

Analyzing and Evaluating WPA Slave Narratives

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Standards | <p>California Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills – Grades 9-12 <i>Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View</i> Students construct and test hypotheses; <i>collect, evaluate, and employ information from multiple primary and secondary sources; and apply it in oral and written evaluations.</i></p> |
| Course | U.S. History and Geography – 11 th grade |
| Focus/Concept | <p>Understanding the value and limitations of primary sources Understanding the concept of historical amnesia</p> |
| Measurable Outcome | <p>Students will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use a concrete strategy to analyze evidence 2. Identify value and limitations of evidence 3. Articulate reasons why gaps in the historical record may exist |
| Primary Source | <p>Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interview with Susan Hamlin, Charleston, SC 2. Interview with Susan Hamilton, Charleston, SC |
| Overview | In this lesson, students will learn a method for analyzing historical documents, compare and contrast two slave narratives, and evaluate the value and limitations of the narratives separately and together. |
| Assessment | Students will choose another slave narrative from the Library of Congress, complete an analysis and evaluation of the source, and write a reflection on how the limitations of slave narratives may have contributed to the public understanding of slavery. |
| Resources | <p>“What is History” – Overhead Transparency Primary Sources: Class Set of Hamlin and Hamilton Interviews SOAPEC Document Analysis Guidelines (overhead and copies for students) Internet Access: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html</p> |

Lesson Implementation

Previous Lesson – “Limits of the Historical Record”

Lesson Opener: Review and Discussion – “What is History” – Graphic summary of limits to the historical record.

Question: How do we know what is a usable, believable record for a historical account? Introduce SOAPEC as concrete strategy for analyzing and evaluating sources.

Introduce and briefly explain slave narratives: antebellum examples, disappearance after Civil War, resurgence during Depression. (see “An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives” by Norman R. Yetman at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snintro00.html>)

Guided Practice: As a class, read Susan Hamlin’s slave narrative. Work collectively with SOAPEC to analyze and evaluate the document.

Guided Practice: With a partner, read Susan Hamilton’s slave narrative, and work together with SOAPEC to analyze and evaluate the document.

As a class, review work done with in pairs. Students should use a different color pen to add information to their own SOAPEC.

If student haven’t noticed the overlap between the narratives, ask them to compare and contrast them, using a Venn diagram (can be done as a class, or in pairs).

Once students have determined that the two interviews are from the same woman, have students respond to questions (in writing, or in small groups).

- What details were included in her first telling that were left out of her second telling?
- Why do you think Susan Hamlin might have left information out of her second telling of her life under slavery?
- Given the differences in the two narratives, what limitations exist for slave narratives as a type of historical source?

Independent Practice: Homework/Assessment:

- Go to <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html> and choose another slave narrative from the Library of Congress.
- Read the narrative and use SOAPEC to complete an analysis and evaluation of the source.
- Write a one-paragraph reflection on how the limitations of slave narratives may have contributed to the public understanding of slavery.

Curriculum created by **Kim McCarthy San Jose, CA**

SOAPEC



A Strategy for Analyzing and Evaluating Historical Evidence

Subject – What?

What is the subject of the piece? What are the general topics/ideas contained in the text?

Origin – Who?

Who wrote or created the source? When was it created? Where was it created?

Audience – Whom?

To whom is the document directed?

Purpose – Why?

What reasons did the originator have for creating the document?

Evaluation – How and why is the document important?

What value does the document have? What can it tell us?

What limitations does the document have? What can't it tell us?

Context – What's the bigger picture?

What else is going on at or around this time?

3904

EX-SLAVE 101 YEARS OF AGE

HAS NEVER SHAKEN HANDS SINCE 1863

Was On Knees Scrubbing when Freedom Gun Fired

I'm a hund'ed an' one years old now, son. De only one livin' in my crowd frum de days I wuz a slave. Mr. Fuller, my master, who was president of the First National Bank, owned de rambly of us except my father. There were eight men an' women with rive girls an' six boys workin' for him. Most o' them wuz hired out. De house in which we stayed is still dere with de sisterns an' slave quarters. I always go to see de old home which is on St. Phillip Street.

My ma had t'ree boys an' t'ree girls who did well at their work. Hope Mikell, my eldest bredder, an' James wuz de shoemaker. William Fuller, son of our master, wuz de bricklayer. Margurite an' Casharine wuz de maids an' I look at de children.

