

Slavery and Emancipation: A Complex Comparison

AUTHOR: Al Wheat, Director of Education, Mississippi Department of Archives and History

GUIDING QUESTION: According to formerly enslaved people, what were the hardships faced not only during enslavement but also after emancipation?

> OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will use three oral histories to compare the experiences of three people who experienced enslavement, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow era. Students will compare and contrast the perspectives of these three people and discuss how the realities led to the Great Migration.

> OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to

- > Explain how enslaved African Americans showed resilience while enslaved and during Reconstruction;
- > Analyze the realities of how African Americans had their freedoms stripped away after Reconstruction ended; and
- > Compare and contrast the realities of life during and after enslavement.

> STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS TO COMMON CORE

- > CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3 Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.
- > CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CONNECTIONS TO C3 FRAMEWORK

- > D2.His.8.9-12 Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.

➤ DOCUMENTS USED

PRIMARY SOURCE COLLECTIONS

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Ebenezer Brown, August 16, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Amite County)

<https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/federal/amite/436/brown-ebenezer>

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Washington County)

<https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/federal/washington/436/oliver-mark>

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Susan Jones, December 20, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Panola County)

<https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/federal/panola/436/jones-susan>

SECONDARY SOURCES

Article, Neil R. McMillen, “WPA Slave Narratives,” February 2005
Mississippi History Now, Mississippi Department of History and Archives

<https://mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/wpa-slave-narratives>

Video, “Historical Context: The End of Reconstruction,” 2024 [6:34]
National History Day

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPZU6x_2NZo

➤ TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- Oral History Comparison Chart
- Oral History Comparison Chart Answer Key

➤ ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- Read the article “WPA Slave Narratives” for background information.
- Preview all primary sources to determine appropriateness for your students.
- Print one copy of the Oral History Comparison Chart Answer Key for teacher use.
- Make one copy of the Oral History Comparison Chart for each student.
- Provide copies of the primary and secondary sources.
- Organize students into groups of three or four students each.
- Arrange the classroom for group work.

➤ PROCEDURE

ACTIVITY ONE: INTRODUCTION (20 MINUTES)

- Introduce the WPA Slave Narratives to students. Teachers may choose to have students read the article or summarize the key points. Ask students:
 - » *Why are these oral histories valuable to our understanding of the time period (1850s to 1930s)?* (This collection preserves the stories of enslaved people from their perspective; they show a variety of perspectives.)
 - » *What are some of the limitations of these sources?* (Told by elderly people many years after the event happened; most were children during the events; they were recorded by people who could stereotype or look down on the interview subjects.)
 - » *What was happening in the 1930s that might have influenced the perspective of the people being interviewed?* (Jim Crow segregation, sharecropping, Great Depression, severe poverty, high unemployment.)
- Explain to students how the interviews they will read were written (reconstructed from notes, they attempted to use phonetic spelling to capture accents and speech patterns, interviewers lacked training and recording equipment, etc.)

ACTIVITY TWO: RESEARCH (45 MINUTES)

- Organize students into groups of three or four students each.
- Play the video “Historical Context: The End of Reconstruction” [6:34] to help set the oral histories into historical context.

Teacher Notes:

- ▶ Remind students that whenever possible, we want to listen to people in history and use primary sources to learn about the experiences of those who lived during that time.
- ▶ When conducting lessons about enslavement, take time to teach your students how to use proper terminology (using terms like enslaved people, enslaved laborers, and not “slaves”). Read the article “What’s in a Word? Being Thoughtful about Terminology in Historical Writing” in this resource for additional support.
- ▶ Read the article “Teaching Enslaved People’s History” in this resource to learn more approaching teaching this topic.
- ▶ While this material is not graphic, it does describe violent actions and traumatic situations. Read the article “Navigating Sensitive Content While Meeting Students’ Needs” in this resource for suggestions on teaching material with graphic or violent content.
- ▶ Preview all content in this lesson to ensure it is appropriate for your students. Consider using the redacted version of the primary sources.
- ▶ Remind students that formerly enslaved people (just like all groups of people) had very different experiences and a range of reactions to the same events.

- › Distribute the Oral History Comparison Chart and assign students to read one of the three oral histories.
- » **Teacher Tip:** The three primary sources can be used to differentiate instruction. Ebenezer Brown's account is the longest and includes the highest level of phonetic spelling. Mark Oliver's account is slightly shorter and written in a clearer transcript. Susan Jones's account is the shortest and clearest to understand. Teachers may choose to assign student groups one, two, or all three interviews. Teachers may also choose to pair students on the more difficult reading (if appropriate).
- » **Editor's Note:** This lesson includes two versions of these sources. The second one is a version of the sources with a particularly offensive word blacked out after the first letter.
- › Give students time to read and complete the appropriate column in the chart. Circulate and provide support as needed. Use the Oral History Comparison Chart Answer Key as a resource.
- › Give students time to summarize their oral histories with their group members. If appropriate, review with the class and complete the chart on the board.



Students interested in this topic might be interested in researching the following for an NHD project:

- ▶ **Enslavement in America (1619–1865)**
- ▶ **Reconstruction (1865–1877)**
- ▶ **Black Codes (1865–1866)**
- ▶ **The Mississippi Plan (1875)**
- ▶ **Works Progress Administration (1935–1943)**

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- › Students can submit their Oral History Comparison Chart.
- › Students can complete a three-part Venn diagram to compare and contrast the experiences of Ebenezer Brown, Mark Oliver, and Susan Jones.
- › Students can develop a list of questions that students would like to ask Ebenezer Brown, Mark Oliver, and Susan Jones to get a better understanding of their lives both during and after enslavement.
- › Students can use oral histories to develop a list of why many African Americans chose to leave the southern states during the Great Migration. What factors pushed them out? What factors pulled them to move North and West?

To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to nhd.org/inclusivehistory.

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Ebenezer Brown, August 16, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Amite County)

<https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/federal/amite/436/brown-ebenezer>

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241--Autobiography of Ebenezer Brown, Amite County.
FHC.
Mrs. W^m F. Holmes.



Ebenezer Brown, who lives seven miles west of McComb, on the Smithdale road, tells his story:

"I is now eighty five years old: I wus born 'bout twelve miles south uf Liberty, on de road dat goes frum Liberty to Jackson, Louisiana, on Mr. Bill McDowell's place, an' dat wus er big farm. Marse Bill wus mi'ty tough on his slaves. I wus jes' a boy, but I will niver fergit how he whup'ed his slaves. I ken name ebry one uf his slaves: dar wus Viney-- she done de cookin'; Zias wus er fiel' han' an' he driv de carriage; my uncle Irwin, he fed de hosses, an' he wus a bad nigger an' got whup'ed fur stealin' all de time; Jim wus de rice beater, an' he beat de rice ebry Friday; Sara wus er fiel' han' -- Relia wurk in de fiél' an' milked, an' had ter go to de cow pen bar' footed an' her feet got frost bit, an' dat made her cripple; Hager wus er fiel' han' an' Peggy wus er fiel' han' an' afte' Relia got crippled Peggy he'p milk; Monday wus er fiel' han' but he wus bad 'bout runnin' way from an' ^{home} de patroller wud git him; Patience, dat wus my mammy, she milked an' wurk in de fiel' an' den dar wus sum big chulluns dat he'ped in de fiel' an' we all hed ter wurk round de house. Dar wus Tom, a nigger boy 'bout my age, an' we played tergedder an' done wurk tergedder.

"Marse Bill hed a big fine two story house, an' it wus white, an' de front uf it wus to de west; on de north side uf de house wus a dug well, sixty five feet deep, an' it had er pulley over it, an' two buckets, an' when one bucket wud come up de udder wud go down. My' but dat wus cold water, but de buckets wus heavy.

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

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De gard'n wus on de south side uf de house, an' de pigeon house wus on de northwest side uf de big house, jes' over de Carriage house.

"Marse Bill's wife wus named Miss Hester an' deir chulluns wus named, young Marse Russ; he wus grown an' toted a big whip all de time; he he'ped Marse Bill look afte' de darkies in de fiel'; an' den dar wus young Marse Tom, an' miss Lizzie, an' Miss Mary, an' Miss Ella, an' Miss Ethel, and Miss Dulcie, an' dat wus all.

