



# Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery

*Jerrold Hirsch, B.A. Botkin*

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In the 1930's, the last decade when many men and women who were born under slavery and freed by the Emancipation Proclamation still lived, the New Deal's Federal Writing Project made an extraordinary and important decision. It sent interviewers to ask these African-American survivors : What does it mean to be free? Even more, how does it feel?

"Does I remember much 'bout slavery times? Well, there is no way for me to disremember unless I die."

B.A. Botkin compiled nearly three hundred of these narratives to create a rich, unvarnished portrait of lives lived half slave, half free. In it, people who experienced the seasonal rhythms of plantation life . . .who were eyewitnesses to Lincoln, Douglas, and Tubman . . .who had their consciousness shaped by bondage . . .and who felt the anguish of the lash have their memories brought to life again. Their voices reach out across the decades and teach us what they know -- our history and our legacy in their telling of an indelible truth.

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