

WPA Slave Narratives
Mississippi
Events: Things Seen and Heard Tell Of
John Sepich, ed.

Jim Allen MS-1

I 'members Lee King had a saloon close to Bob Allen's store in Russell County, Alabama, and Marse John Bussey drunk my mammy up. I means by dat, Lee King tuk her an' my brudder George fer a whiskey debt. Yes, old Marster dranked dem up.

"No, not any weddin's. It was kinder dis way. Dere was a good nigger man an' a good nigger woman, an' the Marster would say, 'I knows you both good niggers an' I wants you to be man an' wife dis year an' raise little niggers; den I won't have to buy' em.'

"I seed slaves sol' oft'ener dan you got fingers an' toes. You know I tol' you dere was a sellin' block close to our sto'. Den plen'y niggers had to be chained to a tree or post 'cause he would run 'way an' wouldn' wuk.

"Dey would track de runways wid dogs an' sometimes a white scal'wag or slacker wud be kotched dodgin' duty. I seed as many deserters as I see corn stalks ober in dat fiel'. Dey would hide out in day time an' steal at night.

Anna Baker MS-2

"One reason Marse Morgan thought so much o' me, dey say I was a right peart young'n' an' caught on to anything pretty quick. Marster would tell me, 'Loosanna, if you keep yo' ears open an' tell me what de darkies talk 'bout, dey'll be somp'n' good in it for you.' (He meant for me to listen when dey'd talk 'bout runnin' off an' such.) I'd stay 'roun' de old folks an' make lak I was a-playin'. All de time I'd be a-listenin'. Den I'd go an' tell Marster what I hear'd. But all de time I mus' a-had a right smart mind, 'cause I'd play 'roun' de white folks an' hear what dey'd say an' den go tell de Niggers.--Don't guess de marster ever thought 'bout me doin' dat.

One time while she was in de fiel' de overseer asked her to go over to de woods wid him an' she said, 'All right, I'll go find a nice place an' wait.' She jus' kep'a-goin. She swum de river an' run away. She slipped back onct or twict at night to see us, but dat was all.

"My pa went to de war wid Marster Morgan an' he never come back. I don't 'member much 'bout 'em goin', but after dey lef I 'member de Blue Coats a-comin'. Dey tore de smoke house down an' made a big fire an' cooked all de meat dey could hol'. All us Niggers had a good time, 'cause, dey give us all us wanted. One of 'em put me up on his knee an' asked me if I'd ever seen Marster wid any little bright 'roun' shiny things. (He held his hand up wid his fingers in de shape of a dollar.) I, lak a crazy little Nigger said, 'Sho', Marster draps 'em 'hind de mantelpiece.' Den, if dey didn' tear dat mantel down an' git his money, I's a son-of-a-gun!

I know' bout dem Kloo Kluxes. I had to go to court one time to testify 'bout' em. One night after us had moved to Tuscaloosa dey come after my step-daddy. Whilst my ma an' de res' went an' hid I went to de door. I warnt scared. I says, 'Marster Will, aint dat you?' He say, 'Sho', it's me. Whar's yo' daddy?' I tol' 'im dat he'd gone to town. Den dey head out for 'im. In de meantime my ma she had started out, too. She warned him to hide, so dey didn' git 'im.

"Soon after dat de Yankees hel' a trial in Tuscaloosa. Dey carried me. A man hel' me up an' made me p'int out who it was dat come to our house. I say, 'Dat's de man, aint it Marster Will?' He couldn' say "No", 'cause he'd tol' me twas him dat night. Dey put 'em in jail for six months an' give 'em a big fine.

Gus Clark MS-4

"A man come to Richmond an' carried me an' pappy an' a lot of other niggers ter Loos'anna ter work in de sugar cane. I was little but he said I could be a water boy. It sho' was a rough place. Dem niggers quar'l an' fight an' kills one 'nother. Big Boss, he rich, an' doan 'low no sheriff ter come on his place. He hol' cou't an' settle all 'sputes hisself. He done bury de dead niggers an' put de one what killed him back to work.

When I was a kid I got two os'berg[FN: Osnaberg: the cheapest grade of cotton cloth] shirts a year. I never wo' no shoes. I didn' know whut a shoe was made fer, 'til I'se twelve or thirteen. We'd go rabbit huntin' barefoot in de snow.

James Cornelius MS-5

"I heered dem talkin' 'bout de war but I didn' know whut dey meant an' one day Marse Murry said he had jined de Quitman Guards an' was goin' to de war an' I had to go wid him. Old Missus cried an' my mammy cried but I thought it would be fun. He tuk me 'long an' I waited on him. I kept his boots shinin' so yer could see yer face in 'em. I brung him water an' fed an' cur'ied his hoss an' put his saddle on de hoss fer him. Old Missus tol' me to be good to him an' I was.