"Marse Bill hed two brudders; one wus named Tom, an' one wus named John; an' Mr. Tom wus a mi'ty rich man; he uster loan money. One time Marse Bill put me on his big fine black pony, named 'Snap', an' give me er note, an' sont me to Mr. Tom's; when I got dar, Mr. Tom sed 'whut's de matter wid Bill now?'; den I giv him de note-- he sed 'Lord, Jesus Christ; peas an' rice: dat is whut Bill is allua wantin'--Money! money! money! '-- he giv me de money an' put me back on de black hoss an' sont me home.

"As a child, I played in de yard wid another black boy named Tom Hardin; but dey didn't 'low fur us to play much. We shot china berries frum er pop-gun, an' we made de shots hit de udder chaps, an' wud git whup'ed fur it. we done dat all de time. We toted in wood fur Viney, so she suld cook, an' she cooked in a big fire place with racks in de chimby; den we had ter pick up de eggs ebery day; we brung de eggs ter de house in er basket; ebery time de wind wud blow we hed to pick up de plums frum under de trees and tote 'em in baskits to de hogs; an' den we picked up de peaches an' apples dat

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fell offen de trees an' toted dem to de hogs an' dat made de hogs fat. Den Marse Bill made cider outern de apples an' dat was good. Den I hed to churn ebery udder day; dat churn wus 'bout three feet high an it hed er long handle dasker, an' I hed ter stand dar an wurk dat ~~hand~~ handle up an' down till de butter wud cum; when I seed de lil'l lumps uf butter stickin on de handle I wud take my finger an' wipe it off an' den suck my finger--but I dar'sent let old Mistis see me do dat, an' iffen she koteded me doin' it I wud git a whup'in--

"Tom an' me hed ter ~~swee~~ sweep de yard an' stamp ebery Sa'day we hed whut yer call 'brush-brooms' an' we brushed dem leaves up in er pile an' put dem in er baskit an' toted 'em to er pen behin' de barn an' dar let 'em rot.

"I'is gwiner tell yo' 'bout my grand mammy- her name wus Dorcas, an' she wus born in Virgini' an' er slave trader brung her to Liberty, an' Marse Bill seed her an sed she wus er husky gal an' he bought her 'fore dey hed time ter put her on de block, an' she tuk up wid a slave dat 'longed to Mr. Landon Lea, named Jared Avenger, an' dey wus my grand mammy an' peppy. She wus old an' lived in a log house down de hill side an' all she culd do wus to wash an' iron an' mend de clothes an' sum times she wurk in de loom room. Grand pap stayed over ter Mr. Lea's, but afte' dey wus sot free he cum to live at Marse Bill's wid grand mammy. My mammy wus deir chile, her name wus Patience.

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

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"My pappy was named Dan; he was born in South Ca'lina an' brung to Liberty an' put on de block, an' two peepul wanted him, but Marse Bill sed he wud giv moren dan dey, an' de boss man sed Marse Bill culd have him. He brung him home an' sed 'Patience, I brung yo' er husband, go live wid 'im' an' dat wus de way dey got mar'ied. Dar wus no preacher dem days to marry yo'.

"My pappy was a carpenter, an' wurk ⁱⁿ de fiel' an' dun de buildin' dat wus dun on de place, an' he driv de oxtteam to Osyka to git sugar an' flour, an' he allus hed ter grease de wagon wid tar. Dat wud make it run easy.

"Marse Bill had no overseer dat I remember; he an' young Marse Russ toted de whup, an' wud ride ober de fiel' an' make de slaves wurk an' dey wud shore whup iffen dat wurk wusnt dun. Den Marse Bill had er old poll parrot dat he put on a limb in de fiel' sum times, an' dat parrot wud tell who it wus dat didnt wurk. Marse Bill wud tie dem slaves an' whup hard, and all de slaves wud say wus 'O, pray, marster; O, pray, Marster! '--

"When de slaves wus wurkin good dey wud sing like dis--

"Watch de sun; see how she run;
Niver let her ketch yo' wid yer wurk undun."

"Howdy, my brethern, Howdy yo' do, a rack in de lot
Since I bin in de lan'
I do mi'ty well, an' I thank de Lord, too,
Since I bin in de lan'

"He O yes, O yes, since I bin in de lan', an' chery Friday
O, yes, O yes, since I bin in de lan'
I do mi'ty well an' I thank de Lord too, sheet, an' git
Since I bin in de lan'----

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

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"Dar wus 'nudder song dat went sorta like dis--
"See my brudder down de hill; fall down on he knees;
Send up your prayers; I'll send up mine; de good Lord ter please.
Raise de heabens, high as de skies; fall down on yer knees;
Send up your prayers; I'll send up mine; de good Lord ter please."

When cum quitin' time dem slaves wud sing all de way ter de house.

"Marse Bill had plenty uf ebery thing 'round him. He hed er drove uf cows an' more milk dan dey knowd whut to do wid. he hed hosses, mules, hogs, sheep, yard full uf chickens, geese, guineas, peafowls, pigeons, and he had two jennies an' er jack, an' he made big money offen dem; he made plenty cotton, corn, rice, taters an' peas an' ebery thing good ter eat. He planted more taters dan eny body in de country; dem taters wus red on de outside and white inside an' dey wud choke yer iffen yo' didnt drink water wid 'em. He made as many as 50 tater banks.

"When he kilt his hogs, he wud smoke dat meat an' wrap it in shucks ter keep it frum spilin' an' dat wus better dan yo' can buy right now.

"He made his slaves pull fodder an' stack it high, an' den he put sum uf it in de loft uf de big barn. He had a rack in de lot an' put dat fodder in dat rack so his stock culd eat it.

"He made lots an' lots uf rice ebery year, an' ebery Friday he made old Jim put sum rice on a big cloth like er sheet, an' git switches an' beat an' beat dat rice; den old Jim wud hold dat rice

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high up and let it fall to de ground a lil'l atter time, an' de wind wud blow de chaff off an' den he had good rice left. Dat wus de way he hulled his peas, an' he fed us on peas an' rice.

"Ebery Sat'day dat cum, Marse Bill wud rashun u de slaves. He wud call dem up an' giv ebery fambly a lil'l flour, rice, peas, meat an' meal, an' sum times a lil'l soda; we had flour 'nouv to make biskits ebery Sunday mornin an de rest uf de time dey et corn bread. Iffen de rashuns giv out 'fore next Sat'day --well, dat wus too bad, fur yo' had ter do wid out.

"Let me tell yo' 'bout my uncle; he wud git more whup'ins dan eny body- He wud steal- Marse Bill kept missin' meat outern de smoke-house, an' he sot up one night ter ketch de rogue. Well, 'bout mid night, uncle Irwin prized up a log an' took it out an' crawl'd through dat hole, an' right dar Marse Bill Kotched him, an' whut a whup'in he did git. Den one time sum body wus stealin Marse Bill's corn, and Marse Bill sot a trap to git dat rogue, an' de nex' mornin, who wus in de trap, but Uncle Irwin. Well he made uncle Irwin dance ober de place while he whup'ed him.

"Uncle Irwin hed to feed de hosses, an' yo' kno' de chickens wud lay eggs in de troughs an' ebery egg he wud find wud be hisern. Marse Bill uster ketch him wid de eggs offen times an' whup him, but he wud do dat er gin. Yo' culdnt put enything down but uncle Irwin wuld git it right now.

"One time Marse bill had er shote dat stayed round de yard; well dat shote cum up missin' one day, an' Marse Bill tole young

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Marse Russ to fin' dat shote; well, Marse Russ found it whar uncle Irwin had kilt it-- uncle Irwin had to dress dat shote an' put it in de smoke house an' take er whup'in fur it.

"Dar wus plenty milk on dat place, an' dey had de milk in a lil'l house out under de China berry tree, close by de kitchen, but dey kepT dat lil'l milk house locked all de time.

"Marse Bill had er pet deer named 'Nan', an' dat deer wus bad 'bout buttins all de chaps on de place. Ebery time I cum close to dat deer, she wud but me down, an' I hed to run, an' dey tole not to run, but dat deer got me fur sho'--

"Marse Bill wud ride dat big black hoss all ober de place; he wus so black an' slick he wud shine, an' his bridle had martingale on it an' dat sho8 wus pritty. I jes' luvud to see him ride dat hoss.

