



The Slave Narratives of Texas

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Many defenders of slavery in Texas, believing it was in harmony with natural law, sanctioned by the Bible, and the best system for the Negro, maintained that the slaves in Texas were well-treated and happy, but as a former slave remarked, "Tisn't he who has stood and looked on, that can tell you what slavery is--'tis he who has endured." From Texas' very beginnings, slavery was a dichotomy entailing divided loyalties.

Slaveowning Stephen F. Austin believed that slavery was an economic necessity for the success of his colony, but he also believed it was evil and immoral. The institution that led Texas to deny the equality of men, and which was to lead her into disaster in the Civil War, also enabled Texas to become a major cotton producer.

Here in *The Slave Narratives of Texas* are the tales of those who Endured--a collection of the voices of the ex-slaves themselves, recalling what their lives were like under slavery. Over one hundred former slaves describe their slave masters, their work, runaway slaves, their recollections of the Civil War, and finally, the coming of freedom.

The narratives were collected by WPA interviewers in the late 1930s and were subsequently edited and published in a disturbing but enlightening and readable book that provides a valuable history of the institution of slavery in Texas. The narratives provide a profoundly moving document which yields great insight into the full impact of slavery upon human lives.

With meticulous editing of the narratives and an extensive scholarly introduction, Ron Tyler and Lawrence R. Murphy have provided a valuable history of the institution of slavery in Texas.

Black and white photographs of the narrators, taken by the interviewers, are scattered throughout the book, allowing the reader a glimpse into the later lives of these elderly ex-slaves.

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