

# AMERICAN SLAVES

**TRUE LIFE STORIES DICTATED  
BY FORMER AMERICAN SLAVES  
DURING INTERVIEWS BY THE  
UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT**

Compiled, Translated from Southern Dialect  
into Standard English, and Edited  
by Donna Wyant Howell



**IMPORTANT Background Information** PLEASE READ!

The ORIGINAL Books: *I WAS A SLAVE*

In the 1930s, thousands of formerly enslaved elders dictated their full life stories during interviews held by the US government.

**These six books remain *entirely* in their own unedited words** – usually in southern dialect.



Available:  
**Six books**

*I WAS A SLAVE* is available now:  
[iwasaaslave.com](http://iwasaaslave.com) or 1-888-SLAVERY

Used as textbooks in USA universities  
for over a decade  
and as history supplements in several countries

You are about to read a sample of the new book: *American Slaves*.  
It is the **translated** (from southern dialect to standardized English) and **edited** version of the above *I WAS A SLAVE* Book Collection.

**EVERY PLANTATION WAS DIFFERENT**

Remember that each plantation followed the rules that were set by the slave owner. Just because one person described a certain situation does not mean that the same circumstance existed on a neighboring farm.

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**This is only a *SAMPLE* of *American Slaves*,**  
an amazing book being published in Fall 2012.  
It will benefit the American Slaves Foundation: 202-824-0824  
Updates: [AmericanSlaves.org](http://AmericanSlaves.org)

## DESCRIPTIONS OF PLANTATION LIFE



LEWIS JONES: The quarters were log cabins that each had a dirt floor and a window, which was a hole in the wall without glass. We slept on bunk beds with straw mattresses.

MARGARETT NILLIAN: There was no glass window in the cabin. There was just a hole with a swinging door [crude shutter]. Of course, it let the flies in during the summer and the cold in during the winter. They could shut the door of the window, but that shut out the light.

FLORENCE NAPIER: All of us had a good time and had plenty to eat. Master used to say that the slaves raised the food and we were entitled to all that we wanted. He felt the same about the clothes. Everything on the place was raised right there by us: all of the meat, vegetables, corn, fruit, and such. All of the cloth and the clothes were made right there. No, sir, it wasn't much that the master had to buy.

WILLIAM MOORE: We had a very hard time trying to survive and were hungry lots of times. Master Tom didn't feel the need to feed his slaves very much. I remember that I had a craving for food all of the time. I'd take lunches to the field slaves and they said that it wasn't enough to stop the pain in their bellies. We survived on things from the fields and rabbits cooked on little fires.

ANNA MILLER: We got almost all of the milk that we wanted because they put it in a trough and we helped ourselves. There was a trough for the slaves and one for the hogs [pigs].

SARAH FORD: I guess Master Charles was about the same as all of the people who owned slaves – some good and some bad. We had plenty to eat and plenty of clothes and shoes. Even if your stomach is full and even if you have plenty of clothes, that bullwhip on your naked skin makes you forget the good part – and that’s the truth.

THOMAS JOHNS: Well, when the cotton first opened and hadn’t dried out, a man could pick two hundred pounds every day. But, when the cotton had had time to dry out and, of course, didn’t weigh as much, he might not be able to pick his two hundred pounds or whatever the amount was set for him to pick. Then, they’d beat him because he didn’t pick what they required. After the cotton was ginned, it had to be baled. They continued to make their slaves work even when it got too dark to see how to pick cotton. They continued to bale cotton without supper even if it took until four o’clock in the morning.

THOMAS COLE: We’d get up early every day of the year – rain or shine, hot or cold. We’d work until noon, eat in the shade, and rest about an hour or a little more when it was hot, but only an hour when it was cold. We were always tired when we worked like that on the plantation.

HATTIE COLE: No, sir, no, sir! There were no parties on Master’s plantation. He said that it was not for parties that he had the plantation. It was for work.

GREEN CUMBY: At night [on Saturdays], the slaves gathered in little bunches around the cabins and talked until bedtime. Sometimes, we’d dance and someone would keep the beat for us by snapping fingers and knees. We didn’t have any instruments.