"Marse Bill had a big gin, called horse power gin; yo' had to press de cotton wid your feet an dat wus hard wurk.

"I had to he'p my pappy shear de sheep; it wus my job to ketch de sheep an' hold him while pappy dun de cuttin.

"Yessum, Marse Bill whup'ed me sumtimes, an' Mistiss wus all de time pullin my ears an' slap'in me in de face/ but de worse whup'in I iver got wus frum my grand mammy--Viney, de cook, cooked a tater pone an' left it in de kitchen, an' afte' dey left de kitchen, I slip'ed in dar and got a big hunk of dat tater pone-- well, Viney missed dat hunk I got, an' when grand mammy larnt I wus de one dat got it- she put de switch on an' tore my back up salt crick. Frum dat day til now I niver eat a tater pone but I think 'bout dat whup'in.

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

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"We niver had no lamps; they white folks had candles, an' made dem candles right on the placem by meltin' tallow an' po'rin it in molds, an' dey made all de soap dat dey had by puttin ashes in a hopper, an' po'rin water on 'em an' takin' dat water an' bilin' it in a big pot with bone an' old grease, an' dat wus good soap.

"When de wimen who had babies wint to de fiel' dey took dem babies wid 'em, an' made a pallet out uf a old quilt in de fence corner, an' put dem babies dar while dey hoed and plowed. Den sum uf de wimen had bigger chulluns, dat dey wud put dar to watch de babies, an' when de babies wud cry, an' de mammies got to de end uf de row, dey wud stop an' nurse deir babies. Den sum uf de big chaps had to tote water to de field fur de han's-- Sumtimes me an' Tom had to tote water to dem.

"When it rained de wimen had to go in de loom house an' wurk. Dey made all de jeans an' lowells, an' cloth right dar an' dyed sum uf it wid copperas an' maple bark. Dem women cud make pritty cloth. Dat cloth niver wore out. In dem days de wimen wore hoops an' whut yer call balmarals (1)- De white folks dun it an' so did the slave wimen.

"De wimen had no combs, an' seed my mammy comb her hed with a cob, then wrap her hair, and tie it up in a cloth. My mammy cud tote a bucket uf water on her head and niver spill er drap. I seed her bring dat milk in great big buckets frun de pen on her head an' niver lose one drap.

"I he'rd 'em talkin 'bout de big fight an' sayin' dey cud

(1) BALMORALS.

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

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whup 'em 'fore breakfast, an' afte' while young Marse Russ wus gone to he'p whup 'em, an' den Marse Bill went 'way too. All de time dey wus gone de slaves kept prayin' to be sot free; dey wud go down under de hill way in de night an' pray hard ter be sot free.

"One day I heard Viney hollerin' "De Yankees am cumin, De Yankees am cumin," an' Tom an' me run ter de big house to see whut de Yankees look like, an' dar dey rinin' up de front lane, three abreast, all dressed in blue clo'se-- dey sho looked fine. Dey rid right over Misstiss flowers and tramped dem down. Miss Hester wus standin' on de frunt gallery, an' one uf dem sojers sed "We want er chunk uf fire," an' Mistiss sed "You will hafter git it frum one uf de darkies" den all de sojers layghed. Den dey sed "Have yer got anythin'g ter eat?" an' she sed "No". an' den dey broke de lock on de smokehouse door an' poured all de lasses out on de ground, an tuk all de meat an' sugar an' flour, an' den dey wint ter de milk house an' broke open dat door an' drunk all de milk an' whut dey did not drink dey poured on de ground.

"Some uf dem sojers koteded de chickens, an' sum uf dem had long knives lak swords, an' would deir hosses right by de turkeys an' retch down an' cut off de head uf ebery turkey. Dey tuk dem turkeys an' chickens down de lane an' cooked 'em.

"Dey went ter de lot an' tuk ebery hoss an' left us sum old scrubby stock dat wus worn out. Zias, one uf de slaves got on Marse Bill's pony named Daisy, an' wint way wid dem Yankees. When he cum back he sed dey promised ter giv him forty acres uf land, an' er mule

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

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an' he got wus a suit uf blue clo'se, an' he cum home er foot, kase dey tuk his pony.

"When dem Yankees cum up ter de house I wus mi'ty skeered. I got b'hind old granny's skirt an' niver let dem see me. Dey wint in de big house na' took de new quilts and counterpins an' put dem under deir saddles; dey burnt de gin an' all de cotton on de place, an' scattered all de corn out uf de crib, an' I had ter he'p pick up whut dey left.

"One mornin' jes' fore dinner, Marse Bill blowed dat big horn an' all de slaves cum right ter de big house, an' he tole dem dat dey wus free now, but dat he wanted dem ter stay wid him till de crop wus made, an' he wud pay dem fur it. Sum of 'em left, but mammy an' pappy stayed an' I stayed wid dem.

"Afte' dat Marse Bill didnt whup but he shore did fuss; he got sum more chickens, an' sold de eggs an' bought plow tools, an' dey sold ebery thing.

"Marse Bill rashuned out de food ter de slaves, but he writ it down in a book an' made de slave pay him fur it at de end uf de year. He promised ter pay de slaves fur dier wurk, but when de end uf de year cum, de slaves owed him so much dar wus nuffin or mi'ty lil'l cumin' ter 'em. De slaves had er hard time. All dey made de boss man tuk it, an' iffen you moved to er nudder plantashun, yo' had to go wid nuffin. De slaves had no hoss to plow, an' de store man sed he wudnt sell 'em unless dey had sumthin' to make sure de store

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

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man was goin' ter git his money. We had no 'lasses or taters, we had nuffin.

"I was gittin' ter be a big youngster an' afte' I stayed dar wid Marse Bill a few years, I left dar an' wint up de country an' hired ter Mr. Addison Burris, an' he fed me an' give me fifty cents er day. I made sum money dat year, an' afte while I mar'ied an settled down, an' one year I sed ter Mr. Burris, "Iwanter to borrow sum money frum yo'-- he sed "how much do yo' want?" he sed, "Well, iffen I let yo' have dat much yo' will have ter pay me fifteen per cent 'intrust'" I sed "I'll do dat"-- he got a lil'l black box an' counted dat money out ter me, an' dat wus de mostest money I ebery seed in my life at one time. I tuk dat money an' bought me ae hoss na' wagon an' sum thing ter eat fur de year, and' dat year I made twelve bales uf cotton, an' 'bout four hundred barrells uf corn. I niver dun dat well eny more; dat wus de best year in my life.

"My first wife is dead. We had three chulluns, an' den I mar'ied Mary Davis; she lived in Summit; we had no chulluns. I am a Baptist, an' b'long ter de Collins Grove Baptist Church near Summit. I is old now an' own my lil'l home, an' one uf my grandsons live wid us, but I tries to he'p Round de place sum.

"I'is seed sum m'ity hard times. I remember afte' de war my mammy wud roast corn cobs an' take de inside out uf it an' use dat soda, an' it wud make de bread rise jes' like soda. We parched tater peelin' an' made coffee, an' we dug up de dirt in de smoke house an' dripped dat through er hopper an' biled dat ter git salt.

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Ebenezer Brown, August 16, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Amite County)

<https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/federal/amite/436/brown-ebenezer>

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"Afte' we wurk fur de white man all our lives, an' den when we wus sot free he niver give de slaves enything. Sum uf de old timers wud steal, but I niver stole enything afte' dat tater pone whuppin'--

"One time de white caps cum ter my house, an' ask fur me. I shore wus skeered; my wife tole dem dat I wus not dar an' dey jes' tole her ter tell me I mustnt wurk fur a certain man 'cross de crick, an' I culdnt trade wid de Jews eny more. Well I wus hid up in de loft uf de house an' he'rd ebery wurd dat dey sed. Dey didnt bother me.

"My grand pappy cud hoodoo eny body. he had er long string uf beads an' cud say prayers over 'em. Den he cud brew er tea an' put one uf den beads in it, an' tell yo' dat wud cure Rumatiz, an' when yo' wud drink dat, yo' wud shoe do sum dibilment or go crazy lak. Yo' eyesight wud git bad an' yo' wud have pains in yo' head an' feel lak yo' wus goin' ter die.

"One time I seed him make er 'nigger' spit cotton, afte' he had drunk er cup uf his tea. Ebery body sed he wus a bad nigger. He niver cud hoo doo me; I wud git out uf his way. I wus too smart fur him.