My pa b'long to a man on Edisto Island. Frum what he said, his master was very near. Pa's real name wuz Adam Collins but he took his master's name; he wuz de coachman. Pa did supin one day en his master whipped him. De next day which wuz Monday, pa carry him 'bout four miles frum home in de woods an' give him de same 'mount of lickin' he wuz given on Sunday. He tied him to a tree an' unhitched de horse so it couldn't git tie-up an' kill e self. Pa den gone to de landin' an' catch a boat dat wuz comin' to Charleston wood ra'm products. He ^{was} permitted by his master to go to town on errands, which helped him to go on de boat without bein' question'. W'en he got here he gone on de water-front an' ax for a job on a ship so he could git to de North. He got de job an' sail' wood de ship. Dey search de island up en' down for him wood houndogs en w'en it wuz t'ought he wuz drowned,

EX-SLAVES cont'd.

'cause dey track him to de river, did dey give up. One of his master' friend gone to New York an went in a store w'ere pas wus employed as a clerk. he reconize' pa is easy is pa reconize' him. He gone back home an' tell pa master who know den dat pa wusn't comin' back an' before he died he sign' papers dat pa wus free. Pa ma wus dead an' he come down to bury her by de permission of his master' son who had promised no ha'm would come to him, but dey wus 'ixin' plans to keep him, so he went to de Work House an' ax to be sold 'cause any slave could sell e self if e could git to de Work House. But it wus on record down dere so dey couldn't sell 'im an' told him his master' people couldn't hold him a slave.

People den use to do de same t'ings dey do now. Some marry an' some live together jus' like now. One t'ing, no minister nebber say in readin' de matrimony "let no man put asunder" 'cause a couple would be married tonight an' tomorrow one would be taken away an be sold. All slaves wus married in dere master house, in de livin' room where slaves an' dere missus an' mossa wus to witness de ceremony. Brides use to wear some of de finest dress an' if dey could afford it, have de best kind of furniture. Your master nor your missus objected to good t'ings.

I'll always 'member Clory, de washer. She wus very high-tempered. She wus a mulatta with beautiful hair she could sit on; Clory didn't take foolishness frum anybody. One day our missus gone in de laundry an' find fault with de clothes. Clory didn't do a t'ing but pick her up bodily an' throw 'er out de door. Dey had to sen' fur a doctor 'cause she pregnant an' less than two hours de baby wus bo'n. Afra dat she begged to be sold fur she didn't to kill missus, but our mas- (want) ter ain't nebber want to sell his slaves. But dat didn't keep Clory frum gittin' a brutal whippin'. Dey whip' 'er until dere wusn't a white spot on her body. Dat

EX-SLAVE cont'd.

wus de worst I ebber see a human bein' got such a beatin'. I t'ought she wus goin' to die, but she got well an' didn't get any better but meaner until our master decide it wus bes' to rent her out. She willingly agree' since she wusn't 'round missus. She hated an' detest' both of them an' all de fambly.

W'en any slave wus whipped all de other slaves wus made to watch. I see women hung frum de ceilin' of builidin's an' whipped with only supin tied 'round her lower part of de body, until w'en dey wus taken down, dere wusn't breath in de body. I had some terribly bad experiences.

Yankees use to come t'rough de streets, especially de Big Market, huntin' inose who want to go to de "free country" as dey call' it. Men an' women wus always missin' an' nobody could give 'count of dere disappearance. De men wus train' up north fur sojus.

De white race is so brazen. Dey come here an' run de Indians frum dere own lan', but dey couldn't make dem slaves 'cause dey wouldn't stan' for it. Indians use to git up in trees an' shoot dem with poison arrow... 'en dey couldn't make dem slaves den dey gone to Africa an' bring dere black brother an' sister. Dey say 'mong themselves, "we gwine max dem up en make ourselves king. Dats d' only way we'll git even with de Indians."

All time, night an' day, you could hear men an' women screamin' to de tip of dere voices as either ma, pa, sister, or brother wus take without any warnin' an' sell. Some time mother who had only one chile wus separated fur life. People wus always dyin' frum a broken heart.

One night a couple married an' de next mornin' de boss sell de wife.

EX-SLAVE cont'd.

De gal ma got in in de street an' cursed de white woman fur all she could find. She said: "dat damn white, pale-face bastard sell my daughter who jus' married las' night," an' other t'ings. The white 'oman threaten' her to call de police if she didn't stop, but de collud woman said: "hit me or call de police. I redder die dan to stan' dis any longer!" De police took her to de work House by de white woman orders an' what became of 'er, I never hear.

W'en de war began we wus taken to Aiken, South Ca'lina w'ere we stay' untill de Yankees come t'rough. We could see balls sailin' t'rough de air w'en Sherman wus comin'. Bumbs hit trees in our yard. W'en de freedom gun wus fired, I wus on my 'nees scrubbin'. Dey tell me I wus free but I didn't b'lieve it.