FRED BROWN: We were allowed to have parties and dances. For the music, we had a banjo, a harmonica, and an accordion. To keep the time, they beat a piece of steel. They danced old-fashioned dances, such as the promenade and the jog. Sometimes, they had a jiggging contest. Two slaves each put a glass of water on their heads and then they competed to see who could dance the hardest without spilling any water.

## BETTY POWERS

(Her full life story will be in the book. The following is a portion.)



Why do you want my story about slavery days? It isn't worth anything. I've been just a hard-working person for all of my life. I raised my family and did my best for them.

When surrender came, I was old enough to fan files away from the white folks and the tables where they ate. I remember because it was the first whipping that I got. It happened when I failed to see some files on the table when the master had company for dinner. His daughter took me upstairs and used the whip on me. Her name was Mary.

The master was a sweet fine man. It was his wife and the overseer who were tough. That woman had no mercy. Gosh for mighty, how I hated her! The mistress knew everything that happened. She had spies among the colored folks. One time, she sent me to the sewing room to see if the women were working. Some of them were and some of them weren't. When I returned, I said, "They're all working." You see, my mama taught me to tell nothing that I saw. That means to mind my own business.

In those times, the colored folks were just put together. It was as the master said. He would say, "Jim and Nancy, you go and live together." When the order was given, it must be done exactly as he said. On the plantation, they didn't think anything about the feelings of the women. No, sir, there wasn't any respect for the women. The overseer and other white men took advantage of the women whenever they wanted. The women knew better than to argue about it. If she did, she would be whipped. I surely thank the Lord that freedom came before I was old enough to have to stand for such treatment.

When we were freed, the master called us to the quarters. I had never seen so many colored folks in one crowd. The yard was full. He told

us that we were free. There were lots who stayed and some who went away. My folks stayed for about four years. Father worked the land as a sharecropper until he got a foothold. Then, he bought a piece of land about five miles from there.

The land that Father bought wasn't cleared. So, all of us worked together to build a cabin. Were we proud? Were we proud? I say that we were when the cabin was finished. There it was – our own home to use as we pleased after being slaves. That was a good feeling. After the cabin was built, we cleared the land. We worked like beavers putting in the crop and tending to it. We watched it grow like it was a little child because all of it belonged to us. It was ours.

The Ku Klux Klan are devils. We never slept in the house when the Klux became very bad [after they had left the plantation]. It was so bad that all of the colored folks around there slept in the woods or in the ditches and places like that. They hid out everywhere as soon as darkness came because the Klux always came in the night. They whipped the colored folks for nothing – just for the fun that they got out of it. They burned some houses and destroyed property. Twice, they hung colored folks up by the thumbs. After a while, the soldiers [from the US government] came and put a stop to it.

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## **THE LIVES OF SLAVE MEN**

**WES BRADY:** The overseer was astraddle his big horse at 3:00 in the morning and was rousting the hands to the field. He got them lined up and, then, he went back to the house for breakfast. The rows were a mile long. All of the hands took lunch to the field in buckets and the overseer gave them fifteen minutes to eat. He'd start cuffing [hitting] some of them on the head when it was time to stop eating and go back to work.

**PETER MITCHELL:** At night, some of the male slaves made hoe handles and cotton sacks. The female slaves washed, ironed, sewed, and knitted. We had to work a certain number of hours every night.

**WILLIS EASTER:** It was a slow job in getting that lint [debris] out of the cotton. I've gone to sleep on many nights while sitting by the

fire and picking lint. In bad weather, we sat by the fire and picked lint, patched harness and shoes, or whittled something, such as dishes, bowls, troughs, traps, and spoons.



*Jordon Smith at the time of his interview in Texas*

JORDON SMITH: I've spun many pieces of cloth and woven many broches of thread.

ISAAM MORGAN: What did we do after we finished work? We went to bed! We were so tired that we couldn't lie down for even two minutes before we were asleep.

