**Introduction**

The Southern Life Histories Project emerged at a turning point in the Federal Writers’ Project. The guidebooks for each state had been largely drafted and were beginning the publication process. With the flagship project well underway, FWP administrators sought new projects. FWP Director Henry Alsberg and his Washington team were particularly interested in projects that promoted a pluralistic vision of the US. As a result, the FWP launched several new initiatives including Social-ethnic Studies and the Folklore Project.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Social-ethnic surveys were designed to understand the acculturation process of foreign "others" residing in the US. On the other hand, the Folklore project drew on anthropological ideals to document beliefs and customs that were thought to be unique to American culture and in danger of fading away in a rush to modernize the nation.

Amid this clamor to create new documentary efforts, William Couch, now Director of the FWP's Southeast Region, lobbied to add the life histories project to this list. Couch received approval from Alsberg in October 1938. In a letter to all state directors, Alsberg offered his enthusiastic support for the project and its potential to produce a large amount of material to aid in studying the current conditions in the American South.[[2]](#footnote-2) Through the end of 1939, the SLHP collected and wrote over 1,200 life histories, an impressive feat given the fact that the actual methods of collection and writing conventions were not established at the onset.

Mapping the locations of the interviews tells a story about the reach and limitation of these life histories. Exploring the collection of maps provokes several questions: Why do the life histories tend to clump together in specific areas? Why are interviews of people from common professions spread out over the region? Why do most writers only collect interviews in a small area? Why were most of the life histories written by women? Why were there only 7 Black writers? Why were the vast majority of interviewees White, a small amount Black, and almost no other races represented in the collection of the life histories?

Understanding the complicated rhetorical ecosystem in which the life histories were produced helps to address these questions. Washington-based FWP administrators desired to create a more pluralistic understanding of national identity through documentary projects. The SLHP had to compete for limited resources with the Social-ethnic and Folklore projects. Couch hoped to use life histories as a new documentary genre to address the social problems in the South. SLHP administrators had conflicting visions of the method needed to collect life histories. SLHP writers held their own prejudices as they were sent out to capture and create a new method of documentation that they had never seen before.

In this layer, we investigate this complex ecosystem by focusing on the factors that influenced the types of interviews the SLHP produced, where the interviews were conducted, and the writers chosen to collect the interviews. Moving back and forth between the map and archival evidence, we show how efforts to differentiate the SLHP's mission from other federal projects and academic disciplines shaped its version of the American South as defined through occupation and against a racialized Black/White binary. Moreover, the scope and method of a life history – as a document capturing a person’s “own story as it appears to him” or her – determined who was considered the best person to write the story.[[3]](#footnote-3) Again relying on a Black/White binary to define capable writers, White women came to dominate this space alongside White male writers while the SLHP segregated both male and female Black writers to the margins.

**Social-ethnic Studies and the Black/White Binary**

The map of interviews reveals that most SLHP interviewees were situated along a Black/White binary. In total, 891 of the interviews were conducted with White interviewees and 271 with Black interviewees. Also included were a small number of other racialized groups, which would be considered ethnic categories by contemporary terms. These include 9 Cuban interviewees, 50 Greek interviewees, 1 Spaniard, and 1 Chinese interviewee.[[4]](#footnote-4) Moreover, the location of these racial and ethnic groups is also interesting. While White and Black interviewees seem to spread out amongst each state in the Southeast region, some ethnic groups are largely located in specific areas. For example, all of the Cuban interviewees are located in Hillsborough County, Florida. This striking pattern raises the questions of why the SLHP decided to classify racial categories in this way and why the project largely ignored the many other racial, ethnic, and indigenous groups who lived in the area. To understand one reason why the interviews break down this way by race, we need to consider the ways the project needed to distinguish its mission from Social-ethnic Studies.

The Social-ethnic Studies project began shortly before the SLHP and was led by Dr. Morton W. Rayse, a Harvard sociologist. Rather than focusing on an individualized life, the Social-Ethnic studies project was concerned with documenting “the life of ethnic groups in various communities, including their cultural backgrounds and activities” through “intensive studies of single groups, cross-sectional studies of whole communities, and extensive studies of larger areas.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Moreover, while field workers were encouraged to use their community affiliation to gain entrance into the communities of study, the tenor of the project was scholarly and decidedly social scientific. In the Manual for Social-ethnic Studies, Rayse directs field workers to collect “field data, including selected interviews, personal histories, and documentary material” as well as fully cooperate with “consultants drawn from the ranks of State writers, historians, folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, etc.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Rayse positioned the project as providing evidence of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of the United States, which FWP administrators argued should be seen as a national strength. He explained that the project's goal was to embrace "the history and role of nationality groups in modern industrial society...to present a composite picture of America," while taking care "not to overstress the separateness and peculiarities of a group. The aim was to show how the group functions in the life of the community...and how it contributes to cultural diversity.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

SLHP administrators used the Social-ethnic Studies’ focus on data collection of entire ethnic communities and embrace of the scholarly community as their primary audience as a way to strongly distinguish their project. One distinction was the kind of data collected. Rather than quantitative social survey data, SLHP would focus on collecting qualitative stories of individuals from their own point of view, focusing on Southerners. SLHP writers were documenting the interviewee’s articulation of their experiences, not writing about them. They viewed the Social-ethnic Studies' purpose as documenting the unique and unusual aspects of American society and culture, rather than the "common" American. North Carolina State Director Bjorkman explained to his writers that these other projects "deal with communities of an exceptional type that deviate in their origins and customs from the more common types of American life.”[[8]](#footnote-8) In contrast, the SLHP was to focus on these "common types," or as Couch put it, "the kind of life that is lived by the majority of people in the South.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