"One day I was standin' by de hoss an' a ball kilt[FN: killed] de hoss an' he fell over dead an' den I cried like it mout[FN: might] be my brudder. I went way up in Tennessee an' den I was at Port Hudson. I seed men fall dawn an' die; dey was kilt like pigs. Marse Murry was shot an' I stayed wid him 'til dey could git him home. Dey lef' me behin' an' Col. Stockdale an' Mr. Sam Matthews brung me home.

Charlie Davenport MS-6

"I was born one night an' de very nex' mornin' my po' little mammy died. Her name was Lucindy. My pa was William Davenport.

"When I was a little mite dey turnt me over to de granny nurse on de plantation. She was de one dat 'tended to de little pickaninnies. She got a woman to nurse me what had a young baby, so I didn' know no dif'ence. Any woman what had a baby 'bout my age would wet nurse me, so I growed up in de quarters an' was as well an' as happy as any other chil'.

"When I could _tote taters [FN: sweet potatoes] dey'd let me pick' em up in de fiel'. Us always hid a pile away where us could git' em an' roast' em at night.

"Old mammy nearly always made a heap o' dewberry an' 'simmon[FN: persimmon]. wine.

"Us little tykes would gather black walnuts in de woods an' store 'em under de cabins to dry.

"At night when de work was all done an' de can'les was out us'd set 'roun' de fire an' eat cracked nuts an' taters. Us picked out de nuts wid horse-shoe nails an' baked de taters in ashes. Den Mammy would pour herse'f an' her old man a cup o' wine. Us never got none o' dat less'n[FN: unless] us be's sick. Den she'd mess it up wid wild cherry bark. It was bad den, but us gulped it down, anyhow.

"De Choctaws lived all 'roun' Secon' Creek. Some of 'em had cabins lak settled folks. I can 'member dey las' chief. He was a tall pow'ful built man named 'Big Sam.' What he said was de law, 'cause he was de boss o' de whole tribe. One rainy night he was kilt in a saloon down in 'Natchez Under de Hill.' De Injuns went wild wid rage an' grief. Dey sung an' wailed an' done a heap o' low mutterin'. De sheriff kep' a steady watch on' em, 'cause he was afeared dey would do somethin' rash. After a long time he kinda let up in his vig'lance. Den one night some o' de Choctaw mens slipped in town an' stobbed[FN: stabbed] de man dey b'lieved had kilt Big Sam. I 'members dat well.

"Mos' ever' slave had his own little garden patch an' was 'lowed to cook out of it.

"Mos' ever' plantation kep' a man busy huntin' an' fishin' all de time. (If dey shot a big buck, us had deer meat roasted on a spit.)

"On Sundays us always had meat pie or fish or fresh game an' roasted taters an' coffee. On Chris'mus de marster 'ud give us chicken an' barrels o' apples an' oranges. 'Course, ever' marster warnt as free handed as our'n was. (He was sho' 'nough quality.) I'se hear'd dat a heap o' cullud people never had nothin' good t'eat.

"I was on de plantation closer to town, den. It was called 'Fish Pond Plantation.' De white folks come an' tol' us we mus' burn all de cotton so de enemy couldn' git it.

"Us piled it high in de fiel's lak great mountains. It made my innards hurt to see fire 'tached to somethin' dat had cost us Niggers so much labor an' hones' sweat. If I could a-hid some o' it in de barn I'd a-done it, but de boss searched ever'where.

"De little Niggers thought it was fun. Dey laughed an' brung out big armfuls from de cotton house. One little black gal clapped her han's an' jumped in a big heap. She sunk down an' down' til she was buried deep. Den de wind picked up de flame an' spread it lak lightenin'. It spread so fas' dat 'fore us could bat de eye, she was in a mountain of fiah. She struggled up all covered wid flames, a-screamin', 'Lawdy, he'p me!' Us snatched her out an' rolled her on de groun', but twant no use. She died in a few minutes.

"I hear'd tell 'bout some Nigger sojers a-plunderin' some houses: Out at Pine Ridge dey kilt a white man named Rogillio. But de head Yankee sojers in Natchez tried 'em for somethin' or nother an' hung 'em on a tree out near de Charity Horspital. Dey strung up de ones dat went to Mr. Sargent's door one night an' shot him down, too. All dat hangin' seemed to squelch a heap o' lousy goin's-on.

"De shawl-strop folks [FN: carpet baggers] what come in to take over de country tol' us dat us had a right to go to all de balls, church meetin's, an' 'tainments de white folks give. But one night a bunch o' uppity Niggers went to a 'tainment in Memorial Hall. Dey dressed deysef's fit to kill an' walked down de aisle an' took seats in de very front. But jus' 'bout time dey got good set down, de curtain drapped[FN: dropped] an' de white folks riz[FN: arose] up widout a-sayin' airy word. Dey

marched out de buildin' wid dey chins up an' lef' dem Niggers a-settin' in a empty hall.

