Progress Administration (WPA), funded the Federal Writers' Project. One of the group's most noteworthy and enduring achievements was the Slave Narrative Collection, consisting of more than 2,000 transcripts of interviews with former slaves, who, in blunt, simple words, provided often-startling first-person accounts of their lives in bondage. This book reprints some of the most detailed and engrossing life histories in the collection. Each narrative is complete. Thirty-four gripping testimonies are included, with all slave occupations represented — from field hand and cook to French tutor and seamstress. Personal treatment reported by these individuals also encompassed a wide range — from the most harsh and exploitative to living and working conditions that were intimate and benevolent. An illuminating and unique source of information about life in the South before, during, and after the Civil War, these memoirs, most importantly, preserve the opinions and perspective of those who were enslaved. Invaluable to students, teachers, and specialists in Southern history, this compelling book will intrigue anyone interested in the African-American experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was captured by the frankness and brutal honesty depicted in these slave narratives. The stories are varied and I am reminded that yes, slavery was horrific and barbaric but these were people and

as such all have different experiences. African Americans in this country are at a clear disadvantage in terms of understanding our heritage and reading these stories kept reminding me of that fact. That's a good thing because this collection covers the gamut of slavery. Unimaginable cruelty to high society life, all led by slaves. Each story is kept short but in the end you have a better view of the people component of slavery not just a view of the "institution of slavery." There was one story about a family run plantation that was considered fairer than most in that they didn't beat, brand or mistreat their slaves. During the course of the Civil War slave families are torn apart and taken away. After the Civil War, these particular plantation owners went looking for all their former slaves as most were starving or being worked in worse conditions than pre Civil War. One former slave girl they found wanted to find her mother and siblings and they set about helping her to do that. In the end she actually finds her mother and a few siblings in another state but it would not have been possible without the assistance of her former owners. This story imparts that there were people who understood that skin color does not mean you lack feelings, that states like Texas were horrible slave raiding states and that the south after the Civil War wasn't a good place to be if you were a former slave. This is a good book to read if you want that overview and being 149 pages it's not overly long. It's also great if you have to pick it up and put it down as each story is only a few pages long.

This is one of the most startling yet enlightening books I have ever read. Remembrances, recollections and memories of ex-slaves were gathered by Mr. Yetman and reproduced unedited (except for clarity) as a project developed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Written in the 1930's when a few very elderly slaves were still living and taken directly from them, the reader gets a true sense of the inhumanity of slavery. Although some slaves were treated decently (I cannot say "kindly" - that word didn't exist when it came to slaves), most were simply a product or asset on a plantation or farm. Families were ripped apart and sold at the owner's whim - never to see brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers again. Husbands and wives suffered the same fate. Many were starved and beaten. Many had no place to sleep at night. It was forbidden for them to learn to read. The treatment, tortures and torments these poor souls endured will break the hardest of hearts. This was not just a "Southern" way of life. There were Northerners equally guilty of these crimes against humanity. There is simply no way to describe the less-than-human conditions that slaves endured except to read their travails for yourself. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Yetman for preserving these remembrances of "our eternal shame". I feel that this should be required reading in schools. And included in some way in the test for citizenship. The book is slim and the memoirs are

short and quickly read. Although it is revolting, slavery is part of our American heritage and every American should know that slavery was our legacy of dishonor" and will forever remain our eternal regret.

Norman Yetman has done every researcher of African American history a great service by his splendid compilation in "When I Was a Slave." Yetman used a precise formula for inclusion and/or exclusion in order to compile these narratives out of more than 3,000 interviews performed by the WPA in the 1930s. They are clearly representative of the entire 3,000, while at the same time of greater length and providing more detail than the 2,900 others. Here the reader hears first-hand the voices of the ex-enslaved African American--telling his or her story with startling imagery and amazing detail. This is a one-of-a-kind collection well worth buying, reading, and re-reading. Reviewer: Bob Kelleman, Ph.D., is the author of *Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*, *Â Spiritual Friends: A Methodology of Soul Care And Spiritual Direction*, and *Soul Physicians*.

I always like reading 1st person accounts because through them the reader gets a true feeling about the event, and this book is no exception. By reading the narratives you can really visualize how life was for the slaves. This is not a book of "horror stories" about slavery (although the horrors of slavery do come out!) and many of the slaves say they were treated "well"; but are humans who are treated like livestock really treated "well"? That is left up to the reader to decide. I would recommend this book for anyone, and especially those studying or teaching about the civil war.

This book gives a wonderful insight into what slavery was like. It's hard to believe that human beings can be so cruel to each other. I don't know how slaves were able to endure such horrible lives. This book helped me to have even more respect for my ancestors and admire their strength and wisdom.

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