To document and organize these common types, SLHP administrators instructed writers to document demographic information relating to the interviewee. This information constitutes important metadata for each interviewee that worked to mark which common type the person's life history spoke to. In a memorandum to all state directors, Walter Cutter (Assistant Regional Director) states, “It is requested that hereafter the following heading be placed on all stories: [[10]](#footnote-10)

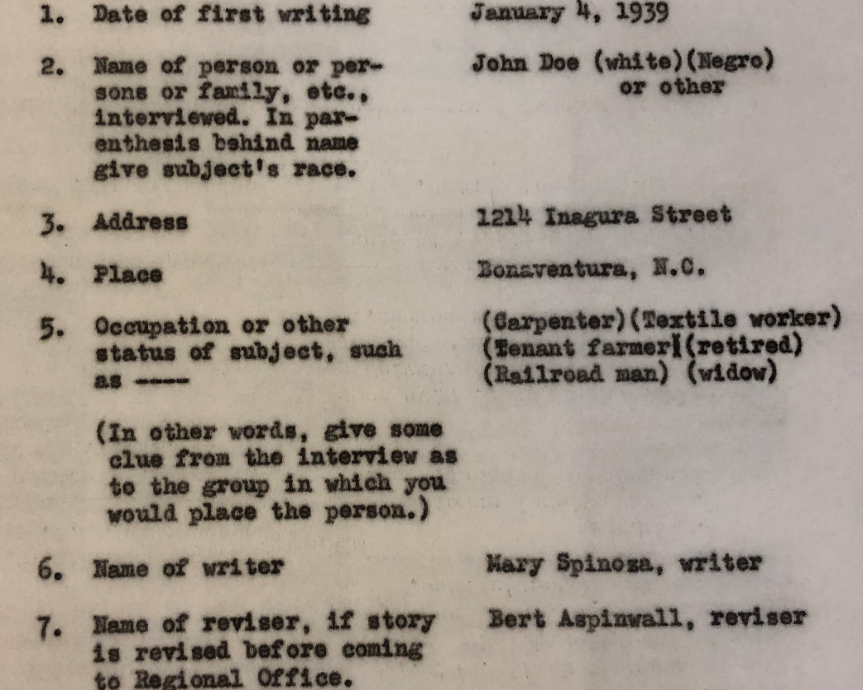


Figure #: The header of a life history.

Instructing writers to collect this specific metadata as a heading before the life histories begins to frame the entire interview within these categories. The interviewee's name is to be read with their race, followed by their location and occupation. Therefore, before the location in the South is demonstrated or the specific occupation, race is marked as a signifier of the interviewee's name. Moreover, the writer is given three possible racial categories: "white," "Negro," or "other." This categorization inscribes a Black/White binary onto the racialized system in the South. Anyone whose racial categorization did not fall into this binary were grouped as "other". The approach erased ethnic and indigenous communities that did not fall within this binary.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Additionally, this framing of Southern identity through a Black/White binary also supports the distinction between the SLHP and the Social-ethnic Studies. SLHP administrators effectively encouraged writers to avoid interviewing subjects from different ethnic, indigenous, or other racial communities as that was considered the purview of the Social-ethnic Studies. Understanding the efforts that the SLHP made to distinguish itself from the Social-ethnic Studies helps to explain why the data revealed in the map shows an absence of communities from diverse racial, ethnic, and indigenous communities. The emphasis on “common types of American life” signaled and reaffirmed the equation of South with whiteness in which Blackness was visible, but often used as *other* by which to measure whiteness. At the same time, additional ethnic and indigenous communities were ignored.

As the life histories began to flow into Chapel Hill, Couch sought to expand the project's reach. "For the present it has been decided to delay work in the South on the Social-ethnic Studies and to concentrate on the life histories," he wrote.[[12]](#footnote-12) The pause made space for the life histories project to reach out to communities once the other project's primary domain. He then instructed, “In selecting persons and families to use as subjects of life histories, use whites, Negroes and members of any other racial groups. We must have life histories that reveal the way people in the South live, and Negroes and members of other racial groups are people just as well as whites.”[[13]](#footnote-13) He has heard the criticism of colleagues such as Sterling Brown, editor of Negro Affairs in the FWP and whose job was to make sure Black voices were included. However, the inclusion of Black voices extended to their role as interviewees, but not writers, as the map demonstrates.

**Folklore and a Focus on Occupation**

Mapping the occupations associated with the life histories reveals a core set of professions that are captured across the American South. Together there are over 200 farmers, over 80 mill and textile workers, and nearly 60 housewives. Along with these most common trades, there are dozens of interviews with cooks, fishermen, and preachers. Mixed in with these large categories are one-off stories showing the wide range of professions available in the region, such as life histories from one peanut vendor, an embalmer, a preacher, and even a self-proclaimed “loan shark.”[[14]](#footnote-14) It is clear from the map that there was an intentional decision to find interviewees that showed the depth and range of occupations across the entire region. To understand why the SLHP focused so heavily on economic conditions, it is useful to consider its relationship to the FWP’s Folklore Project.

The Folklore Project of the FWP was launched in 1936 and was initially led by John Lomax. It focused on the collection of oral material such as songs, stories, and dialect.[[15]](#footnote-15) The project saw folklore as consisting of ideas and customs transmitted by communities by word of mouth. Unlike other modes of expression, such as newspapers and books, folklore was seen to be outside of academic and commercial modes of dissemination.[[16]](#footnote-16) The SLHP initially had chosen to distinguish itself from the Folklore Project by focusing on documenting an individual's history that led to their contemporary circumstances, rather focus on stories from the past. This distinction, however, became insufficient when the Folklore Project was reorganized under the Direction of Benjamin Botkin in early 1938.