"Dat's de way it happen ever' time a Nigger tried to git too uppity. Dat night after de breakin' up o' dat' tainment, de Kloo Kluxes rid[FN: rode] th'ough de lan'. I hear'd dey grabbed ever' Nigger what walked down dat aisle, but I aint hear'd yet what dey done wid 'em.

Gabe Emanuel MS-7

"Lawdy! I's recallin' de time when de big old houn' dog what fin' de run-away Niggers done die wid fits. Dat man Duncan, he say us gwina hol' fun'al rites over dat dog. He say us Niggers might better be's pow'ful sad when us come to dat fun'al. An' dem Niggers was sad over de death o' dat poor old dog what had chased 'em all over de country. Dey all stan' 'roun' a-weepin' an' a-mournin'. Ever' now an' den dey'd put water on dey eyes an' play lak dey was a-weepin' bitter, bitter tears. 'Poor old dog, she done died down dead an' can't kotch us no more. Poor old dog. Amen! De Lawd have mercy!'

"I 'member how 'cited I'd git when one o' dem shindigs 'ud come off. I sho' would strut den. De mistis 'ud dress me up an' I'd carry de likker an' drinks' roun' 'mongst de peoples. 'Would you prefer dis here mint julip, Marster? Or maybe you'd relish dis here special wine o' de Judge's. 'Dem white folks sho' could lap up dem drinks, too. De Judge had de bes' o' ever'thing.

"Us never knowed when dem Yankee sojers would come spen' a few weeks at de Big House. Dey'd eat up all de marster's vit'als an' drink up all his good likker.

"I 'member one time de Yankees camped right in de front yard. Dey took all de meat out'n de curin' house. Well sir! I done 'cide by myse'f dat no Yankee gwina eat all us meat. So dat night I slips in dey camp; I stole back dat meat from dem thievin' sojers an' hid it, good. Ho! Ho! Ho! But dey never did fin' dat meat.

"One time us sot fire to a bridge de Yankees had to cross to git to de plantation. Dey had to camp on de other side, 'cause dey was too lazy to put out de fire. Dat's jus' lak I figgered it.

Dora Franks MS-8

"My mammy come from Virginny. Her name was Harriet Brewer. My daddy was my young Marster. His name was Marster George Brewer an' my mammy always tol' me dat I was his'n. I knew dat dere was some dif'ence 'tween me an' de res' o' her chillun, 'cause dey was all coal black, an' I was even lighter dan I is now. Lawd, it's bean to my sorrow many a time, 'cause de chillun used to chase me 'round an' holler at me, 'Old yallow Nigger.' Dey didn' treat me good, neither.

"I stayed in de house mos' o' de time wid Miss Emmaline. Miss Emmaline's hair was _dat_ white, den. I loved her' cause she was so good to me. She taught me how to weave an' spin. 'Fore I was bigger'n a minute I could do things dat lots o' de old han's couldn' come nigh doin'. She an' Marse Bill had 'bout eight chillun, but mos' of 'em was grown when I come 'long. Dey was all mighty good to me an' wouldn' 'low nobody to hurt me.

"I 'members one time when dey all went off an' lef' me wid a old black woman call Aunt Ca'line what done de cookin' 'round de place some o' de time. When dey lef' de house I went in de kitchen an' asked her for a piece o' white bread lak de white

folks eat. She haul off an' slap me down an' call me all kin' o' names dat I didn' know what dey meant. My nose bled an' ruint de nice clean dress I had on. When de Mistis come back Marse George was wid 'er. She asked me what on earth happen to me an' I tol' 'er. Dey call Ca'line in de room an' asked her if what I say was de truf. She tell 'em it was, an' dey sent 'er away. I hear tell dat dey whup her so hard dat she couldn' walk no mo'.

"Lots o' Niggers would slip off from one plantation to de other to see some other Niggers. Dey would always manage to git back' fore daybreak. De wors' thing I ever heard 'bout dat was once when my Uncle Alf run off to 'jump de broom.' Dat was what dey called goin' to see a woman. He didn' come back by daylight, so dey put de Nigger hounds after him. Dey smelled his trail down in de swamp an' foun' where he was hidin'.

"Now, he was one of da biggest Niggers on de place an' a powerful fas' worker. But dey took an' give him 100 lashes wid de cat o' ninety-nine tails. His back was somethin' awful, but dey put him in de fiel' to work while de blood was still a-runnin'. He work right hard 'til dey lef'. Den, when he got up to de end o' de row nex' to de swamp, he lit out ag'in.

"Dey never foun' 'im dat time. Dey say he foun' a cave an' fix him up a room whar he could live. At nights he would come out on de place an' steal enough t'eat an' cook it in his little dugout. When de war was over an' de slaves was freed, he come out. When I saw him, he look lak a hairy ape, 'thout no clothes on an' hair growin' all over his body.