ISAAC MARTIN: They were very rich. Old Master had an old waiting man who was dressed in very nice clothes. If we wanted to talk to Old Master, we had to call for that old waiting man. He would come to us and ask what we wanted. Then, he would tell Old Master.

CAROLINE HAMMOND: Uncle Billie waited on the table. He wore a vest under a uniform that was decorated with brass buttons and braid. He wore white gloves. I still can almost see him standing at the door after he had rung the bell. When the family and guests came in, he took his

position behind Mr. Davidson. He served or passed the plates of meats, fowl, or whatever was to be eaten by the family and guests.

BEN CHAMBERS: I drove the carriage to carry the folks to church on Sunday. I had to catch old Tom and Bill. They were the two carriage horses. I had to curry them, brush them, keep the harness oiled, hitch them, and drive them to church. I kept that buggy very clean and looking nice. That was one of the best jobs on the plantation. Some of the other slaves were rather jealous of me.

JOHN H. JACKSON: I remember when they were finishing City Hall. I also remember the foreman, Mr. James Walker. He was the general manager. The overseer was Mr. Keen. I remember all of the bricklayers. All of them were colored. The man who plastered City Hall was named George Price. He plastered the inside. The men who plastered the outside and put up the columns in front were Robert Finey and William Finey. Jim Artis was a contractor and builder who did a lot of work around Wilmington. They were slaves. Slaves did most of the fine work around Wilmington. They called them artisans. None of them could read, but give them any plan and they could follow it to the last line.

CAREY DAVENPORT: My father was a carpenter and Old Master let him have lumber. He made his own furniture from that lumber and made a box to put clothes in. He made the best Carey plows in that part of the country. He made horseshoes, nails, and everything that was made from iron. He used to make spinning wheels and parts of looms. He was a very valuable man. He made wheels with hubs and spokes.

EMANUEL ELMORE: Pa had a talent for making covered skillets and [iron] firedogs [log holders for the fireplace]. He made them so pretty that ladies would come and give an order for a pair of dogs. They told him how they wanted them to look. He would take his hammer and beat them to look exactly like they said. My father was sold four times during slavery. When he was brought to Virginia, he was put on the block and auctioned for \$4,000. The last time that he was sold, he was bought for only \$1,500. [Donna: In comparison, the wage for common labor after the Civil War sometimes was \$8 per month.]

IDA BLACKSHEAR HUTCHINSON: My grandfather was a mechanic.



He built houses, made keys, did all of the blacksmith work, and made shoes. He worked with iron, wood, and leather. He was an architect, as well. He could take raw cowhide and make leather out of it and then make shoes out of the leather. He taught blacksmithing, brickmaking, bricklaying, shoemaking, carpentry, and other things to his son, Isom.

GABRIEL GILBERT: My daddy was a smart man. I'll never be like him for as long as I live in this world. He made shoes. He built houses. He did anything.

CATHERINE SCALES: John Durham [the master's Confederate son] went to war. He took Richmond Scales with him to wait on him! He cooked for him! He made his pallet! He cleaned his clothes! He rubbed down his horse! Master John Durham would sleep with Richmond in the winter to keep himself warm. Richmond would carry water in a canteen to him during a battle. Richmond would hold onto his horse's tail and would go as far as he could with him before a battle.

SIMUEL RIDDICK: When the War broke out, I left my master and went to Portsmouth, Virginia. General Miles captured me and put me into a uniform. I waited on him. I was a body servant and a private in the US Army. I stayed with him until General Lee surrendered. When Lee surrendered, I stayed in Washington, DC with General Miles at the Willard Hotel and waited on him. I stayed there for a long time. I was with General Miles at Fortress Monroe and stayed with him until he was in charge of North Carolina. He was a general and was in charge of the 69th brigade. He also had the Bluecats and Greentorches. I waited on him at the Abbeck House in Alexandria, Virginia, after the War. I stayed with the general for a long time after the War.

## **JOHN FINNELY**

((His full life story will be in the book. The following is a portion.))