As a professor of English at the University of Oklahoma and trained in English literature departments, Botkin brought "a literary sensibility" to the study of folklore and refused the traditional configuration of folklore studies as just an approach to preserving the past.[[17]](#footnote-17) Shaped by the field of anthropology, he viewed folklore as also an ongoing process in the here and now that offered sights into contemporary life rather than a field defined by the search for some “pure, uncontaminated lore” as traditional folklorists often did.[[18]](#footnote-18) Folklore, in other words, was also responding to and offering insights into how communities were navigating the present, from the economic impact of the Great Depression to the effects of industrialization to questions about local, regional, and national identity.[[19]](#footnote-19) They were not just documenting stories to understand past beliefs, norms, and values, but instead a lens into contemporary culture. Guided by the belief that every group[[20]](#footnote-20) had folklore, the project also supported FWP officials' effort to document and circulate an indigenous culture, which could serve as the evidence of a national identity at a time when faith in the nation was fragile.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The expanded scope of the Folklore Project was met with approval from FWP administrators, who understood the work of the Folklore Project and the Social-ethnic Studies as complementary. In fact, the FWP hoped that the same field workers would collect material for both the Folklore project and Social-ethnic Studies. As the Manual on Social-ethnic Studies explained, “The Social-ethnic studies deal with the whole life of a group or community, including cultural backgrounds and activities: the folklore studies deal with a body of lore in relation to the life of a group or community.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Folklore was understood as demonstrating how cultural traditions and beliefs were built and handed down over generations. They were another component that could further shed light on Social-ethnic communities and the nation at large and vice-versa.

To accomplish their goals, the Folklore Project sent field workers to collect "personal stories" from individuals. To capture folklore, Botkin believed fieldworkers should begin by asking informants about their personal histories. When interviews progressed well, these individual stories would expand to capture the experiences, histories, and even fantasies of entire communities. By engaging directly in the process of telling and re-telling these stories, interviewees were uniquely positioned to witness and capture entire folk histories.[[23]](#footnote-23) Asking for personal histories was an avenue for collecting folklore. The person’s history offered a frame for understanding the context that created and circulated a piece of folklore. These materials were envisioned both to document as well as be mined for folk culture.

This framework of folklore was also used to segregate folklore from Black people as a sub-branch within the project. In a memorandum to state directors, Alsberg announced the creation of a sub-project under folklore he labeled “negro-lore,” which was concerned with “Negro life throughout the country, Negro folklore…highlights of Negro history and activities” as well “the collection stories of ex-slaves.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Partitioning Black folklore apart from the rest of the American folklore project, together with grouping folklore and history, demonstrates a common move within Jim Crow logic that segregated and othered Black history and experiences.[[25]](#footnote-25) Moreover, Couch saw this concern with stories of formerly enslaved persons as falling outside of the scope of the SLHP. He wrote to state directors, “In the life histories the emphasis is on the present and the past is treated only to throw light on the present. Ex-slave stories that relate mainly to the past will not be acceptable as life histories.”[[26]](#footnote-26) With this framing, Couch effectively positioned ex-slaves interviews as only being relevant to the SLHP if they talked about how slavery affected their present situation. This logic sheds even greater light on the content of Black life histories, since writers were effectively encouraged to gloss over details of slavery. Couch would continue to use this interest in contemporary social conditions as a defining factor in the SLHP.

Botkin's use of personal histories to gain insight into folklore meant that Couch had to be clear about how the SLHP documented unique and valuable information. To do this, Couch made two important moves in framing the project. First, he positioned the project as focusing on the South's occupation sectors by drawing on the national concern that the South was not sufficiently progressing with economic reforms. Second, Couch drew on sociology, despite his frustrations with the field. He believed that he could take a common method in the field known as case studies and transform them into readable stories published in the form of books for a reading public, which meant a primarily White affluent audience.[[27]](#footnote-27) The focus on *what* and *how* became key to arguments about the purpose and novelty of the SLHP.

To distinguish Botkin's use of personal histories to gain insight into folklore from the SLHP, Couch used a sociological frame to argue that life histories were concerned with documenting social structures such as education, family, and health rather than culture such as beliefs, ideas, and values. Yet, like Botkin and the field of Sociology from which he adapted his method, he believed the individual stories, what he called "word pictures", could be put together to draw a composite album of a social group. Given the constraints also shaped by their relationship to the Social-ethnic Studies as well as national concerns about the state of the South, the SLHP focused on “common types” in the region organized by occupational sectors.[[28]](#footnote-28)

By focusing the scope of the project on occupational types, Couch believed that the project would be able to address the source of the social problems in the South. As discussed in Layer 1, President Roosevelt defined the South as "economic problem #1," which exemplified how the South was thought of as having social problems that both led to the Great Depression and prevented the region from more quickly recovering. While Roosevelt's framing suggests that it was the social issues that led to economic problems, many Southern progressives, especially the Regionalists in Chapel Hill, as well as progressives in national offices in the FWP saw the causation as flowing in the opposite direction: economic problems caused the social issues in the South. The proposal of capturing people's life histories from specific occupational sectors was thought to be one way to gain insight into the common problems faced by these workers. In discussing the value of the life histories, Couch explains, "this material makes clearer than ever before the problems which have been faced in this region, and illuminates, almost startling, the human factors and interests involved. It seems to me that knowledge of such material is basic to any real understanding of our problems and people.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

This emphasis on the economic systems that cause social issues falls in line with a sociological framework as opposed to the Folklore’s project focus on recording cultural forms drawn from anthropological approaches. However, rather than a broad representation of all different social types and classes across occupational sectors, other SLHP administrators crafted a much narrower frame by emphasizing the need to document what they called “common” and “typical” workers. Eudora Richardson, State Director of Virginia, similarly instructed her writers,

Try to interview workers who may be considered typical, such as a man who packed up his family and belongings and came from a small farm, hoping to earn a better living in industry; a former share-cropper who wants more ‘cash money’ from his mill job; a ‘floater’ or transient worker from another industrial section; a believer in union organizations; an opponent of unions; a leader among women workers’ a worker who is looked on as a spokesman for the employer point of view; local persons who now have their first industrial job.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Richardson equates a broader interest in occupation with specific types of workers. This equation is significant as these instructions tell writers how to define Southern workers through the “typical” types worthy of documenting. These typical Southern workers are positioned as primarily coming from either agriculture or industry with a keen desire to work despite economic and market forces subverting their efforts to gain employment. To argue that these were typical stories across the American South, the SLHP needed to collect similar stories from people all across the region. Hence, we see interviews from various professions, most notably farmers and industrial labor, across the region.