Pet Franks MS-9

I 'member de Klu Kluxers an' all de carryin' on. Dey would dress up in white sheets an' come 'roun' an' scare all de Niggers. Dey'd whip de bad ones. Some of 'em would git cow horns an' put on dey heads. One time dey chased a Nigger plumb under de house jus' a-playin' wid 'im. Dey was a-bellowin' jus' lak bulls.

Nettie Henry MS-10

Things got so bad de Kloo-Kluxes[FN: Klu Klux] started ridin' at night an' sposin'[FN: disposing] o' bad Niggers. Den one Satu'd'y night Mr. Theodore's big sto' got set fiah to an' de Mayor he tried to blame it on de Kloo-Kluxes. 'Course ever'body knowed de Yankees done it. You see de Yankees was a-tryin' to git de Gov'nor to run de Kloo-Kluxes out. Dat was one awful fiah. Near 'bout de whole town burnt up down town an' ever' nice white man was down dare a-fightin' de fiah.

"Plenty o' Niggers was out, too, doin' devlishment. Three of 'em got 'rested an' dey had de trial Monday. In de meantime, all de Yankee-lovin' Niggers had a big meetin' an' de loudes' mouf dere was dat big buck Nigger Bill. He all time call hisse'f Dennis when he don' call hisse'f Clopton. Here dey goes, all het up frum makin' speeches an' a-drinkin', an' packs de courtroom full. When Mr. Patton got up on de stan' an' say, he sho' done hear Bill Dennis say somp'in', Bill he holler out, 'Dat's a lie!' Only he say a bad word dat I wouldn' say. Den Mr. Patton raise up his walkin' stick an' start toward Bill. 'Bout den Bill jerk out his pistol an' shoot at Mr. Patton. He miss Mr. Patton an' hit Judge Bramlette. Yes'm, kilt him corpse-dead right dere on his high pulpit chair!

"'Bout dat time ever'thing bus' loose. Near 'bout all de white gent'mun in de court room take a shot at Bill. He falls, but he aint dead yet. Dey put him in de sheriff's

office an' lef two white men wid him. But things was a-happenin' so fas' by dat time dey couldn' stan' it. Dey th'owed Bill out of dat two-story window an' run down to git in de fight. De white folks was plumb wo' out by dat time wid all de devilishment o' de Yankees an' de fool Niggers. Even a mean Nigger got sense 'nough to know when he done gone too far. Dey all git away as fas' as dey could an' scatter over town, den after dark dey come a-creepin' back to de quarters. Dat was sho' de wronges' thing to do. Dat night, all de sho' 'nough white men came a-marchin' out Seventh Street on dey way to de quarters.

Smith Hodges MS-11

"When Miss July got mar'ied dey had two cooks in de kitchen makin' pound cake fer more'n a week, an' pies, an' chicken pie, an' dey killed a hog. Dey had ever'body in de country savin' butter an' eggs fer a long time. I didn' see de weddin' but de yard was full and we had ever'thing to eat.

Prince Johnson MS-13

"One day Marster's chillun an' de cullud chillun slipped off to de orchard. Dey was jus' a-eatin' green apples fas' as dey could when 'long come de master, hisse'f. He lined 'em all up, black an' white alike, an' cut a keen switch. Twant a one in dat line dat didn' git a few licks. Den he called de old doctor woman an' made 'er give 'em ever' one a dose o' medicine. Dey didn' a one of 'em git sick.

De rule was, if a Nigger wouldn' work he mus' be sol'. 'Nother rule on dat place was dat if a man got dissati'fied, he was to go to de marster an' ask him to put 'im in his pocket.' Dat meant he wanted to be sol' an' de money he brought put in de marster's pocket. I aint never known o' but two askin' to be 'put in de pocket.' Both of 'em was sol'.

"Christ'mus was de time o' all times on dat old plantation. Dey don't have no such as dat now. Ever' chil' brought a stockin' up to de Big House to be filled. Dey all wanted one o' de mistis' stockin's, 'cause now she weighed nigh on to three hund'ed pounds.

"One time, jus' when ever'thing was a-goin' fine, a sad thing happened. My young mistis, de one named for her ma, ups an' runs off wid de son o' de Irish ditch digger an' marries 'im. She wouldn' a-done it if dey'd a-let 'r marry de man she wanted. Dey didn' think he was good 'nough for her. So jus' to spite' em, she married de ditch digger's son.

"Old Mis' wouldn' have nothin' more to do wid 'er, same as if she warnt her own chil'. But I'd go over to see 'er an' carry milk an' things out o' de garden.

"It was pitiful to see my little miss poor. When I couldn' stan' it no longer I walks right up to Old Mis' an' I says, 'Old Mis', does you know Miss Farrell aint got no cow.' She jus' act lak she aint hear'd me, an' put her lips together dat tigh. I couldn' do nothin' but walk off an' leave her. Pretty soon she called, 'Prince!' I says, 'Yes mam.' She says, 'Seein' you is so concerned 'bout Miss Farrell not havin' no cow, you better take one to 'er.' I foun' de rope an' carried de bes' cow in de lot to Miss Farrell.