Ebenezer weighs about 175 pounds--, black, round face-- snow white teeth, all appear good--About five feet and six inches tall-- Step is slow, and he walks with a stick-- says his health is "Tollerbul"--I judge he hold up well for his age.

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Washington County)
<https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/federal/washington/436/oliver-mark>

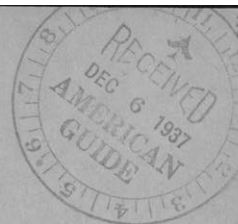
Autobiography of Ex-Slaves

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Carrie Campbell



I is a Mississippian. Born in the State and lived in it all my life. My mother, Fannie Oliver, died when I was a baby. My father, Jim Oliver, took care of me as best he could till the War broke out. He ran off and joined the Yankee Army so my Grandma, Fena, and Grandpa Stevens, took me and raised me. My sister Joemima was most grown at that time so she helped to care for me. I never had no brother and my other sister died before she was old enough to get a name. I was born in the year 1856. I has kept up with it all these years. Ain't never forgot them figures. I told them to my son when he was old enough to remember and he has kept up with it too, same as I is. I has been here a long time and I has learned a heap of things in all them years. All of my folks came from Kentucky. My master, June Ward, bought them at Lexington and brought them home to his plantation in Washington County, Mississippi. He always went off to get his slaves. The dealers didn't come to our part of the country with slaves for sale. I never seed one sold in my life. They had slave markets in New Orleans but Master never went there after hisn. I wasn't old enough to do much work 'sept to be the cow pen boy. My job was to go for the cows and keep the calves off while the milking was going on. I never got no money for that. Nobody was paid for work but we could make money selling eggs and chickens. Money made that way, we was allowed to spend for what soever we wanted. In them days we had everything in the way of food and clothes. Masters' smoke house was most as big as a store. It was kept filled all the time. Lake Washington was right there with fish of all kind. We would catch so many of them fish we would have to throw

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Washington County)
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them back in the water to keep the hogs from eating them. The woods was full of game, deer, bears, wild cows, panthers, turkeys, geese, ducks, possums, rabbits, squirrels, birds and everything. Them wild ducks would stay around on the lake with the tame ducks. The leader kept his sharp eyes set and if you don't slip up on him, he will see you and when he do, he give one quack, and like a flash of lightning them ducks is gone. 'Bout the only thing my young Master thought about was hunting. When I was big enough, he took me with him. Me and him sure had good times. We has killed turkeys in the new plowed field. The wild cows and deer would come to the houses to get water and it wasn't nothing to see bears every day. We had a big central garden out of which vegetables was gathered for us to eat. Besides this we had corn bread, 'lasses, and white bread every Sunday.

Master bought all our clothes in Kentucky, and I mean clothes. They wasn't no old flimsy things like they is now. When Master go to Kentucky, he would bring back everything we needed to wear, even to shoes, with brass tips on the toes. Master sure wan't no slacker when it come to doing for his hands. I can see him now walking up and down on his porch pulling his long beard and saying, "Well, boys, is you all here. Hope none of you done run away while I been gone." Some of the slaves had a way of running off to the woods when Master left, 'cause the overseer, who wasn't nothing nohow, but poor white trash, would get a little hard on them. When Master got back, they always got back. When the overseer tell on the ones that been gone, Master say "Well, well, I have to see about that." He ain't going to see 'bout nothing of that kind, so it drops right there. Miss Ma-

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
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tilda, bless her soul, was the best creature that ever lived. She was Master's wife. There wasn't nothing Miss Matilda couldn't do. I is seed her set and knit all day and not once look at what she was knitting. Them needles would click together same as a clock ticking and when she finishes she have the prettiest jackets and socks, just the same as if they come from a weaver. There was two sons in the family, Mr. George and Mr. June, Jr. Two girls, Mattie, and Betty. They would allgo off for the summer, and stay three months at a time. I had an uncle that would step off every time Master left and stay till he got back. Some of them overseers was mean as the devil, and they would try to make my uncle work in the field. He wasn't no field hand, he was an ax man. He knowed, too, when Master was there, he wasn't going to allow no mistreatment. Big as the place was, there was need for hewers and choppers all the time, to keep the place in wood. There wan't no need trying to make a man go from one profession to another one he don't know nothing about.

I never heared them say how many acres old Master owned. He had about two hundred slaves to work it, and it took that many with the clearing of the land and the cultivating going on all the time.

The overseer blew the horn before day to get up; again at twelve o'clock for dinner and before dark to stop work. The working hours was from sun to sun. When tht last horn blowed we went to the big eating hall for supper. Them cooks knowed how to prepare

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Washington County)
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food. Them baked 'tater pies; could smell it across the field. It took me a long time to get used to not having good things to eat. The children had a separate place to eat from the grown folks. I 'speak they had sense enough to know them children would be sick if they gave them the same quality food the grown folks had. After supper there wasn't no rule to abide by. We could do whatsoever we pleased, just so we got to bed by nine o'clock. A nigger ain't fit to do no work if he sets up all night. Saturday nights, that's a different matter. We could set up all night. That when we held our dances. We was off work at dinner time on Saturday, and Sunday was free day, so there wan't no objection to how late we danced, just so there wasn't no cutting up going on. The strictest rule they had was about fighting. They wouldn't have none of that. If you do it anyway, and somebody gets bad hurt, you be put in the stocks for that. It was dark in there, too, to make it seem worser. That was the only jail slaves knowed anything about. For running off, stealing hogs, and not working, you was given a whipping and let go. I remember one night, my pa came in late. Soon as he stepped in the door, he said, "Cover that boy's head up quick." Wasn't no need to have my head covered then, 'cause I done seed him. My pa had stole that hog. Such a killing and a going on as there was. They never catch up with him neither.

The only book learning we ever got was when we stole it. Master bought some slaves from Cincinnati, that had worked in white folks houses. They had stole a little learning and when they came to our

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
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place they passed on to us what they knew. We wasn't allowed no paper and pencil. I learned all my A.B.C's without it. I knows how to read and ain't never been in a school room in my life. There was one woman by the name of Aunt Sylvia. She was so smart she foreknewed things before they took place. I has heard Master say many a time he wouldn't take nothing in this world for her. If he want to get the ages to put down in his book, she could tell it to him to the very day and month. How she knowed so much I can't tell. We didn't have no church. We used the children's house for our meeting place of prayer. Aunt Sylvia gave the lecture. She was a good thinker. Looked as if she knowed everything just from her mother wit. She was the only preacher we knowed anything about. Never had a baptizing or anything of that sort. There was another pretty smart one among the slaves. He was the carpenter for the place. He made all the beds we slept on, and they was beautiful. Every one of them had a tester, like a canopy over it. He made all the coffins too, and that kept him steady working whenever an epidemic broke out. Wasn't much attention paid to the burying of the dead. Not even a song or a prayer at the grave.

I often sets back and wonders if there is ever been held such celebrations as the ones we had on Christmas Day. There was presents for everybody from the youngest to the oldest. Then there was Santa Claus for the children. At night there was a big dance. The fiddlers and the tambourine and bone beaters, was the finest to

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
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be got out of Kentucky. Master sure wan't no stingy man. He gave us a barrel of whiskey every Christmas. The cups was tied on the barrell. We would ring around it and each person have his nip as his time come. All the while the songs was going on. The drivers was there to keep order. Better not be no fighting 'cause that shore meant the stocks. When the dancing started Master and old Miss always came to see them cut the Pigeon Wing and do the Rail road.

Fourth of July was the big barbecue. Weeks before time, they start telling us, "You better get your crops clean by the Fourth of July. We knowed what that meant and we knowed it so well that when the time come, them crops looked like they been swept with new brooms. If a person today could see the number of cows, sheep, goats and hogs that was barbecued for that one day, they would think the whole world was going to be fed. New Years was held at the big house. That was not public, like the other day. So I don't know much about it. I never liked to shuck corn, so I never got no enjoyment out of corn shuckings. Heap of them liked it, and they would try hard for the prize that was offered for the one that could shuck the most.