There were no parties or dancing, but we had gatherings for corn husking and fighting matches. The fights were more for their enjoyment, but all of the slaves were allowed to see them. The slave owners from different

plantations matched their slaves according to size and then bet on them. Master Finnely had one slave who weighed about 150 pounds. He was a very good fighter. That man was quick like a cat, was powerful for his size, and liked to fight. He quickly won the battle. No one lasted long with him. Well, after awhile, a new slave man came to the neighborhood and there was a vicious fight. I saw that one.

The fight was held at night and pine torches were used for light. Folks standing around in a circle created the ring. The two fighters got in that circle. Fighters would fight without rest until one gave up or couldn't get up. They were allowed to do anything with their hands, head, and teeth. Sure, that's it. Nothing was barred except knives and clubs.

Well, sir, those two slaves got into the ring. Tom, who was the master's slave, started quickly like he always did, but the other slave started just as quickly and that surprised Tom. It was the first time that another man was just as quick as he was. When they came together, it was like two bulls. "Ker-smash!" was sound that was made when they hit. Then, it was hit, kick, bite, and butt anywhere, any place, and any way to get the better of the other one. First, one was down and the other was on top and pounding. Then, it was the other one on top. The one on the bottom would bite knees or anything that he could do. That was the way that it went for a half-hour. Both were extremely tired and getting slow, but they were still fighting. There wasn't much of an advantage for either one.

Finally, that other slave hit Tom in the stomach with his knee and punched him on the jaw at the same time. Down went Tom. The other man jumped on him with both feet, straddled him, and hit with a right, left, right, left, and right on the sides of Tom's head. Tom lay there without giving any resistance. Everybody was saying, "Tom has met his match. He is done." Both were bleeding and were awful sights. Well, that slave relaxed to get his wind or something. Then, as quick as a flash, Tom flipped him off and jumped to his feet. Before that man could get to his feet, Tom kicked him in the stomach again and again. The man's body started to quiver and his master said, "Enough." As far as I know, that was the closest that Tom ever came to getting whipped. They might have found someone after that. If they did, I don't know about it because I became a runaway a short time after the fight.

[Donna: In his lengthy full story, he gives breath-holding heart-clutching details about his escape.]

## **BUD JONES**

(His full life story will be in the book. The following is a portion.)

One day, Old Master rang a bell and called all of the slaves. He held up a white flag in front of them and said, "You listen carefully to me because I'm going to tell you something that you going to be glad to hear. There is no more slavery. You are free." The slaves jumped straight up in the air and danced and sang and shouted, "The freedom! Oh, praise to God, the freedom! Thank God!" The slaves milled around the cabins for all of that night. They had torches and marched around as they sang: "No more bullwhips are going to call me, no more, no more. Like thousands of times before, no more, no more! No more bloodhounds are going to chase me, no more, no more. Like thousands of times before, no more, no more!" [The original wording of this song is in the second book of the *I WAS A SLAVE* Book Collection.]

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## **THE LIVES OF SLAVE WOMEN**

**HENRY JAMES TRENTHAM:** Some of the women plowed while barefooted almost all of the time. They had to carry that row and keep up with the men and then do their cooking at night.

**MARTHA BRADLEY:** I always worked in the field and had to carry big logs. I had straps on my arms and those logs were put in that strap. I hauled them to the log pile. During cotton-picking time, we'd stay in the field until long after dark. We'd pick by candlelight and then carry it and put it on the scaffold.

**ANNIE OSBORNE:** My mother worked in the field all day and came in at night to help with the stock [animals]. After supper, they made her spin cloth.

**KATE CURREY:** They had the house slaves and the field slaves. I waited on the mistress. She had cooks, a house girl, and sewing girls to do the work. She also had an old auntie who nursed the children.

**SALLIE NEWSOM:** Grandma carried her mistress' big hoop dresses and carried her trains [long trailing hems of dresses] up off of the floor. She combed her long glossy hair. When Grandma became the cook,

Mama became a house girl.

ANTHONY CHRISTOPHER: They didn't bother [whip or cause any problems for] Mama and Pappy. I guess that it was because Deenie, my older sister, was Master Patton's girl. He wasn't married and he kept Dennie in the Big House.

