

Life in Slavery ^[1]

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It's almost impossible for us today to imagine how difficult life was for a slave in the antebellum South. Work was long and hard, food and shelter were minimal, the threat of brutal punishment always loomed, and families could be broken up at a master's whim. Yet, heroically, enslaved people made lives for themselves — families, religion, a culture, even art.

In this chapter, we'll read — and, in one case, actually hear — the words of former slaves themselves. Some sources in this chapter are books written by slaves who escaped to the North, to tell antebellum northerners what slavery was really like. Others are interviews conducted by a federal government program in the 1930s. These interviews can be difficult to read, but they are one of very few ways we can learn about the experiences of enslaved people directly.

Before beginning, please read this [guide to reading slave narratives](#)^[2].

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