

A New Deal for Writers: The Alabama Writers' Project and Its Contributions to American History.

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Abstract

At the height of the Great Depression and the New Deal, administrators and staff of the Federal Writers' Project embarked on a series of literary undertakings to uncover and

restore the nation's cultural and historical landscape. Amongst the most popular and significant of these assignments were the American Guide Series and Oral History Projects. Under these projects, staff produced guidebooks for every state, conducted and transcribed thousands of interviews with former slaves and ordinary Americans, and documented America's folk traditions. This thesis serves to fill a gap in the historiography of the Federal Writers' Project by examining its efforts at the state level in Alabama. It analyzes Alabama's contribution to the Guidebook and Oral History Projects by exploring and evaluating the Alabama Project, its staff, and its accomplishments. It traces the background and organization of the Alabama Writers' Project, reviews the guidelines and constraints placed upon administrators and workers, examines Alabama's personnel and their achievements, and assesses materials it produced. Although scholars and the public neglected the Project's materials for decades, this thesis claims that the guidebook and oral histories reshaped perceptions of the state's culture and history. In later years, scholars and the public rediscovered these materials and deemed them valuable sources of historical information, incorporating the guidebook and oral histories into their own projects.

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