This brings us back to the embalmer and preacher. A major focus was on agriculture and industrialization, as the occupation filter on the map indicates. With the project’s prioritization with the FWP, the scope expanded to include more occupations, which helped paint a broader picture of the region. Even with the expanded focus, though, documenting the "typical" version of each specific type of worker remained the goal. So, they collected several life histories to find the best example. Combined with the need to navigate in relation to the Social-ethnic Studies, the SLHP produced this album of word pictures of “typical” workers through a Black/White binary.

**Sociology and the Configuration of a Life History**

Whereas the map of occupations illustrates the goal of capturing a core set of professions from all across the region, the map showing where individual writers took life histories provides a different pattern. Each writer, with very few exceptions, only conducted life histories in a narrow geographic region. The map shows, for example, W. O. Saunders’ focus on the North Carolina coast, W. W. Dixon’s work near Columbia, South Carolina, and Barbara Berry Dorsey’s collection of life histories near St. Petersburg, Florida. In most cases, the regions of focus for each writer also correspond to where a writer lived. Writers were constructing life histories within their own geographic community. Whereas the focus on occupations was spurred by the desire to distinguish the SLHP from the Folklore Project's anthropological questions, the desire to have local writers can be understood as a desire to differentiate life histories from those prevailing methods that dominated Sociology.

As the larger field of Sociology, Couch looked past the work of Du Bois and the Atlanta School to center his arguments in relation to the Chicago and Chapel Hill schools.[[31]](#footnote-31) By the 1930s, certain schools of sociology had canonized works such as Florian Znanieckian and William I. Thomas’s *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918). They were credited with the shift from a philosophical to a scientific approach grounded in empiricism because of their use of "human documents", which included introducing a new form of qualitative data that they called a life history. Works such as Shaw’s *The Jack-Roller* (1930) further popularized empirical American sociology and the life history method.[[32]](#footnote-32) The life history method became a popular form of evidence for case studies, which were conducted among a person or particular group by a social worker or sociologist, even often resulting in life histories being called case histories.

By the mid-1930s, they were a common method in Sociology, primarily associated with social work and the emerging field of criminology.[[33]](#footnote-33) “So closely related are these various kinds of case studies that it is impossible, for all practical purposes, to draw a clear-cut distinction between a case study, a case study, a case history, and a life history of an individual”, wrote UNC Sociology Professor Katherine Jocher in 1928 for *Social Forces*. The slippage between terms in the field meant that the method, and debates over the method, were often under the more popular terms of “case histories” and “case studies”. This was the case for Rupert Vance, Couch’s primary interlocutor and from whom he drew inspiration for the life histories.

To capture stories of “typical” Southern workers, Couch and SLHP administrators found Sociology’s case studies intriguing. However, Couch did not think the increasingly favored statistical and data-driven approaches in sociology could motivate a general readership to learn about the social problems in the South or social problems in general. They abstracted not only the people but the problems and missed an opportunity to persuade people into action. Instead, he saw promise in the case study approach, specifically the method of life histories, if this method could be repurposed for a popular audience and to focus on common types rather than those defined as deviant.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Case studies “are technically written for a technical audience” and “restricted usually to segments of persons’ lives used to illustrate particular problems, such as problems of juvenile delinquency, adult criminality, and marital frictions,” he wrote.[[35]](#footnote-35) Instead, Couch argued for a different purpose and reader. Rather than focusing on “deviant” segments of the population, he was interested in “representatives of the great body of people” in which each person would tell “his own story as it appears to him including all those details which while deemed non-essential for sociological generalizations, nevertheless, portray in the realest sense the nature and quality of a man’s living [underline original].”[[36]](#footnote-36)

Additionally, Couch objected to the assumption within the discipline that “only sociologists can get case histories that are worth getting.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Instead, he believed that non-academic writers would be better able to collect information from subjects because they are more closely related to the subjects' situations, especially writers from the South. Moreover, they would not have the disciplinary trappings of sociology, so they would be more open to relating the life history as the interviewee told it. Couch explains, "the approach to this subject by the workers on the Federal Writers' Project will be from a human point of view corresponding closely with the point of view of the journalist, except that certain simple techniques will be established and followed to ensure the greatest possible accuracy in the histories are collected.”[[38]](#footnote-38)

The entanglement with sociology was driven largely because of the initial purpose of the SLHP: to understand a sociological problem through empirical data. Yet, the kind of empirical data desired was not quantitative but qualitative. As the field of Sociology desired authority through becoming a quantitative social science, the SLHP would collect sociological data but through individual *stories* from the perspective of the *individuals themselves* that were meant to be read in aggregate to shed light on the social conditions of a region. While Couch’s ambitions for the SLHP far exceeded the immediate social issues of the region, for he hoped this “new literary genre” would animate other domains and find yet unknown purposes, the immediate concerns about the economic and, therefore, social health of the region deeply shaped the genre in formation.