CHARITY ANDERSON: I waited on the mistress and the children. I laid out all of the clothes on Saturday nights. On Sunday mornings, I'd pick up all of the dirty things. They didn't have a thing to do.

### **Working Mothers**

SILVIA KING: For hours, I sat and spun with two threads. One of them was in one hand and the other was in the other hand. One of my feet was on the wheel to keep it moving and I had a baby sleeping on my lap.

CATO CARTER: The mothers were confined with suckling babies. They had to spin. I would take thread to them and then bring it back to the house after it was spun. If they didn't spin seven or eight cuts each day, they'd get whipped. It was considerably hard on a woman when she had a fretting baby.

ANK BISHOP: All of the women on Lady Liza's place had to go to the field everyday. Those who had suckling babies [infants] came out of the field about 9:00 in the morning and when the bell rang at 12:00 to breastfeed them. One woman tended to all of the children in one house. Her name was Ellie Larkin and they called her "Mammy Larkin." She frequently sent me down to the field to get the mothers to come to suckle their children. Hungry and crying babies made her job more difficult.

OPHELIA WHITLEY: The women plowed and dug. I've known them to leave the field, go to their houses, give birth to a baby, and return to work on the next day. Most of the time, they did light work for a week or so.

SARA COLQUITT: I used to take my smallest baby with me. I had two children. I'd tie my baby [in a pouch] to a tree limb to avoid the ants and bugs while I hoed and worked in the furrow.

## **FANNIE MOORE**

(Her full life story will be in the book. The following is a portion.)



*Fannie Moore, age 88,  
at the time of her interview  
in the 1930s  
in North Carolina*

Nowadays when I hear folks growling and grumbling about not having this and that, I just think about what they would have done if they had been brought up on the Moore plantation.

I never understood how my mother could withstand such hard work. Every night, she prayed for the Lord to get her and her children off of the place. One day, she was plowing in the cotton field. Suddenly, she let out a big yell. Then, she started singing, shouting, whooping, and hollering. Then, it seemed as if she plowed harder. When she came home, Master Jim's mother said, "What's going on in the field? Do you think we sent you out there just to whoop and yell? No, siree. We put you out there to work and you better work or else we'll get de overseer to cowhide your back." My mother's black wrinkled face grinned widely and she said, "I'm saved. The Lord told me that I'm saved. Now, I know the Lord will show me the way. I'm not going to grieve anymore. No matter how much you beat my children and me, the Lord will show me the way. Someday, we won't be slaves." Old Granny Moore grabbed the cowhide [whip] and slashed my mother across her back, but Mother never yelled. She just went back to the field and continued singing.

It was a terrible sight to see the speculators come to the plantation. They would go through the fields and buy the slaves of their choice. When the speculators came, all of the slaves started shaking. No one

knew who was going to be sold. Sometimes, they sold them on the auction block. The breeding woman always brought more money than the rest, even more than the men. When they put a breeding woman on the block, they put all of her children around her to show how fast she could have children. When she was sold, her family never saw her again. She never knew how many children she had. Sometimes, she had colored children and, sometimes, white.

I remember that there once was a dance in one of the houses in the quarters. All of the slaves were laughing, patting their feet, and singing, but there were a few who didn't. The patrollers [usually poor white men who were hired by neighboring slave owners to police the area at night] shoved the door open and started grabbing us. Uncle Joe's son decided that this was the time to die and he started to fight. He said that he was tired of withstanding so many beatings and he just couldn't stand any more. The patrollers started beating him and he started fighting. Oh,



*Lucindy Lawrence Jurdon with spinning wheel in Alabama (Notice feet.)*

Lord, it was terrible. They whipped him with a cowhide [whip] for a long time. Then, one of them took a stick and hit him on the head. It burst his head wide open. The poor boy fell on the floor and was moaning and groaning. The patrollers whipped about twelve other slaves and sent them home. They left the dead boy with us.