There never was no trouble between the ^{white} folks and us. They didn't try to keep the war news from us. They didn't exactly come out and tell us nothing but they didn't care if we heared it. The children would hear them say the soldiers were near Petersburg; they would tell it to us, and we pass it on to the next one, same

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
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as they do now. We knowed pretty much hat was going on. They was fighting right at us, at Milligan's Bend. The Yankee soldiers passing all the time taking our men off with them. That is, all that would go. They took everything with them they could lay hands on. What they couldn't use, they tore up. Them Yankee soldiers had buttons on their blue jackets that looked like real gold. They looked so rich and grand on them beautiful horses, it was no wonder so many wanted to go with them. My father went, and was in the Army 'till he got mustered out at Vicksburg. Us children didn't give it much thought, one way or 'tother. We kept right up with our little games of ball and marbles. Som time have our little ring play. The old folks told us all sorts of stories about hants and ghosts. They said I was so hardheaded they couldn't scare me. My wife believes in spirits and says she has seed them many times. I come pretty near getting up to it once. My hair started creeping on end, I was that scared. They kept telling the story, about the hant that was in the old gin house, where the man was killed. I was a grown man then. I kept telling my wife there wasn't nothing to it, and to prove it to her, I started out to investigate. When I got nearly to that gin house, so help me, if it didn't start up ruming. I could hear the wheels going and the engine puffing same as if it had up steam. I left there right now, and while I don't believe in ghosts I don't believe neither in making investigations. That was my last time. Whenever a slave got sick, he was cared for mighty nice. The white doctor 'tended

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

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him and the old folks nursed him. Sometime the old folks did the doctoring with the medicine they made out of herbs. Their snake root tonic was mighty fine. Nothing better for the cramps than bur vine tea. They made little bags of asafele and buckeye to keep off disease. For the heart complaint they used a brass key or a piece of lead around the neck.

When the War ended, the word got around to all. Some of the slaves didn't have sense enough to know what it was all about, but they joined in with the others, shouting, "Free, at last! Free as a frog." They jumped and hollered and carried on something terrible. The boys in blue came by to excite them more. We stayed there, like heap of them did, for a many a year after the War. Then we moved off to another place near by but that wasn't the same, as the old home place. Seemed like we couldn't be contented no where else, so we moved back. After a number of years they changed overseers and for some reason my Grandma couldn't get along with him so we left. I never did give up till I had to, 'cause I wanted to stay. Didn't have no trouble with the KuKlux Klan, the Night Riders or nothing. The Reconstruction came and went but it didn't bother us none. In certain places the colored folks voted, and I has heared of them holding public office as high up as the Senate. None of them don't vote now. I 'speak they ain't got money enough to pay their taxes.

After we left the old homelace we moved to Greenville and there I lived for forty years. I worked by the day at the oil mill and ran a public dray wagon. Schools were started up for

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
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negroes. White teachers taught till the colored could learn to master the old Blue Back speller. When you get all there is, in that book its just the same as mastering the Bible. When I married my first wife, Linie, we was both dressed up in the best we had. Didn't get no special clothes for the occasion. We had four children. Two boys and two girls. Two of them is still living. The girl Carrie Belle is in Chicago, and the boy has been the cook in a restuarant in Clarksdale for years and years. I moved to Coahoma County in the year 1910. after my first wife died, I married Betsy and we is still living together. I am able to work a little yet. Up to this year Betsy could pick cotton, but she ain't no 'count now 'cept to do our little cooking. She can't remember 'bout all the noted men like I can. There is Abraham Lincoln, he was talked of much, 'cause he set us all free, and Jefferson Davis, he was a great man. He done his part for what he thought was right. He didn't think they had a right to take the slaves away from their owners, when they had done bought them. Some of the colored people thinks there ain't nobody like Booker T. Washington. I hears them talk about him, but for my part, I don't know nothing about his displays.

Nobody is raising their children up right these days. They got no manners. Don't come around the old folks, so fraid they will be asked to do something. Their mothers not much better. Don't come to the door to ask about us if we sick. Me and my wife

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
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lives to be honest and righteous. We is both members of the Baptist Church and we don't visit none, 'sept the ones that lives as we does. Its hard pulling to make a living these days. Even with the little money the Government gives me, its hard to get by. Things is so high, money won't buy much. You just handles it; thats all.

Everybody wants to be free and they should be. I don't believe its right to live in bondage, but I do say it bold and above board that the slaves with good masters like mine was a heap better off. Folks all say that's 'ceitful on my part, but it couldn't be, 'cause I wasn't old enough to know nothing about being 'ceitful. I can remember having every thing I wanted and it takes a long time to get used to not having nothing.

SUSAN JONES TRANSCRIPT

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Susan Jones, December 20, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Panola County)

<https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/federal/panola/436/jones-susan>

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Susan Jones ex-slave Autobiography
241-ex-slaves-Panola County
Margaret L. Pack

Susan Jones
95 years old

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GUIDE

I wuz born on Mr. Charles Alexander's plantation in Panola County. My father and mother wuz Si and Easter Alexander. When de war broke out I wuz not big enough to work in the fields so I played in de yard and helped in de house. Both my parents died before freedom wuz declared. After de war I stayed with my brothers on de place for two years. All de slaves rejoiced and most of dem broke up and went to Memphis but when dey found dey couldn't git no work and live in de city so dey all come back. We all started one Sunday mawning and walked to Hernando and stayed all night under some plum bushes and walked to Memphis de next day.

I didn't see no fighting but jest heaps of fighting soldiers from both sides. One Sunday mawning early de Yankee soldiers come through and and sot de public blacksmith shop on fire and took all de hosses, meat, chickens dey could find and even got in de mild cellar and drunk all de milk.

All de slaves wuz fed jest what de white folks et and it wuz plenty good. Marsta Charlie Alexander wuz a pore man and he married Miss. Jane Byrd, who owned all de slaves and land and she wouldn't let him treat us mean but when she died he raised cain. He beat up all de slaves and most any time you could hear niggers praying and hollering down at de neighbors house. He whipped 'em jestcause he could.

Why he'd take dem in droves down to de city and sell em jest cause he didn't like em. He'd put em in de cattle pen til he sold dem. My brother Henry Clay ran off in de woods after he whooped him so hard.

SUSAN JONES TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Susan Jones, December 20, 1937
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He ran all day and de white folks set de coon dogs after him and he wuz caught. Dey put him in a barrell with a stick nailed over his shoulder and one between his ~~knées~~ so as he couldn't get out and dey put him in de yard so everybody could see him. Henry had a knife so he whittled de stick into de stick and got out and run off again after dat he wuz caught and whooped and de next time he run off he joined de Union soldiers

After Miss. died we had a overseer and he sho wuz pore white trash and a meaner man never lived. He and his famble lived on de place and de niggers warn't no more than dogs on our place.

Miss had nine chillun and two daughters died.

I heard lots about de Klan but I neverdid see em, dey never done nothin' to us. We didn't expect so much from freedom but anything wuz better than what we had.

I kin remember when Abraham Lincoln wuz running for de Presidency I've heard lots about him and seen Jeff Davis' soldiers and Lincoln's soldiers come through and dey burnedall de fine houses and smoke houses and de white folks hid de silverware.

Dare wuz a man who come through and he looked jest like a tramp, well he inquired de way and counted all de plow hands, we had fifteen plow hands and thrity hoe hands. De next day de ground wuz darkened with soldiers and dey asked whare de plow hands wuz and my cousin Paul said dare wan't none, well said de yankee, who runs dem fifteen plows and he led dem soldiers right to de field and dey took all de mules and nigger men and made de men fight. Some of dem deserted and de others fought in de war. De man what had come de day before wuz a spy.

My husband, imon Jones fought in de war, he wuz in de northern army under General Foster in Company K. Regiment 59. He wuz in de battle of Vicksburg and Gettisburg.

SUSAN JONES TRANSCRIPT (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Susan Jones, December 20, 1937
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I aint never seen no hants but I've heard em plenty of times, I wuz working in my garden one day and I heard some one walking in de house and I thought it wuz my sister and I called but shedidn't answer and jest kept on walking so I went in and looked high and low but there warn't no body there and when I started out de door it started again and my hair gan to creep off my head and I nearly broke my neck gitting to de white folk's house. We would stay in de house with the white girls after dey father died and lots of times we would hear de peanna playing and dey didn't even have no peanna but you could hear them keys jest a playing. andfolks would walk up and down de stairs.