As a result, the project became focused on two primary aims. One was to document the region in a particular configuration – through a Black/White binary categorized by occupation. The second was to forge a new literary genre for sociological knowledge for a broader public. In this case, they identified their primary audience as an affluent White audience beyond the academy, for their social and cultural power in US society made them powerful voices that shaped US social policy.

**Who can best document a life history? A Focus on White Women Writers**

Looking at the map of writers shows that a significant amount of the life histories was written by women. In total, women made up slightly over half of the writing staff and produced over 60 percent of the recorded life histories. A large portion of the interviews was written by a small number of writers. There were 30 writers who wrote ten or more life histories. Together, those 30 writers wrote 677 life histories, slightly over half of the entire collection. Within this group of the most prolific writers, 11 were men, among which only one was Black (Robert McKinney), and 19 were White women. These 19 women wrote nearly 40 percent of the life histories. This small group of White women was responsible for shaping much of the collection.

Why were White women able to gain such a prominent position as writers in the SLHP? The key role of women writers in the project is particularly striking for a time when women were largely excluded from the workplace and had only been given the right to vote a mere two decades earlier. Two notable causes pushed the SLHP to use women writers so prolifically. First, gendered notions that associate women with the domestic sphere made them better able to gain access to interviewees within their homes and to make them at ease sharing their stories. Second, women were seen as good recorders of information due to their interest in communication and were increasingly favored for stenographer and secretary positions, which made them well-positioned to record interviewees' stories. [[39]](#footnote-39) Mostly male editorial staff would then change these notes into well-crafted stories.

While SLHP administrators framed the purpose of the life histories as providing an opportunity for the “people [to] speak for themselves,” it was never intended for the histories to be unmediated replications of the exact words of the interviewees as one might expect of oral history transcripts today.[[40]](#footnote-40) Instead, the SLHP writers and the editorial supervisors were responsible for turning the raw material from the interviewee into a life history with “literary excellence” that would be more “readable.”[[41]](#footnote-41) To achieve such literary excellence, Couch began the project by mandating that State Directors secure “the best qualified writers.”[[42]](#footnote-42) State Directors scoffed at such a directive because of the WPA requirement that 90% of writers be certified relief workers,[[43]](#footnote-43) arguing that good writers “were few and far between.”[[44]](#footnote-44) The State Director of Virginia, Richardson, went as far as to state, “There is no use deluding ourselves. There is not a relief worker on our staff that can produce a life story that is worth publishing.”[[45]](#footnote-45)

Couch was generally quite frustrated with this complaint from state directors, seeing the problem of securing good writers as a result of the hiring practice. He wrote, “I am practically certain relief rolls contain many persons who can write, that individuals frequently do not know their own abilities, that officials consulting applicants for relief know little about discovering abilities, and that the failure to get on the project persons who can write is a consequence of the application of naive, primitive social work techniques.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Additionally, he argued that “I have found that if I take a little time to look around I can locate persons already certified or who can be certified who are able to do really valuable work.”[[47]](#footnote-47) While Couch’s approach of “looking around” for those who were able to do “really valuable work” as well as helping workers find their own abilities seems to be aimed at opening up the project to new writers that had previously been ignored, the actual hiring processes relied on raced and gendered notions of who was best qualified to capture stories of interviewees and who possessed necessary writing skill.

The SLHP specially selected a handful of White women for non-relief positions, the same female writers who would become the most prolific writers during the life of the project. Among these women were the two writers who wrote more life histories than any other writer: Bernice Harris with 85 life histories and Ida Moore with 51 life histories. Harris, an aspiring playwright and novelist, was recruited after reviewing her novel for publication at UNC Press. Harris had taken summer classes at UNC in English as well as Professor Frederick Koch, founder of the Carolina Playmaker.[[48]](#footnote-48) *Purlsane*, which was loosely based on Harris’ childhood in Mt. Moriah, North Carolina, detailed the life of a small rural community. In a letter trying to recruit her to the project, Couch wrote, “We want you to get stories of tenant farmers and small farm owners … There are several reasons for my thinking of you in connection with this work. First, I believe you can do it better than anyone else I can find and that the stories you write will be authentic and interesting. Second, I am extremely anxious for you to do more writing of the kind you have done in your volume of plays and in Purslane.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

While Couch clearly recruited Harris because of her writing experience and ability, he also hoped that she could use her connections in her town (Seaboard, NC) as leverage to gain access to people willing to give their life histories. Because her husband owned and operated a cotton gin, Harris knew many people in the farming community. Together with her connections in the community, Harris believed that she was well-positioned to put people at ease. She explained that together with the many economic problems in the region was "the need of the lonely and forgotten to tell *all* to a sympathetic listener [italics original].”[[50]](#footnote-50) Harris’ description of herself as a sympathetic listener reveals a gendered notion of who was better able to listen to people’s stories.

In addition to gendered ideas about women as more sympathetic listeners, women were also positioned as less threatening and thus more likely to gain entrance into communities thought to be resistant to interviews. Ida Moore's early work on interviews with mill workers demonstrated this ability. Couch hired Ida Moore in May 1938 as one of the first people to work on the life histories project in the position of a non-certified, non-security worker. In a letter advocating for her hire, he wrote, "we have in hand at present in typescript a novel of hers which has been read for us by about one-half dozen persons, all of whom have recommended it highly...Miss Moore has had two years of college work, has taught school, and has learned much in the last ten years from having to forage for a living for herself and several brothers and sisters. Of the persons whom I know, who are available for this job, I consider her the best.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Again, Couch understood Moore's college education and the existence of a manuscript as evidence of her writing skill, lower-class roots, and resourcefullness as attributes that would help her perform her job.