After the War, the Ku Klux Klan became more active. They were mean. In their long white robes, they scared the black people to death. They kept close watch on us because they were afraid that we were trying to do something. They never appeared much during the daytime. They just came out at night. They took black people into the woods and beat them and hung them. We were afraid to move, much less try to do anything. We never knew what to do. We didn't have any education. We didn't have any money. All that we could do was to stay on the same plantation until we could do better.

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## **MANDY MORROW**

(Her full life story will be in the book. The following is a portion.)

I stayed in Georgetown for about twenty years after surrender. Then, I went to Austin. There, I worked for important folks. Governor James Stephen Hogg sent for me to be his cook in the Governor's Mansion. I'll tell you one dish that Governor Hogg really liked the most of all.

Take one pound of spaghetti, half of a quart of tomatoes, one pint of milk, a fourth pound of butter, and half of a pound of New York snap cheese. Break the spaghetti into small pieces, put it into boiling water, and boil it for about twenty minutes. Drain the water and blanch. Grate the cheese. Shred the tomatoes. Put about a half teaspoon of soda in the milk and pour it into the cheese and the tomatoes. Mix all of it together. Then, salt to taste, which is about a tablespoon of salt. Add about a fourth of a teaspoon of red hot pepper. Put all of that into a baking dish. Cut the butter into small pieces and lay it over the top. Now, it is ready for a fairly hot oven. Bake it for about 45 minutes or until a good brown color covers the top. Then, it is ready to bring joy to the eaters.

The more that you eat of that spaghetti, the more that you want. "Good" isn't the word to explain it. So, you want me to tell you about some more dishes? No, sir, one is enough. Try that one. If it is good, come back for more and bring some money.

## **THE LIVES OF SLAVE CHILDREN**

JOSE BROWN: I saw children who were too little to walk sold from their mothers in Woodville. They were sold just like calves.

WILL DAILY: The little children would be crying when they took their mothers away from them.

HILLIARD YELLERDAY: When a girl became a woman, she was required to go to a man and become a mother. Sometimes, Master would select a very large and healthy slave man from some other plantation. He would ask the other master to let this man come to his place to be with his slave girls. A slave girl was expected to have children as soon as she became a woman. Some of them had children when they were twelve and thirteen years old.

RYER EMMANUEL: They were proud of their slave children. When they had company in the Big House, Miss Ross would bring them to the door to show us to them. The yard would be black with all of the children lined up next to the doorsteps. All of us would be looking into their eyes. Old Mistress would say, "Don't I have a pretty crop?" The lady looked so pleased.

WILLIE WILLIAMS: Lots of times, the master looked at the children, pointed at one, and said, "That one will be worth a thousand dollars." He would point at another and say, "That one will be a whopper [a large one]." You see, it was just like raising mules. If you don't hurt them when they are young, you get good strong slaves when they are big.

### **Lifestyles**

#### **In the Big House:**

SOLBERT BUTLER: When I was a little boy, Master treated me like a pet. He carried me in his carriage. He had a little bed beside his bed and he took care of me.

BUD JONES: I grew up in the house of Old Master. I slept in a little side room that was attached to the Big House. I slept on a carpet on the floor and used another one as my cover. The bed was good enough in



warm weather, but I almost froze to death when it was cold.

**In the slave quarters:**

MARY SELLERS: We had rope beds with cornhusks in sacks that were used as mattresses and plenty of covers in cold weather.

GEORGE HENDERSON: Our covers were made of big pieces of material taken from old cast-off clothes.

**Infant Care**



*Please notice the differences: Some plantations had a nursery; some didn't. Some mothers nursed their own children during the day; some weren't allowed to leave their tasks, so other women nursed for them.*

STEVE ROBERTSON: I remember that I lived in the nursery throughout the week. You know, we didn't see our mothers except on Sunday mornings. They worked in different places on the plantation during the day. When they came in after dark, all of us were asleep. They

were allowed to take only the suckling babies with them [to the fields].

HENRY BROWN: At 1:00, the babies were taken to the field to be nursed. Then, they were taken back [to the nursery] until the mothers finished their work and went to get them.

CLARA BRIM: They had a nurse who breastfed the little ones when their mothers were working.