Miss. loved pretty things and they jest had common things and lived in a doubld log house. She begged for a safe and real china dishes but he wouldn't git em for her but jest after she died he bought de safe and dishes. Night after night dem dishes would rattle and shake and we'd look and there wuz no one. De master said it wuz cats but we didn't have no cats and we jest knew it wuz Miss and she rattled dem dishes til everyone wuz broke.

I live with my son Gundy Jones, he rents this farm. We've farmed all my life and my husband died sixteen years ago and I get a pension frum de Government. I got eleven children and too many grandchildren to count and I've even got great-great grand children and I've seen two of em.

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT, REDACTED VERSION

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Ebenezer Brown, August 16, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Amite County)

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Ebenezer Brown, who lives seven miles west of McComb, on the Smithdale road, tells his story:

"I is now eighty five years old: I wus born 'bout twelve miles south uf Liberty, on de road dat goes frum Liberty to Jackson, Louisiana, on Mr. Bill McDowell's place, an' dat wus er big farm. Marse Bill wus mi'ty tough on his slaves. I wus jes' a boy, but I will niver fergit how he whup'ed his slaves. I ken name ebry one uf his slaves: dar wus Viney-- she done de cookin'; Zias wus er fiel' han' an' he driv de carriage; my uncle Irwin, he fed de hosses, an' he wus a bad n[REDACTED] an' got whup'ed fur stealin' all de time; Jim wus de rice beater, an' he beat de rice ebry Friday; Sara wus er fiel' han' -- Relia wurk in de fiél' an' milked, an' had ter go to de cow pen bar' footed an' her feet got frost bit, an' dat made her cripple; Hager wus er fiel' han' an' Peggy wus er fiel' han' an' afte' Relia got crippled Peggy he'p milk; Monday wus er fiel' han' but he wus bad 'bout runnin' way from an' ^{home} de patroller wud git him; Patience, dat wus my mammy, she milked an' wurk in de fiel' an' den dar wus sum big chulluns dat he'ped in de fiel' an' we all hed ter wurk round de house. Dar wus Tom, a n[REDACTED] boy 'bout my age, an' we played tergedder an' done wurk tergedder.

"Marse Bill hed a big fine two story house, an' it wus white, an' de front uf it wus to de west; on de north side uf de house wus a dug well, sixty five feet deep, an' it had er pulley over it, an' two buckets, an' when one bucket wud come up de udder wud go down. My'. but dat wus cold water, but de buckets wus heavy.

EBENEZER BROWN TRANSCRIPT, REDACTED VERSION (CONT.)

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Ebenezer Brown, August 16, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Amite County)

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241--Autobiography of Ebenezer Brown, Amite County.

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De gard'n wus on de south side uf de house, an' de pigeon house wus on de northwest side uf de big house, jes' over de Carriage house.

"Marse Bill's wife wus named Miss Hester an' deir chulluns wus named, young Marse Russ; he wus grown an' toted a big whip all de time; he he'ped Marse Bill look afte' de darkies in de fiel'; an' den dar wus young Marse Tom, an' miss Lizzie, an' Miss Mary, an' Miss Ella, an' Miss Ethel, and Miss Dulcie, an' dat wus all.

"Marse Bill hed two brudders; one wus named Tom, an' one wus named John; an' Mr. Tom wus a mi'ty rich man; he uster loan money. One time Marse Bill put me on his big fine black pony, named 'Snap', an' give me er note, an' sont me to Mr. Tom's; when I got dar, Mr. Tom sed 'whut's de matter wid Bill now?'; den I giv him de note-- he sed 'Lord, Jesus Christ; peas an' rice: dat is whut Bill is allua wantin'--Money! money! money! '--- he giv me de money an' put me back on de black hoss an' sont me home.

"As a child, I played in de yard wid another black boy named Tom Hardin; but dey didn't 'low fur us to play much. We shot china berries frum er pop-gun, an' we made de shots hit de udder chaps, an' wud git whup'ed fur it. we done dat all de time. We toted in wood fur Viney, so she suld cook, an' she cooked in a big fire place with racks in de chimby; den we had ter pick up de eggs ebery day; we brung de eggs ter de house in er basket; ebery time de wind wud blow we hed to pick up de plums frum under de trees and tote 'em in baskits to de hogs; an' den we picked up de peaches an' apples dat

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fell offen de trees an' toted dem to de hogs an' dat made de hogs fat. Den Marse Bill made cider outern de apples an' dat was good. Den I hed to churn ebery udder day; dat churn wus 'bout three feet high an it hed er long handle dasker, an' I hed ter stand dar an wurk dat ~~hand~~ handle up an' down till de butter wud cum; when I seed de lil'l lumps uf butter stickin on de handle I wud take my finger an' wipe it off an' den suck my finger--but I dar'sent let old Mistis see me do dat, an' iffen she koteded me doin' it I wud git a whup'in--

"Tom an' me hed ter ~~sweep~~ sweep de yard an' stamp ebery Sa'day we hed whut yer call 'brush-brooms' an' we brushed dem leaves up in er pile an' put dem in er baskit an' toted 'em to er pen behin' de barn an' dar let 'em rot.

"I'is gwiner tell yo' 'bout my grand mammy- her name wus Dorcas, an' she wus born in Virgini' an' er slave trader brung her to Liberty, an' Marse Bill seed her an sed she wus er husky gal an' he bought her 'fore dey hed time ter put her on de block, an' she tuk up wid a slave dat 'longed to Mr. Landon Lea, named Jared Avenger, an' dey wus my grand mammy an' peppy. She wus old an' lived in a log house down de hill side an' all she culd do wus to wash an' iron an' mend de clothes an' sum times she wurk in de loom room. Grand pap stayed over ter Mr. Lea's, but afte' dey wus sot free he cum to live at Marse Bill's wid grand mammy. My mammy wus deir chile, her name wus Patience.

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"My pappy was named Dan; he was born in South Ca'lina an' brung to Liberty an' put on de block, an' two peepul wanted him, but Marse Bill sed he wud giv moren dan dey, an' de boss man sed Marse Bill culd have him. He brung him home an' sed 'Patience, I brung yo' er husband, go live wid 'im' an' dat wus de way dey got mar'ied. Dar wus no preacher dem days to marry yo'.

"My pappy was a carpenter, an' wurk ⁱⁿ de fiel' an' dun de buildin' dat wus dun on de place, an' he driv de osteam to Osyka to git sugar an' flour, an' he allus hed ter grease de wagon wid tar. Dat wud make it run easy.

"Marse Bill had no overseer dat I remember; he an' young Marse Russ toted de whup, an' wud ride ober de fiel' an' make de slaves wurk an' dey wud shore whup iver dat wurk wusnt dun. Den Marse Bill had er old poll parrot dat he put on a limb in de fiel' sum times, an' dat parrot wud tell who it wus dat didnt wurk. Marse Bill wud tie dem slaves an' whup hard, and all de slaves wud say wus 'O, pray, marster; O, pray, Marster! '--

"When de slaves wus wurkin good dey wud sing like dis--

"Watch de sun; see how she run;
Niver let her ketch yo' wid yer wurk undun."

"Howdy, my brethern, Howdy yo' do, a rack in de lot
Since I bin in de lan'
I do mi'ty well, an' I thank de Lord, too,
Since I bin in de lan'

"He O yes, O yes, since I bin in de lan' an' chery Friday
O, yes, O yes, since I bin in de lan'
I do mi'ty well an' I thank de Lord too, sheet, an' git
Since I bin in de lan'----

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"Dar wus 'nudder song dat went sorta like dis--
"See my brudder down de hill; fall down on he knees;
Send up your prayers; I'll send up mine; de good Lord ter please.
Raise de heabens, high as de skies; fall down on yer knees;
Send up your prayers; I'll send up mine; de good Lord ter please."

When cum quitin' time dem slaves wud sing all de way ter de house.

"Marse Bill had plenty uf ebery thing 'round him. He hed er drove uf cows an' more milk dan dey knowd whut to do wid. he hed hosses, mules, hogs, sheep, yard full uf chickens, geese, guineas, peafowls, pigeons, and he had two jennies an' er jack, an' he made big money offen dem; he made plenty cotton, corn, rice, taters an' peas an' ebery thing good ter eat. He planted more taters dan eny body in de country; dem taters wus red on de outside and white inside an' dey wud choke yer iffen yo' didnt drink water wid 'em. He made as many as 50 tater banks.