In de days of slavery woman wus jus' given time 'nough to deliver dere babies. Dey deliver de baby 'bout eight in de mornin' an' twelve had too be back to work.

I wus a member of Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church for 67 years. Big Zion, across de street wus my church before den an' before Old Bethel w'en I lived on de other end of town.

Senec Lincoln shook hands with his assassin who at de same time shoot him, frum dat day I stop shakin' hands, even in de church, an' you know how long dat wus. I don't b'lieve in kissin' neider fur all carry dere meannesses. De Master wus betrayed by one of his bosom frien' with a kiss.

SOURCE

Interview with (Mrs.) Susan Hamilton, 17 Henrietta Street, who claims to be 101 years of age. She has never been sick for twenty years and walks as though just 40. She was hired out by her master for seven dollars a month which had to be given her master.

INTERVIEW WITH EX-SLAVE

On July 6th, I interviewed Susan Hamlin, ex-slave, at 17 Henrietta street, Charleston, S. C. She was sitting just inside of the front door, on a step leading up to the porch, and upon hearing me inquire for her she assumed that I was from the Welfare office, from which she had received aid prior to its closing. I did not correct this impression, and at no time did she suspect that the object of my visit was to get the story of her experience as a slave. During our conversation she mentioned her age. "Why that's very interesting, Susan," I told her, "If you are that old you probably remember the Civil War and slavery days." "Yes Ma'am, I been a slave myself," she said, and told me the following story:

"I kin remember some things like it was yesterday, but I is 104 years old now, and age is starting to get me, I can't remember everything like I use to. I getting old, old, you know I is old when I been a grown woman when the Civil War broke out. I was hired out then, to a Mr. McDonald, who lived on Atlantic street, and I remembers when de first shot was fired, and the shells went right over de city. I got seven dollars a month for looking after children, not taking them out, you understand, just minding them. I did not get the money, ~~Mausa~~ got it."

"Don't you think that was fair?" I asked. "If you were fed and clothed by him, shouldn't he be paid for your work?" "Course it been fair," she answered, "I belong

to him and he got to get something to take care of me."

"My name before I was married was Susan Calder, but I married a man name Hamlin. I belonged to Mr. Edward Fuller, he was president of the First National Bank. He was a good man to his people till de Lord took him. Mr. Fuller got his slaves by marriage. He married Miss Mikell, a lady what lived on Edisto Island, who was a slave owner, and we lived on Edisto on a plantation. I don't remember de name cause when Mr. Fuller got to be president of de bank we come to Charleston to live. He sell out the plantation and say them (the slaves) that want to come to Charleston with him could come and them what wants to stay can stay on the island with his wife's people. We had our choice. Some is come and some is stay, but my ma and us children come with Mr. Fuller.

We lived on St. Philip street. The house still there, good as ever, I go 'round there to see it all de time; the cistern still there too, where we used to sit 'round and drink the cold water, and eat, and talk and laugh. Mr. Fuller have lots of servants and the ones he didn't need hisself he hired out. The slaves had rooms in the back, the ones with children had two rooms and them that didn't have any children had one room, not to cook in but to sleep in. They all cooked and ate downstairs in the hall that they had for the colored people. I don't know about slavery but I know all the slavery I know about,

the people was good to me. Mr. Fuller was a good man and his wife's people been grand people, all good to their slaves. Seem like Mr. Fuller just git his slaves so he could be good to dem. He made all the little colored chillen love him. If you don't believe they loved him what they all cry, and scream, and holler for when dey hear he dead? 'Oh, Mausea dead my Mausea dead, what I going to do, my Mausea dead.' Dey tell dem t'aint no use to cry, dat can't bring him back, but de chillen keep on crying. We used to call him Mausea Eddie but he named Mr. Edward Fuller, and he sure was a good man.

"A man come here about a month ago, say he from de Government, and dey send him to find out 'bout slavery. I give him most a book, and what he give me? A dime. He ask me all kind of questions. He ask me dis and he ask me dat, didn't de white people do dis. and did dey do dat but Mr. Fuller was a good man, he was sure good to me and all his people, dey all like him, God bless him, he in de ground now but I ain't going to let nobody lie on him. You know he good when even the little chillen cry and holler when he dead. I tell you dey couldn't just fix us up any kind of way when we going to Sunday School. We had to be dressed nice, if you pass him and you ain't dress to suit him he send you right back and say tell your ma to see dat you dress right. Dey couldn't send you out in de cold barefoot neither. I 'member one day my ma want to send me wid some milk for her sister-in-law what live 'round de corner. I fuss cause it

cold and say 'how you going to send me out wid no shoe, and it cold?' Mause hear how I talking and turn he back and laugh, den he call to my ma to gone in de house and find shoe to put on my feet and don't let him see me barefoot again in cold weather.