MARY KINCHEON EDWARDS: The women brought oilcloths to the fields so that they could put the youngest children to sleep in a shady place. Older children had to pick [crops in the fields].

## **Food**

HILLIARD YELLERDAY: Some owners allowed their slaves to eat the same kind of food that was served on their own tables. Other masters fed their slave children from troughs that were made very much like those used by hogs [huge pigs].

MANDY McCULLOUGH COSBY: Mr. McCullough raised slaves to sell. A long trough was in a cool place in the backyard and was filled with good cold buttermilk with cornbread crumbled into it. The children got good care because the master expected that they would bring good money.

## **Clothing**

WILLIS EASTER: All of the children had only one homemade garment. It was a long shirt. You couldn't tell the girls from the boys in the yard.

WES BRADY: I never had shoes until after the War was over. I ran around until I was a big child in just a long shirt with a string for a belt.

WILLIAM MATHEWS: The clothes that we wore were made out of the material used to make sacks. In the summer, we went barefoot. In the winter, they provided shoes with heels that were as big as biscuits.

WILLIS WOODSON: I lived in the master's house, so I got good clothes and shoes, too.

## **Working Children**

WALTER RIMM: I was put to work with the other kids just as soon as I was old enough to be taken from the nursery [which would have been around the age of four]. We pulled weeds for half of the day, then were put to sleep, and then were awakened to pull more weeds.

JACOB BRANCH: Children started working as soon as we could toddle. First, we gathered firewood. If it was freezing or hot, we had to go in order to toughen us. When we got a little bigger, we tended to the cattle and fed the horses and hogs. By the time that we were big children [around the age of twelve], we were picking cotton and pulling cane. We were never idle.

JOHN PRICE: As children, we had lots of time to play and didn't work much [on that particular plantation]. We were always riding old stick horses. We tied a rope to the stick and called it a martingale. We made marbles from clay. We dried them and played with them.

SALLIE PAUL: You see, they didn't make the children work very hard when they were very young because that would stunt their growth.

JORDON SMITH: Mistress didn't allow her slaves to work hard until they were twelve. The first work that I did was hoeing. We worked for as long as we could see a stalk of cotton or a hill of corn. It was hell among the children if they crossed Master Ab or her. She had a place in the kitchen where she tied their hands to the wall and cowhided [whipped] them. Sometimes, they cut their backs almost into pieces.

CINTO LEWIS: Sometimes, our mamas would have to help us work in our row so that we didn't get whipped.

JENNIE FITTS: I was always with Missy Annie and I tended to her. Night and day, I was with her. I slept at the foot of her bed. I used a fan to keep the flies off of her. I got drinks and other things for her. I went to places to get things for her. Every night when she was ready to go to sleep, I rubbed her feet. I definitely tended to Missy.

HENRY KIRK MILLER: As soon as children were big enough to hire out, the mistress leased us to anybody who would pay for us to work. I was put with another widow woman who lived about 20 miles from us. She worked me on her cotton plantation. Old Mistress sold one of my sisters and took cotton as the payment.

GUS FEASTER: Lots of times [when he was a child], Newt and Anderson [the slave owner's sons] told John [his older brother] and me to get under the steps while Old Master was eating his supper. When he left the table, we would always hear the sliding of his chair because he was such a big fat man. Then, he would go into the mistress' room to sit by the fire. There, he would warm his feet and have his Julip [an alcoholic drink]. As quick as lightning, John and I would scamper from under the steps and run to the jasmine bushes along the front walk. We would hide there until Anderson and Newt came out. In their hands, they would be carrying ham biscuits that were full of gravy for us. Sometimes, the gravy would run down to the end of my elbow and drop off before I could lick it off of my wrists. That was the best food that a slave ever had. When they had honey on their table, the boys never failed to carry a honey biscuit with them. It was so good that I licked just one measly little bit of the honey and melted butter on my way to the quarters [the slave cabins]. I would taste just a little. When I got to Mama, she and I would sit by ourselves and taste it until it was gone.



*Children's names unknown; photograph circa Emancipation*

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