"I'se seen many a patrol in my lifetime, but dey dassent come on us place. Now de Kloos Kluxes[FN: Ku Kluxes] was diffent. I rid[FN: rode] wid' em many a time. 'Twas de only way in dem days to keep order.

Hamp Kennedy MS-14

"De Yankees sho' come to our house--yes sir, dey did. De fust time dey kotched our hogs an' cut off de hind part an' take hit wid' em. De front part dey lef' in de fiel'. Dey carries corn in de saddle bags an' throwed hit out to de chickens. Den when de chickens come up to eat dey kotched 'em by de head an' wring hit off an' take all de chickens wid' em.

"Our white folks buried all dey silver in de groun' an' hid dey hosses in de deep gullies near de plantation. Even dey clo'es an' meat dey hide, an' de soljers didn' find nothin' 'cepin' de hosses, an' dey lef' dey tired ones an' tuk our fresh ones wid' em. Dey burned de fiel's an' orchards so our white folks couldn' he'p feed our soljers none.

"Fire was 'bout de hardes' thing fer us to keep. Dere wa'nt no matches in dem days, an' we toted fire frum one plantation to 'nother when hit burned out. We put live coals in pans or buckets an' toted it home.

"Sometimes we put heavy waddin' in a old gun an' shot hit out into a brush heap an' then blowed the sparks' til de fire blazed. Ever'body had flint rocks too, but few niggers could work 'em an' de ones dat could allus had dat job to do.

"When de War was right on us, grub was scarce an' sometimes little niggers only had clabber milk an' dey et it in de trough wid de pigs, an' sometimes dey only had pie crusts an' bread crusts at night when dey et on de cabin flo'. Dem was hard times afte' de War.

James Lucas MS-15

"I was born in a cotton fiel' in cotton pickin' time, an' de wimmins fixed my mammy up so she didn' hardly lose no time at all. My mammy sho' was healthy. Her name was Silvey an' her mammy come over to dis country in a big ship. Somebody give her de name o' Betty, but twant her right name. Folks couldn' un'erstan' a word she say. It was some sort o' gibberish dey called gulluh-talk, an' it soun' _dat_ funny.

"Don' rightly know how it come 'bout. Lemme see! De bes' I 'member my nex' Marster was Pres'dent Jefferson Davis hisse'f. Only he warnt no pres'dent den. He was jus' a tall quiet gent'man wid a pretty young wife what he married in Natchez. Her name was Miss Varina Howell, an' he sho' let her have her way. I spec I's de only one livin' whose eyes ever seed 'em bofe. I talked wid her when dey come in de big steamboat. 'Fore us got to de big house, I tol' her all 'bout de goins'-on on de plantations. She was a fine lady. When I was a boy 'bout thirteen years old dey took me up de country toward Vicksburg to a place call Briarsfield. It mus'-a been named for her old home in Natchez what was called 'de Briars.' I didn' b'long to Marse Jeff no great while, but I aint never fo'git de look of 'im. He was always calm lak an' savin' on his words. His wife was jus' de other way. She talked more dan a-plenty.

"I was a grown-up man wid a wife an' two chillun when de War broke out. You see, I stayed wid de folks til 'long cum de Yanks. Dey took me off an' put me in de War. Firs', dey shipped me on a gunboat an', nex', dey made me he'p dig a canal at Vicksburg. I was on de gunboat when it shelled de town. It was turrible, seein' folks a-tryin' to blow each other up. Whilst us was bull-doggin' Vicksburg in front, a Yankee army slipped in behin' de Rebels an' penned 'em up. I fit[FN: fought] at Fort Pillow an' Harrisburg an' Pleasant Hill an' 'fore I was ha'f through wid it I was in Ba'timore an' Virginny.

"I was on han' when Gin'l Lee handed his sword to Gin'l Grant. You see, Miss, dey had him all hemmed in an' he jus' natchelly had to give up. I seen him stick his sword up in de groun'.

"Law! It sho' was turrible times. Dese old eyes o' mine seen more people crippled an' dead. I'se even seen 'em saw off legs wid hacksaws. I tell you it aint right, Miss, what I seen. It aint right atall.

"Den I was put to buryin' Yankee sojers. When nobody was lookin' I stript de dead of dey money. Sometimes dey had it in a belt a-roun' dey bodies. Soon I got a big roll o' foldin' money. Den I come a-trampin' back home. My folks didn' have no money but dat wuthless kin'. It was all dey knowed 'bout. When I grabbed some if it an' throwed it in de blazin' fiah, dey thought I was crazy, 'til I tol' 'em, 'dat aint money; it's no 'count!' Den I give my daddy a greenback an' tol' him what it was.