Couch did, in fact, test Moore’s abilities by asking her to conduct the first interviews with textile mill workers. According to Couch, many argued that “‘the effort to get stories from people living in textile mill villages would arouse suspicion and that any person attempting to get material would very likely be rejected. It was also said that the people would not talk.’”[[52]](#footnote-52) However, Moore “proved the job could be done” by collecting more than 28 life histories from mill workers. Moore did such a good job showing that life histories could be collected and written in the manner Couch desired that she wrote the manual on life histories, which was sent to all writers and administrators in the SLHP.

While Couch and other SLHP administrators in North Carolina looked to women as lead writers, other key state administrators, most notably James Aswell and William McDaniel in Tennessee, took a significantly different approach to their writers as they felt virtually none of them were capable of writing. McDaniel and Aswell did not create the space for the writers to evolve and define the genre but instead took it upon themselves to craft the stories. Complaining of the incompetence of the writers, Aswell wrote Couch, “We are handicapped by having no field workers who can write or know what to look for. I have to tear down each thing that comes in, reassemble it, and then send it back with detailed instructions for expansion...When the piece is returned (with blanks that we furnish filled out with physical description of the interviewed and the neighborhood), then the thing has to be cut, the dialogue made natural and often more material sent for to fill up the cracks in the continuity...The field workers themselves are often half-illiterates. While this has its obvious advantages, the disadvantages are also pretty heavy.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Despite the extremely condescending tone, Aswell and McDaniel did see some promise in three female writers, Nellie Gray Toler, Della Yoe, Ruth Clark, who ultimately were the three most prolific writers in Tennessee.

Though Couch took a different approach to administering life histories than McDaniel, Aswell, and other SLHP supervisors, White women played a central role in the SLHP. Women occupied these roles because of the gendered assumptions about their supposed superior abilities to listen and their demur position, which then allowed them to put interviewees at ease. Certain writers even used those assumptions to create space for their writing and approach to life histories, such as Bernice Harris and Muriel Wolff, two of the most prolific writers.[[54]](#footnote-54) While White women writers seized this opportunity to contribute to the SLHP, their Black female counterparts were denied. In fact, Black writers were systematically excluded from the project, even as efforts were still made to capture the life histories of Black interviewees. However, the ways in which Blackness was represented often corresponded to Jim Crow characterizations expected by a White audience, which we delve into in Layer 4.

**Segregated on the Black/White Binary: The Marginalization of Black Writers**

Looking at the map of non-White writers reveals that White writers wrote the vast majority of life histories. In total, 159 of the writers were White, 7 were Black, and there was 1 Chinese American writer who wrote a single life history.[[55]](#footnote-55) Such data seems to counter Couch's advice to state and local SHLP administrators, encouraging them to look around for local writers. Moreover, this data is inconsistent with greater FWP aims of including Black writers.

To increase Black representation in the ranks of the FWP, Alsberg created the Office of Negro Affairs, led by renowned poet and scholar Sterling Brown and state and local offices known as Negro Working Units.[[56]](#footnote-56) However, these units were segregated, and often required workers to depend on Historical Black Colleges to find office space as they were forbidden to work in the same space as White colleagues. Brown worked hard to advocate for the inclusion of Black writers in all FWP initiatives.[[57]](#footnote-57) However, he consistently met resistance by White administrators. These administrators argued that they were unable to hire Black writers because of the requirements of segregation, the lack of writing skill, and the unwillingness of the Washington office to provide adequate resources for hiring.

Couch and the other SLHP administrators relied on structures of segregation, together with notions of writing skill and objectivity, to veil their racist hiring practices. When asked to explain why more Black people had not been hired, Bjorkman wrote to the office of Negro Affairs that not a single Black person had been hired in North Carolina because "the resources of the Writers' Project 'have not permitted the setting up of separate establishments, which would be required for such employment.’”[[58]](#footnote-58) Again relying on the argument of scarcity in resources that also effectively blamed Black writers, in a separate letter referencing his inability to hire Black writers, Bjorkman stated,

Efforts to do better in this respect have failed on account of the impossibility of finding members of that race capable of qualification for the project while certified on relief. The few employed have invariably had to be dropped after a short time because they did nothing at all...With a very small percentage of non-relief workers allowed to the project, and with such positions absolutely needed for the filling of directive and supervisory positions, it has been impossible to place any negroes in this class.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Following the almost exact same line of logic while also appealing to white supremacist sensibilities, Alabama state director Myrtle Miles stated, "'members of the race who are fortunate enough to have Institute training are not on relief,' 'it would be unwise to give a Negro this job...There is considerable racial sensitiveness in Tuskegee and vicinity.’”[[60]](#footnote-60) According to this logic, there were not enough skilled Black writers who qualified for relief. Those who were skilled writers did not qualify for relief, and the respective state offices were not willing to expend limited resources on hiring non-relief Black writers.

Couch echoed the argument of the inability to find Black writers but did so by appealing to a notion of colorblindness. Writing to Alsberg, he explained,

Since taking on the job of Regional Director I have found it necessary to spend a large part of my time working on the problem of improving the quality of personnel on state staff. I have not recommended or approved anyone for any non-relief position without first having definite evidence in the form of printed manuscript material as to his ability to write. I have held to this in dealing with white persons and I do not believe I should discriminate for or against Negros in this particular. There are no non-relief vacancies in North Carolina or on the Regional staff at the present time. On the Regional staff I have employed only those persons that I think have exceptional talent. Nothing would delight me more than to discover a Negro with exceptional writing talent, legally resident in the states with which I deal, and desiring to work on the Writers’ Project...I shall appreciate greatly any evidence that anyone can give me in locating Negros who are qualified for work on the Writers' Project in this region.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Couch’s argument to Alsberg assumed as given that there were not any good Black writers who qualified for relief and instead focused on the idea of hiring into the few allotted non-relief positions. In this case, he relied on racist structures of evidence that purport a type of objectivity and colorblindness to conclude that no Black writers could provide "evidence in the form of printed manuscript material" of "exceptional talent." Such reliance on printed manuscripts did not take into account inequalities in access to presses or higher education, not to mention his opaque definition of what constituted "exceptional talent."

