

Questions to Consider: The first three interviews, one by an ex-slave and another by two members of the next generation of African Americans, illustrate how the initial hopes of freedom were lost. The last two interviews, from an elite Spanish Mexican woman and from a survivor of the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890, illustrate different kinds of conquest and resistance. Note how language matters in these interviews. Beulah Hagg probably believed that she was “authentic” when she wrote Boston Blackwell’s interview in dialect. Thomas Savage, the interviewer of Doña Angustias, was proud of his ability to transcribe Spanish at high speed word for word. James McGregor interviewed Dewey Beard through an interpreter.

1. In what ways do the first three narrators contradict the southern stereotype of former slaves as ignorant and childlike?
2. How do these five narrators demonstrate resistance?
3. In what ways does language itself affect the interview? Can we regard these interviews as authentically “in their own words?” And even when we hear the recorded voices of Hughsey Childes and Minnie Whitney, do we know enough about them from these brief excerpts to be able to fully understand their testimony?

The End of Slavery: Boston Blackwell

Source Note: The first interview is from the nation’s most famous oral history collection, the slave narratives collected by the Federal Writers Project in the 1930s. Over 2000 former slaves were interviewed and their memories preserved in the Library of Congress. For years the collection was controversial. Many historians questioned the accuracy of the accounts. After all, by the 1930s, ex-slaves were elderly and their memories faded. Historians also questioned how well the interviews represented former slaves. Although 2,000 was a large sample, it was only 2 percent of the total slave population. Also, would elderly black people speak frankly with the interviewers, most of whom were white? For the