When de war start going good and de shell fly over Charleston he take all us up to Aiken for protection. Talk 'bout marching through Georgia, dey sure march through Aiken, soldiers was everywhere.

"My ma had six children, three boys and three girls, but I de only one left, all my white people and all de colored people gone, not a soul left but me. I ain't been sick in 25 years. I is near my church and I don't miss service any Sunday, night or morning. I kin walk wherever I please, I kin walk to de Battery if I want to. The Welfare use to help me but dey shut down now, I can't find out if dey going to open again or not. Miss (Mrs.) Buist and Miss Pringle, dey help me when I can go there but all my own dead."

"Were most of the masters kind?" I asked. "Well you know," she answered, "times den was just like dey is now, some was kind and some was mean; heaps of wickedness went on just de same as now. All my people was good people. I see some wickedness and I hear 'bout all kinds of t'ings but you don't know whether it was lie or not. Mr. Fuller been a Christian man."

"Do you think it would have been better if the negroes

had never left Africa?" was the next question I asked. "No Ma'am," (emphatically) dem heathen didn't have no religion. I tell you how I t'ink it is. The Lord made t'ree nations, the white, the red and the black, and put dem in different places on de earth where dey was to stay. Dose black ignoramuses in Africa forgot God, and didn't have no religion and God blessed and prospered the white people dat did remember him and sent dem to teach de black people even if dey have to grab dem and bring dem into bondage till dey learned some sense. The Indians forgot God and dey had to be taught better so dey land was taken away from dem. God sure bless and prosper de white people and He put de red and de black people under dem so dey could teach dem and bring dem into sense wid God. Dey had to get dere brains right, and honor God, and learn uprightness wid God cause ain't He make you, and ain't His Son redeem you and save you wid His precious blood. You kin plan all de wickedness you want and pull hard as you choose but when the Lord mek up His mind you is to change, He can change you dat quick (snapping her fingers) and easy. You got to believe on Him if it tek bondage to bring you to your knees.

You know I is got converted. I been in Big Bethel (church) on my knees praying under one of de preachers. I see a great, big, dark pack on my back, and it had me all bent over and my shouldærs drawn down, all hunch up. I

look up and I see de glory, I see a big beautiful light, a great light, and in de middle is de Sabior, hanging so (extending her arms) just like He died. Den I gone to praying good, and I can feel de sheckles (shackles) loose up and moving and de pack fall off. I don't know where it went to, I see de angels in de Heaven, and hear dem say 'Your sins are forgiven.'" I scream and fell off so. (Swoon.) When I come to dey has laid me out straight and I know I is converted cause you can't see no such sight and go on like you is before. I know I is still a sinner but I believe in de power of God and I trust his Holy name. Den dey put me wid de seekers but I know I is already saved."

"Did they take good care of the slaves when their babies were born?" she was asked. "If you want chickens for fat (to fatten) you got to feed dem," she said with a smile, "and if you want people to work dey got to be strong, you got to feed dem and take care of dem too. If dey can't work it come out of your pocket. Lots of wickedness gone on in dem days, just as it do now, some good, some mean, black and white, it just dere nature, if dey good dey going to be kind to everybody, if dey mean dey going to be mean to everybody. Sometimes chillen was sold away from dey parents. De Mause would come and say "Where Jennie," tell um to put clothes on dat baby, I want um. He sell de baby and de ma scream and holler, you know how dey carry on. Geneally (generally) dey sold it when de ma wasn't dere. Mr. Fuller

didn't sell none of us, we stay wid our ma's till we grown.
I stay wid my ma till she dead.

"You know I is mix blood, my grandfather bin a
white man and my grandmother a mulatto. She been marry to
a black so dat how I get fix like I is. I got both blood,
so how I going to quarrel wid either side?"

SOURCE: Interview with Susan Hamlin, 17 Henrietta street.

NOTE * Susan lives with a mulatto family of the
better type. The name is Hamlin not Hamilton,
and her name prior to her marriage was Calder
not Collins. I paid particular attention to this
and had them spell the names for me. I would
judge Susan to be in the late nineties but she is
wonderfully well preserved. She now claims to be
104 years old.

What is history?

The Past: All actions & thoughts
by all individuals in all times and
places

Events observed
by someone

Events
observed and
remembered

Events
observed,
remembered
and recorded

Events for which we
have surviving records
(raw material of
history)

Events for which we
have available, usable,
believable records for a
historical account