"When he kilt his hogs, he wud smoke dat meat an' wrap it in shucks ter keep it frum spilin' an' dat wus better dan yo' can buy right now.

"He made his slaves pull fodder an' stack it high, an' den he put sum uf it in de loft uf de big barn. He had a rack in de lot an' put dat fodder in dat rack so his stock culd eat it.

"He made lots an' lots uf rice ebery year, an' ebery Friday he made old Jim put sum rice on a big cloth like er sheet, an' git switches an' beat an' beat dat rice; den old Jim wud hold dat rice

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high up and let it fall to de ground a lil'l atter time, an' de wind wud blow de chaff off an' den he had good rice left. Dat wus de way he hulled his peas, an' he fed us on peas an' rice.

"Ebery Sat'day dat cum, Marse Bill wud rashun u de slaves. He wud call dem up an' giv ebery fambly a lil'l flour, rice, peas, meat an' meal, an' sum times a lil'l soda; we had flour 'nouv to make biskits ebery Sunday mornin an de rest uf de time dey et corn bread. Iffen de rashuns giv out 'fore next Sat'day --well, dat wus too bad, fur yo' had ter do wid out.

"Let me tell yo' 'bout my uncle; he wud git more whup'ins dan eny body- He wud steal- Marse Bill kept missin' meat outern de smoke-house, an' he sot up one night ter ketch de rogue. Well, 'bout mid night, uncle Irwin prized up a log an' took it out an' crawl'd through dat hole, an' right dar Marse Bill Kotched him, an' whut a whup'in he did git. Den one time sum body wus stealin Marse Bill's corn, and Marse Bill sot a trap to git dat rogue, an' de nex' mornin, who wus in de trap, but Uncle Irwin. Well he made uncle Irwin dance ober de place while he whup'ed him.

"Uncle Irwin hed to feed de hosses, an' yo' kno' de chickens wud lay eggs in de troughs an' ebery egg he wud find wud be hisern. Marse Bill uster ketch him wid de eggs offen times an' whup him, but he wud do dat er gin. Yo' culdnt put enything down but uncle Irwin wuld git it right now.

"One time Marse bill had er shote dat stayed round de yard; well dat shote cum up missin' one day, an' Marse Bill tole young

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Marse Russ to fin' dat shote; well, Marse Russ found it whar uncle Irwin had kilt it-- uncle Irwin had to dress dat shote an' put it in de smoke house an' take er whup'in fur it.

"Dar wus plenty milk on dat place, an' dey had de milk in a lil'l house out under de China berry tree, close by de kitchen, but dey kepT dat lil'l milk house locked all de time.

"Marse Bill had er pet deer named 'Nan', an' dat deer wus bad 'bout buttins all de chaps on de place. Ebery time I cum close to dat deer, she wud but me down, an' I hed to run, an' dey tole not to run, but dat deer got me fur sho'--

"Marse Bill wud ride dat big black hoss all ober de place; he wus so black an' slick he wud shine, an' his bridle had martingale on it an' dat sho8 wus pritty. I jes' luvud to see him ride dat hoss.

"Marse Bill had a big gin, called horse power gin; yo' had to press de cotton wid your feet an dat wus hard wurk.

"I had to he'p my pappy shear de sheep; it wus my job to ketch de sheep an' hold him while pappy dun de cuttin.

"Yessum, Marse Bill whup'ed me sumtimes, an' Mistiss wus all de time pullin my ears an' slap'in me in de face/ but de worse whup'in I iver got wus frum my grand mammy--Viney, de cook, cooked a tater pone an' left it in de kitchen, an' afte' dey left de kitchen, I slip'ed in dar and got a big hunk of dat tater pone-- well, Viney missed dat hunk I got, an' when grand mammy larnt I wus de one dat got it- she put de switch on an' tore my back up salt crick. Frum dat day til now I niver eat a tater pone but I think 'bout dat whup'in.

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"We niver had no lamps; they white folks had candles, an' made dem candles right on the placem by meltin' tallow an' po'rin it in molds, an' dey made all de soap dat dey had by puttin ashes in a hopper, an' po'rin water on 'em an' takin' dat water an' bilin' it in a big pot with bone an' old grease, an' dat wus good soap.

"When de wimen who had babies wint to de fiel' dey took dem babies wid 'em, an' made a pallet out uf a old quilt in de fence corner, an' put dem babies dar while dey hoed and plowed. Den sum uf de wimen had bigger chulluns, dat dey wud put dar to watch de babies, an' when de babies wud cry, an' de mammies got to de end uf de row, dey wud stop an' nurse deir babies. Den sum uf de big chaps had to tote water to de field fur de han's-- Sumtimes me an' Tom had to tote water to dem.

"When it rained de wimen had to go in de loom house an' wurk. Dey made all de jeans an' lowells, an' cloth right dar an' dyed sum uf it wid copperas an' maple bark. Dem women cud make pritty cloth. Dat cloth niver wore out. In dem days de wimen wore hoops an' whut yer call balmarals (1)- De white folks dun it an' so did the slave wimen.

"De wimen had no combs, an' seed my mammy comb her hed with a cob, then wrap her hair, and tie it up in a cloth. My mammy cud tote a bucket uf water on her head and niver spill er drap. I seed her bring dat milk in great big buckets frun de pen on her head an' niver lose one drap.

"I he'rd 'em talkin 'bout de big fight an' sayin' dey cud

(1) BALMORALS.

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whup 'em 'fore breakfast, an' afte' while young Marse Russ wus gone to he'p whup 'em, an' den Marse Bill went 'way too. All de time dey wus gone de slaves kept prayin' to be sot free; dey wud go down under de hill way in de night an' pray hard ter be sot free.

"One day I heard Viney hollerin' "De Yankees am cumin, De Yankees am cumin," an' Tom an' me run ter de big house to see whut de Yankees look like, an' dar dey rinin' up de front lane, three abreast, all dressed in blue clo'se-- dey sho looked fine. Dey rid right over Misstiss flowers and tramped dem down. Miss Hester wus standin' on de frunt gallery, an' one uf dem sojers sed "We want er chunk uf fire," an' Mistiss sed "You will hafter git it frum one uf de d [REDACTED] den all de sojers layghed. Den dey sed "Have yer got anythin'g ter eat?" an' she sed "No". an' den dey broke de lock on de smokehouse door an' poured all de lasses out on de ground, an tuk all de meat an' sugar an' flour, an' den dey wint ter de milk house an' broke open dat door an' drunk all de milk an' whut dey did not drink dey poured on de ground.

"Some uf dem sojers koteded de chickens, an' sum uf dem had long knives lak swords, an' would deir hosses right by de turkeys an' retch down an' cut off de head uf ebery turkey. Dey tuk dem turkeys an' chickens down de lane an' cooked 'em.

"Dey went ter de lot an' tük ebery hoss an' left us sum old scrubby stock dat wus worn out. Zias, one uf de slaves got on Marse Bill's pony named Daisy, an' wint way wid dem Yankees. When he cum back he sed dey promised ter giv him forty acres uf land, an' er mule

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an' he got wus a suit uf blue clo'se, an' he cum home er foot, kase dey tuk his pony.

"When dem Yankees cum up ter de house I wus mi'ty skeered. I got b'hind old granny's skirt an' niver let dem see me. Dey wint in de big house na' took de new quilts and counterpins an' put dem under deir saddles; dey burnt de gin an' all de cotton on de place, an' scattered all de corn out uf de crib, an' I had ter he'p pick up whut dey left.

"One mornin' jes' fore dinner, Marse Bill blowed dat big horn an' all de slaves cum right ter de big house, an' he tole dem dat dey wus free now, but dat he wanted dem ter stay wid him till de crop wus made, an' he wud pay dem fur it. Sum of 'em left, but mammy an' pappy stayed an' I stayed wid dem.

"Afte' dat Marse Bill didnt whup but he shore did fuss; he got sum more chickens, an' sold de eggs an' bought plow tools, an' dey sold ebery thing.