"Aftah de War was over de slaves was worse off dan when dey had marsters. Some of 'em was put in stockades at Angola, Loosanna[FN: Louisiana], an' some in de turrible corral at Natchez. Dey warnt used to de stuff de Yankees fed 'em. Dey fed' em wasp-nes' bread, 'stead o' corn-pone an' hoe cake, an' all such lak. Dey caught diseases an' died by de hund'eds, jus' lak flies. Dey had been fooled into thinkin' it would be good times, but it was de wors' times dey ever seen. Twant no place for 'em to go; no bed to sleep on; an' no roof over dey heads. Dem what could git back home set out wid dey min's made up to stay on de lan'. Mos' of dey mistis' took 'em back so dey wuked de lan' ag'in. I means dem what lived to git back to dey folks was more'n glad to wuk! Dey done had a sad lesson. Some of 'em was worse'n slaves after de War.

"Dem Ku Kluxes was de debbil. De Niggers sho' was scared of 'em, but dey was more after dem carpet-baggers dan de Niggers. I lived right in 'mongst 'em, but I wouldn' tell. No Ma'm! I knowed 'em, but I dasn' talk. Sometimes dey would go right in de fiel's an' take folks out an' kill 'em. Aint none of 'em lef' now. Dey is all dead an' gone, but dey sho' was rabid den. I never got in no trouble wid 'em, 'cause I tended my business an' kep' out o' dey way. I'd-a been kilt if I'd-a run 'roun' an' done any big talkin'.

Sam McAllum MS-16

"My young marster learned me out o' his speller, but Mistis whupped me. She say I didn' need to learn nothin' 'cept how to count so's I could feed de mules widout colicin' 'em. You give' em ten years[FN: ears] o' corn to de mule. If you give' em more, it 'ud colic' 'em an' dey'd die. Dey cos' more'n a Nigger would. Dat were de firs' whuppin' I ever got--when me an' my young marster were a-spellin'.

Charlie Moses MS-17

"My marster was mean an' cruel. I hates him, hates him! The God Almighty has condemned him to eternal fiah. Of that I is certain. Even the cows and horses on his plantation was scared out o' their minds when he come near 'em. Oh Lordy! I can tell you plenty 'bout the things he done to us poor Niggers. We was treated no better than one o' his houn' dogs. Sometimes he didn' treat us as good as he did them. I prays to the Lord not to let me see him when I die. He had the devil in his heart.

"Old man Rankin worked us like animals. He had a right smart plantation an' kep' all his Niggers, 'cept one house boy, out in the fiel' a-workin'. He'd say, 'Niggers is meant to work. That's what I paid my good money for 'em to do.'

"He had two daughters an' two sons. Them an' his poor wife had all the work in the house to do, 'cause he wouldn' waste no Nigger to help 'em out. His family was as scared o' him as we was. They lived all their lives under his whip. No Sir! No Sir! There warnt no meaner man in the world than old man Jim Rankin.

"Oh Lordy! The way us Niggers was treated was awful. Marster would beat, knock, kick, kill. He done ever'thing he could 'cept eat us. We was worked to death. We worked all Sunday, all day, all night. He whipped us 'til some jus' lay down to die. It was a poor life. I knows it aint right to have hate in the heart, but, God Almighty! It's hard to be forgivin' when I think of old man Rankin.

"If one o' his Niggers done something to displease him, which was mos' ever' day, he'd whip him' til he'd mos' die an' then he'd kick him 'roun in the dust. He'd even take his gun an', before the Nigger had time to open his mouth, he'd jus' stan' there an' shoot him down.

"We'd git up at dawn to go to the fiel's. We'd take our pails o' grub with us an' hang' em up in a row by the fence. We had meal an' pork an' beef an' greens to eat. That was mos'ly what we had. Many a time when noontime come an' we'd go to eat our vittals the marster would come a-walkin' through the fiel with ten or twelve o' his houn' dogs. If he looked in the pails an' was displeased with what he seen in 'em, he took 'em an' dumped 'em out before our very eyes an' let the dogs grab it up. We didn' git nothin' to eat then 'til we come home late in the evenin'. After he left we'd pick up pieces of the grub that the dogs left an' eat 'em. Hongry--hongry--we was so hongry.

"When the war come Marster was a captain of a regiment. He went away an' stayed a year. When he come back he was even meaner than before.

"When he come home from the war he stayed for two weeks. The night 'fore he was a-fixin' to leave to go back he come out on his front porch to smoke his pipe. He was a-standin' leanin' up ag'in' a railin' when somebody sneaked up in the darkness an' shot him three times. Oh my Lord! He died the nex' mornin'. He never knowed who done it. I was glad they shot him down.

"I only seen the Klu Klux Klan onct. They was a-paradin' the streets here in Brookhaven. They had a Nigger that they was a-goin' to tar an' feather.

James Singleton MS-19

"Marse Elbert, he lived in jes a plain wood house made Califo'nia style, wid a front room an' a shed room where de boys slep'. Dey had two boys, Jettie an' William.

"I reckon dere was 'bout a hun'erd an' sixty acres planted in taters an' corn, an' dey made whiskey too. Yessum, dey had a 'stillery[FN: distillery] hid down in de woods where dey made it.