Moreover, while Couch seemed to lament the fact that no one was helping him locate qualified Black writers, Irma Neal Henry, Consultant on Negro Affairs in North Carolina, was continually writing him with names and resumes of candidates with a college education and considerable writing experience.[[62]](#footnote-62) One candidate included Dr. Edward Farrison, who had a Ph.D. in English from Ohio State University and was a English and public speaking professor at Bennett College for 12 years.[[63]](#footnote-63) Additionally, he had published in several scholarly journals, including *The Journal of Negro History* and *The Crisis*. Despite the exceptional qualifications of Farrison, Couch claimed that while there were a number of jobs in which Farrison could “be very useful,” he did “not see any chance to increase the salaried staff.” In other words, there were no paid positions available for Farrison; however, Couch alluded to the fact that there may be a non-paid position available as he had worked with others who offered their assistance “on a voluntary, non-salary basis.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Therefore, even when Couch was presented with an extremely qualified Black candidate, he was not willing to make a non-relief position available, but would consider using his unpaid labor something most could not afford to give, not to mention the insult provided by such a suggestion.

In the end, Couch declared, “In the past two months I have spent several hours writing letters and having conferences over the matter of Negro employment on the North Carolina staff and the Regional staff. I feel that this time has been wasted......I do not feel that it is wise for me to spend time getting information about the qualifications of persons that might be employed unless there is a definite prospect of vacancies in which they might be used.”[[65]](#footnote-65) While Couch seems to blame the Washington office for lack of vacancies, it is clear that he was rarely willing to advocate for Black writers to occupy such non-relief positions. Moreover, Couch's argument about wasting his time is quite poignant given the fact that at the same time he was writing this, he was also berating the state directors for not "looking around" the community for writers who qualify for relief and approaching their personnel with the necessary "enthusiasm and understanding" necessary to discover the "the abilities of persons on their staffs.”[[66]](#footnote-66) Such a contradiction evidences the underlying racialized logic about which writers were worthy of the time necessary to help them discover their own abilities and allot non-relief positions to those with exceptional talent. This logic aimed to position White writers as more qualified to document and write life histories while disqualifying Black writers from working on the project.

**Conclusion**

Within the complex documentary ecosystem of the FWP, Couch and his fellow administrators carved out a space for the SLHP by creating a version of the life history method that was distinct from other sociological approaches. For the SLHP, life histories were written for a generalized audience by writers who were not trained academics. Most importantly, the FWP life history did not focus on deviance but rather common workers throughout the South. The interviewees were supposed to give their own perspective of their lives. The democratic ethos of the project resonated well with the larger FWP concerned with documenting real life as Americans lived it.

However, how the SLHP distinguished life histories from its two rival projects in the FWP (the Social-ethnic studies and Folklore) demonstrate that common workers actually fell into a Black-White binary. As a result, other ethnic and indigenous communities were seen as outside the scope of the SLHP. This Black-White binary was reproduced when the SLHP hired writers. White writers, particularly women, were seen as better positioned to capture true and authentic stories from interviewees. As Layer 4 discusses, the project’s purpose and the positionality of the writers necessarily shaped the content and form of the life histories.