"My mammy an' pappy was fiel' han's, an' I was mighty little to do so much. I jes minded de cow pen, made fires in de Big House, an' swep' de house. When I made de fires, iffen dere wa'nt any live coale lef', we had to use a flint rock to git it sta'ted.

"I seen de Yankee sojers when dey passed our house but dey didn' bother us none. None didn' even stop in. Dey was wearin' blue jackets an' had gold buttons on caps

an' jackets. But when de Confed'rate sojers come along, dey stopped an' killed a fat cow er two, an' taken de fat hoss an' lef' a lean one, an' taken ever'thing else dey seen dey wanted.

Berry Smith MS-20

"I was twelve years old when de stars fell. Dey fell late in de night an' dey lighted up de whole earth. All de chaps was a-runnin' 'roun' grabbin' for 'em, but none of us ever kotched[FN: caught] one. It's a wonder some of 'em didn' hit us, but dey didn'. Dey never hit de groun' atall.

"A heap o' white folks was good to dey Niggers, jus' as good as dey could be, but a heap of 'em was mean, too. My mistis was good to us an' so was Marse Jim Harper. He wouldn' let de boys 'buse us while he lived, but when he died dey was wild an' cruel. Dey was hard taskmasters. We was fed good three times a day, but we was whupped too much. Dat got me. I couldn' stan' it. De old marster give us good dinners at Chris'mus, but de young ones stopped all dat.

Susan Snow MS-21

"My ma was a black African an' she sho' was wild an' mean. She was so mean to me I couldn' b'lieve she was my mammy. Dey couldn' whup her widout tyin' her up firs'. Sometimes my marster would wait 'til de nex' day to git somebody to he'p tie her up, den he'd forgit to whup 'er. Dey used to say she was a cunger an' dey was all scared of 'er. But my ma was scared o' cungers, too.

"All de Niggers on de place was born in de fam'ly an' was kin, 'cept my ma. She tol' me how dey brought her from Africa. You know, like we say 'President' in dis country, well dey call him 'Chief' in Africa. Seem like de Chief made 'rangements wid some men an' dey had a big goober grabbin' for de young folks. Dey stole my ma an' some more an' brung 'em to dis country.

"I don't 'member nothin' 'bout havin' no pa. You know, honey, in dem days husbands an' wives didn' b'long to de same folks. My ma say her husband was so mean dat after us lef' Alabama she didn' want to marry no more.

"A man didn' git to see his wife 'cept twict a week. Dat was Wednesday an' Satu'd'y night.

"I got more whuppin's dan any other Nigger on de place, 'cause I was mean like my mammy. Always a-fightin' an' scratchin' wid white an' black. I was so bad Marster made me go look at de Niggers dey hung to see what dey done to a Nigger dat harm a white man.

"Dey was a white man--I aint lyin'--I know him an' I seen him. He had Nigger houn's an' he made money a-huntin' runaway Niggers. His own Niggers kilt 'im. Dey hung 'em for it.

Isaac Stier MS-22

"When dey got to Natchez de slaves was put in de pen 'tached to de slave markets. It stood at de forks o' St. Catherine Street an' de Liberty road. Here dey was fed an' washed an' rubbed down lak race hosses. Den dey was dressed up an' put through de paces dat would show off dey muscles. My pappy was sol' as a twelve year old, but he always said he was nigher twenty.

"De firs' man what bought him was a preacher, but he only kep' 'im a little while. Den he was sol' to Mr. Preacher Robinson. He was a Methodis'.

"De bes' times I can 'member always come 'roun' de Fourth o' July. Dat was always de beginnin' o' camp-meetin'. Aint nothin' lak dat in dese days.

"Ever'body what had any standin' went. Dey cooked up whole trunks full o' good things t'eat an' driv' over to de camp groun's. De preacher had a big pavilion covered wid sweet-gum branches an' carpeted wid sawdust. Folks had wagons wid hay an' quilts whar de men-folks slep'. De ladies slep' in little log houses an' dey took dey feather beds wid' em. I always driv' de carriage for my white folks. Whilst dey was a-worshipin' I'd slip 'roun' an' tas' out o' dey basket. Ever' day I'd eat 'til I was ready to bus'. One day I got so sick I thought I'd pop wide open. I crawled down to de spring an' washed my face in col' water, but I kep' gittin' worse an' worse. Den somebody called out: 'Captain Stier, yo' Nigger's a-dyin'!' My marster called de doctor. He sho' was shamed in public, 'cause, he knowed pos'tive I'd been a-pilferin' in dem baskets. Dem sho' was good old days. I'd love to live' em over ag'in.