1. Memorandum: “Program of the Federal Writers’ Project for the coming year” from Henry Alsberg, October 1938. Folder 1093 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1093, IMG\_1080. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Life Histories as a Method of Revealing People,” no date given, Folder 1165 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1165, IMG\_5254. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These numbers are based on the SLHP’s recorded metadata. As described in the Methods section, we also include an additional ethnic category that identifies slightly more interviewees of Cuban and Greek descent. The extra counts are small compared to the official counts; there are 10 Cuban interviewees and 56 Greek interviews using this ethnic category. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Memorandum: Program of the Federal Writers’ Project for the coming year” from Henry Alsberg, October 1938. Folder 1093 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1093, IMG\_1080; “Manual for Social-Ethnic Studies”, 1938. Folder 1111 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1111, IMG\_1547. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “Manual for Social-Ethnic Studies”, 1938. Folder 1111 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1111, IMG\_1553. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “Memorandum on Project Work,” from Edwin Bjorkman, November 15, 1938. Folder 1101 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1101, IMG\_1284. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Couch, *These Are Our Lives*, 419. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Memorandum: Heading to be Placed on All Life Histories,” from Walter Cutter, January 5, 1939. Folder 1112 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1112, IMG\_1605. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. To read more about the use of racial categories, please see the Method Layer. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “Answers to Frequent Queries on Life Histories,” no date given. Folder 1165 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1165, IMG\_5241. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Life History of A. Way, Jr., written by Wilson Heflin, July 18, 1939. Folder 37 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “Memorandum: Notes on Dr. Botkin’s Conference,” December 1, 1938. Folder 1104 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1104, IMG\_1332. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Botkin received the following degrees: Harvard (BA, 1920); Columbia (M.A. 1921); University of Nebraska (Ph.D., 1931) as cited in Lawrence R. Rodgers and Jerrold Hirsch, *America’s Folklorist: BA Botkin and American Culture* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), p. 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Hirsch and Rodgers, *America’s Folklorist: BA Botkin and American Culture*, 8; Rukowski, *Literary Legacies of the Federal Writers’ Project,* 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Rachel C. Jackson, “Locating Oklahoma: Critical Regionalism and Transrhetorical Analysis in the Composition Classroom,” *College Composition and Communication*, 2014, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Hirsch, *Portrait of America*, 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. “Manual for Social-Ethnic Studies”, 1938. Folder 1111 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Hirsch, *Portrait of America*, 184. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1111, IMG\_1547. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Memorandum: “Program of the Federal Writers’ Project for the coming year” from Henry Alsberg, October 1938. Folder 1093 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1093, IMG\_1078. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Shirley Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation* (Jackson, United States: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=1181927; Catherine A. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers’ Project* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. “Life Histories as a Method of Revealing People,” no date given, Folder 1165 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1165, IMG\_1541. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Monty Noam Penkower, The Federal Writers’ Project ; a Study in Government Patronage of the Arts (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Hirsch, *Portrait of America*, 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Letter to Dr. Douglass Freeman from W.T. Couch, March 25, 1939. Folder 1128 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1098, IMG\_3625. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Letter to Mary S. Venable from Eudora Richardson, November 2, 1938. Folder 1098 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1098, IMG\_1229. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Earl Wright, “WEB Du Bois, Howard W. Odum and the Sociological Ghetto,” *Sociological Spectrum* 34, no. 5 (2014): 453–68. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For examples of work about the importance of the book, see Herbert Blumer,*Critiques of Research in the Social Sciences: An* Appraisal of Thomas and Znaniecki's The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1939); John Dollard, *Criteria for a Life History,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939); Loraine Gelsthorpe, “The Jack-Roller: Telling a Story?” *Theoretical Criminology* 11, no. 4 (November 2007): 515 - 42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480607081839>; Jo Goodey. “Biographical Lessons for Criminology.” *Theoretical Criminology* 4, no. 4 (November 2000): 473–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480600004004004. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. John Dollard, *Criteria for the life history*, (Peter Smith: New York 1949), 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. “Memorandum Concerning Proposed Plans for Work of the Federal Writers’ Project in the South,” July 11, 1938, Folder 1087 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1087, IMG\_940. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. “Life Histories as a Method of Revealing People,” no date given, Folder 1165 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. “Memorandum Concerning Proposed Plans for Work of the Federal Writers’ Project in the South,” July 11, 1938, Folder 1087 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1087, IMG\_940. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Jessica Enoch, *Domestic Occupations: Spatial Rhetorics and Women’s Work* (SIU Press, 2019); David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs, *Educating the New Southern Woman: Speech, Writing, and Race at the Public Women’s Colleges, 1884-1945* (SIU Press, 2013); Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith, “Mapping Topoi in the Rhetorical Gendering of Work,” *Associate Editor*, 2015, 200; David Gold and Jessica Enoch, *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Couch, *These Are Our Lives*, xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Couch, *These Are Our Lives*, 418; Couch, *These Are Our Lives*, xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Letter to Eudora Richardson from W.T. Couch, November 1, 1938, Folder 1098 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1098, IMG\_1216. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. To be certified for relief, workers had to pass a “means test” that demonstrated their economic need and inability to find a job, which many felt would mark them as inferior when trying to find a job in the future. See Penkower, *The Federal Writers’ Project*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Letter to W.T. Couch from Eudora Richardson, November 5, 1938, Folder 1099 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1099, IMG\_1246. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Letter to W.T. Couch from Eudora Richardson, December, 21 1938, Folder 1108 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1108, IMG\_1444. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Letter to Henry Alsberg from W.T. Couch, September 26, 1938, Folder 1092 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1092, IMG\_1030. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Letter to Eudora Richardson from W.T. Couch, November 1, 1938, Folder 1098 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1098, IMG\_1216. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Richard Walser, *Bernice Kelly Harris : Storyteller of Eastern Carolina* (University of North Carolina Library, 1955), http://archive.org/details/bernicekellyharr20wals. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Letter to Bernice Harris from W.T. Couch, October 13, 1938, Folder 1095 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1095, IMG\_1114. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Bernice Harris, *Southern Savory* (University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Letter to Edwin Bjorkman from W.T. Couch, August 4, 1938, Folder 1088 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1088, IMG\_0953. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. As quoted in Hirsch, *Portrait of America*, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Letter to J.R Aswell from W.T. Couch, January 9, 1939, Folder 1113 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Bernice Harris, *Southern Savory* (University of North Carolina Press, 1964). Letter to Mr. Couch from Muriel Wolff, September 26, 1938 Folder 1092 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. For more about the data and metadata that we used to conduct these counts, see the Methods Layer. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Charles H. Rowell and Sterling Allen Brown, “‘Let Me Be Wid Ole Jazzbo’: An Interview with Sterling A. Brown,” Callaloo 21, no. 4 (1998): 789–809. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. “Report on the Status of the Negro in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee,” October 19, 1938, Folder 1096 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1096, IMG\_1135. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Letter to W.T. Couch from Edwin Bjorkman, December 29, 1938, Folder 1109 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1109, IMG\_1478. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. “Report on the Status of the Negro in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee,” October 19, 1938, Folder 1096 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1096, IMG\_1135. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Letter to Henry Alsberg from W. T. Couch, January 25, 1939, Folder 1118 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1118, IMG\_1810. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Letter to W.T. Couch from Irma Neal Henry, November 9, 1938, Folder 1100 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1100, IMG\_1260. See also Letter to W.T. Couch from Irma Neal Henry, January 12, 1939, Folder 1115 and Letter to W.T. Couch from Irma Neal Henry, January 30, 1939, Folder 1119. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Cover letter of Edward Farrison, January 30, 1939, Folder 1119 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1119, IMG\_1851. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Letter to Edward Farrison from W.T. Couch, January 31, 1939, Folder 1119 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1119, IMG\_1861. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Letter to Henry Alsberg from W.T. Couch, February 25, 1939, Folder 1124 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1124, IMG\_2054. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. “Memorandum: Work on Life Histories” from W.T. Couch, no date, Folder 1165 in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Digital version will include documents: 3709, 1165, IMG\_5245. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)