"Fore de war I never knowed what it was to go empty. My marster sho' set a fine table an' fed his people de highes'. De hongriest I ever been was at de Siege o' Vicksburg. Dat was a time I'd lak to forgit. De folks et up all de cats an' dogs an' den went to devourin' de mules an' hosses. Even de wimmin an' little chillun was a-starvin'. Dey stummicks was stickin' to dey backbones. Us Niggers was sufferin' so us took de sweaty hoss blankets an' soaked 'em in mudholes where de hosses tromped. Den us wrung' em out in buckets an' drunk dat dirty water for pot-likker. It tasted kinda salty an' was strength'nin', lak weak soup.

"De Klu Klux Klan didn' bother me none. Course, I was feared of' em at firs', but I soon learnt dat long as I b'haved myse'f an' tended my business dey warnt after me. Dey sho' disastered dem what meddled wid de white folks. Nobody but a smart Alec would a-done dat. Only Niggers huntin' trouble mixed into white folks bus'ness. Onct or twict I seen Klu Klux's ridin' by, but dey always traveled fas' an' I kep' my mouf[FN: mouth] shut.

"After de war my marster come back home. De fences was gone, de cattle was gone, de money an' de Niggers was gone, too. On top o' all dat de whole country was over-run an' plumb took over by white trash. It was cautious times.

"After awhile, robbers an' low down trash got to wearin' robes an' pretendin' dey was Klu Klux's. Folks called dem de 'white caps.' Dey was vicious, an' us was more scared of 'em dan us'd ever been o' de Klan. When dey got likkered up de debbil sho' was turnt loose.

Mollie Williams MS-24

"One day Marse George an' his Uncle, Mr. John Davenport--now thar was a rich man fer ye, why, he had two carri'ge drivers--dey rid over to Grand Gulf whar dey was a sellin' slabes offen de block an' Mr. John tol' Marse George to pick hisself out a pair of darkies to mate so's he could git hisself a start of darkies fer to chop his cotton an' like. So Marse George pick out my pappy fust. My pappy come from North Ca'lina. Den he seen my mammy an' she was big an' strengthy an' he wanted her pow'ful bad. But lak I tol' you, he didn' have 'nough money to buy 'em both, so his Uncle John say he'd buy mammy an' den he would loan her over to Marse George fer pappy. An' de fust chile would be Mr. John's, an' de secon' Marse George's, an'

likewise. Mammy was a Missourian name Marilyn Napier Davenpo't. An' pappy was name Martin Newsome.

"I neber got no whuppins frum Marse George 'cause he didn' whup de chilluns none. Li'l darky chillun played 'long wid white chillun. Iffen de old house is still thar I 'spec you kin fin' mud cakes up under de house whut we made out'n eggs we stole frum de hen nests. Den we milked jes anybody's cows we could ketch, an' churned it. We's all time in ter some mischief.

Tom Wilson MS-25

I 'member Mis Nancy an' white folks 'ud set out thar of an evenin' an' mek us li'l cullud chillun dance an' sing an' cut capers fer to 'muse 'em. Den dey had a trough, built 'bout lak a pig trough, an' dey would mek de cook bake a gre't big slab er co'n bread an' put hit in de trough an' po' milk or lasses over hit, an' tu'n us li'l cullud chillun loose on hit. An' I'se tell'n y' as much of hit went in our hair an' eyes an' years[FN: ears] as went in our moufs[FN: mouths].

"Chris'mus was a mighty glad time fo' us. Yessum, us got extra rashins' an' had time off ter play an' kick our heels. Gen'ly[FN: generally] had 'bout a week off. Tell you what Marse Jim 'ud do when Chris'mus come 'roun'. He'd sen' one of da cullud mans out to git a log an' say, 'Now long as dis log burn, y'all kin have off'n wuk'. Co'se us'd hunt de bigges' gum log an' den soak hit in de stream so hit wud burn on a long time. Dey'd put hit on back er de fire an' hit wud las' mos' a week.

Clara C. Young MS-26

While I was wid old marster, he let Miss Rachel--dat was his wife--have me fer de house. She larned me how to cook an' wait on de table, an' I declar', she call me her ver' smartest gal! Sometimes, tho', I wouldn' come right quick lak when she ring de bell fer me, an' she'd start ringin' it harder an' harder. I knowed den she was mad. When I'd get dar, she'd fuss at me an' tu'n my dress up an' whup me--not hard 'cause she wa'nt so strong-- but I'd holler some !

"I heerd tell one time, tho', of de hired man (he was a nigger) an' de oberseer whuppin' one of my cousins 'til she bled; she was jes' sebenteen years old an' was in de fambly way fer de fust time, an' couldn' work as hard as de rest. Nex' mawnin' afte' dat she died. De hired man tol' de rest if dey said anything 'bout it to de marster, he'd beat dem to death, too, so ever'budy kep' quiet an' de marster neber knowed.

"When us had our big meetin's, dere would allus be some darkies frum de plantations aroun' to come. Dey would have to slip off 'cause dey marsters was afraid dey would git hitched up wid some other black boy er gal on de other plantation an' den dey would either have to buy er sell a nigger 'fo you could git any work out of him.