"Marse Bill rashuned out de food ter de slaves, but he writ it down in a book an' made de slave pay him fur it at de end uf de year. He promised ter pay de slaves fur dier wurk, but when de end uf de year cum, de slaves owed him so much dar wus nuffin or mi'ty lil'l cumin' ter 'em. De slaves had er hard time. All dey made de boss man tuk it, an' iffen you moved to er nudder plantashun, yo' had to go wid nuffin. De slaves had no hoss to plow, an' de store man sed he wudnt sell 'em unless dey had sumthin' to make sure de store

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man was goin' ter git his money. We had no 'lasses or taters, we had nuffin.

"I was gittin' ter be a big youngster an' afte' I stayed dar wid Marse Bill a few years, I left dar an' wint up de country an' hired ter Mr. Addison Burris, an' he fed me an' give me fifty cents er day. I made sum money dat year, an' afte while I mar'ied an settled down, an' one year I sed ter Mr. Burris, "Iwanter to borrow sum money frum yo'-- he sed "how much do yo' want?" he sed, "Well, iffen I let yo' have dat much yo' will have ter pay me fifteen per cent 'intrust'" I sed "I'll do dat"-- he got a lil'l black box an' counted dat money out ter me, an' dat was de mostest money I ebery seed in my life at one time. I tuk dat money an' bought me ae hoss na' wagon an' sum thing ter eat fur de year, and' dat year I made twelve bales uf cotton, an' 'bout four hundred barrells uf corn. I niver dun dat well eny more; dat was de best year in my life.

"My first wife is dead. We had three chulluns, an' den I mar'ied Mary Davis; she lived in Summit; we had no chulluns. I am a Baptist, an' b'long ter de Collins Grove Baptist Church near Summit. I is old now an' own my lil'l home, an' one uf my grandsons live wid us, but I tries to he'p Round de place sum.

"I'is seed sum m'ity hard times. I remember afte' de war my mammy wud roast corn cobs an' take de inside out uf it an' use dat soda, an' it wud make de bread rise jes' like soda. We parched tater peelin' an' made coffee, an' we dug up de dirt in de smoke house an' dripped dat through er hopper an' biled dat ter git salt.

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"Afte' we wurk fur de white man all our lives, an' den when we wus sot free he niver give de slaves enything. Sum uf de old timers wud steal, but I niver stole enything afte' dat tater pone whuppin'--

"One time de white caps cum ter my house, an' ask fur me. I shore wus skeered; my wife tole dem dat I wus not dar an' dey jes' tole her ter tell me I mustnt wurk fur a certain man 'cross de crick, an' I culdnt trade wid de Jews eny more. Well I wus hid up in de loft uf de house an' he'rd ebery wurd dat dey sed. Dey didnt bother me.

"My grand pappy cud hoodoo eny body. he had er long string uf beads an' cud say prayers over 'em. Den he cud brew er tea an' put one uf den beads in it, an' tell yo' dat wud cure Rumatiz, an' when yo' wud drink dat, yo' wud shoe do sum dibilment or go crazy lak. Yo' eyesight wud git bad an' yo' wud have pains in yo' head an' feel lak yo' wus goin' ter die.

"One time I seed him make er 'n [REDACTED] spit cotton, afte' he had drunk er cup uf his tea. Ebery body sed he wus a bad n [REDACTED] He niver cud hoo doo me; I wud git out uf his way. I wus too smart fur him.

Ebenezer weighs about 175 pounds--, black, round face-- snow white teeth, all appear good--About five feet and six inches tall-- Step is slow, and he walks with a stick-- says his health is "Tollerbul"--I judge he hold up well for his age.

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT, REDACTED VERSION

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Mark Oliver, December 6, 1937
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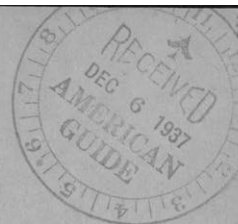
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F.C.

Carrie Campbell



I is a Mississippian. Born in the State and lived in it all my life. My mother, Fannie Oliver, died when I was a baby. My father, Jim Oliver, took care of me as best he could till the War broke out. He ran off and joined the Yankee Army so my Grandma, Fena, and Grandpa Stevens, took me and raised me. My sister Joemima was most grown at that time so she helped to care for me. I never had no brother and my other sister died before she was old enough to get a name. I was born in the year 1856. I has kept up with it all these years. Ain't never forgot them figures. I told them to my son when he was old enough to remember and he has kept up with it too, same as I is. I has been here a long time and I has learned a heap of things in all them years. All of my folks came from Kentucky. My master, June Ward, bought them at Lexington and brought them home to his plantation in Washington County, Mississippi. He always went off to get his slaves. The dealers didn't come to our part of the country with slaves for sale. I never seed one sold in my life. They had slave markets in New Orleans but Master never went there after hisn. I wasn't old enough to do much work 'sept to be the cow pen boy. My job was to go for the cows and keep the calves off while the milking was going on. I never got no money for that. Nobody was paid for work but we could make money selling eggs and chickens. Money made that way, we was allowed to spend for what soever we wanted. In them days we had everything in the way of food and clothes. Masters' smoke house was most as big as a store. It was kept filled all the time. Lake Washington was right there with fish of all kind. We would catch so many of them fish we would have to throw

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT, REDACTED VERSION (CONT.)

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them back in the water to keep the hogs from eating them. The woods was full of game, deer, bears, wild cows, panthers, turkeys, geese, ducks, possums, rabbits, squirrels, birds and everything. Them wild ducks would stay around on the lake with the tame ducks. The leader kept his sharp eyes set and if you don't slip up on him, he will see you and when he do, he give one quack, and like a flash of lightning them ducks is gone. 'Bout the only thing my young Master thought about was hunting. When I was big enough, he took me with him. Me and him sure had good times. We has killed turkeys in the new plowed field. The wild cows and deer would come to the houses to get water and it wasn't nothing to see bears every day. We had a big central garden out of which vegetables was gathered for us to eat. Besides this we had corn bread, 'lasses, and white bread every Sunday.

Master bought all our clothes in Kentucky, and I mean clothes. They wasn't no old flimsy things like they is now. When Master go to Kentucky, he would bring back everything we needed to wear, even to shoes, with brass tips on the toes. Master sure wan't no slacker when it come to doing for his hands. I can see him now walking up and down on his porch pulling his long beard and saying, "Well, boys, is you all here. Hope none of you done run away while I been gone." Some of the slaves had a way of running off to the woods when Master left, 'cause the overseer, who wasn't nothing nohow, but poor white trash, would get a little hard on them. When Master got back, they always got back. When the overseer tell on the ones that been gone, Master say "Well, well, I have to see about that." He ain't going to see 'bout nothing of that kind, so it drops right there. Miss Ma-

MARK OLIVER TRANSCRIPT, REDACTED VERSION (CONT.)

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tilda, bless her soul, was the best creature that ever lived. She was Master's wife. There wasn't nothing Miss Matilda couldn't do. I is seed her set and knit all day and not once look at what she was knitting. Them needles would click together same as a clock ticking and when she finishes she have the prettiest jackets and socks, just the same as if they come from a weaver. There was two sons in the family, Mr. George and Mr. June, Jr. Two girls, Mattie, and Betty. They would allgo off for the summer, and stay three months at a time. I had an uncle that would step off every time Master left and stay till he got back. Some of them overseers was mean as the devil, and they would try to make my uncle work in the field. He wasn't no field hand, he was an ax man. He knowed, too, when Master was there, he wasn't going to allow no mistreatment. Big as the place was, there was need for hewers and choppers all the time, to keep the place in wood. There wan't no need trying to make a man go from one profession to another one he don't know nothing about.

I never heared them say how many acres old Master owned. He had about two hundred slaves to work it, and it took that many with the clearing of the land and the cultivating going on all the time.

The overseer blew the horn before day to get up; again at twelve o'clock for dinner and before dark to stop work. The working hours was from sun to sun. When tht last horn blowed we went to the big eating hall for supper. Them cooks knowed how to prepare

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food. Them baked 'tater pies; could smell it across the field. It took me a long time to get used to not having good things to eat. The children had a separate place to eat from the grown folks. I 'speak they had sense enough to know them children would be sick if they gave them the same quality food the grown folks had. After supper there wasn't no rule to abide by. We could do whatsoever we pleased, just so we got to bed by nine o'clock. A n [REDACTED] ain't fit to do no work if he sets up all night. Saturday nights, that's a different matter. We could set up all night. That when we held our dances. We was off work at dinner time on Saturday, and Sunday was free day, so there wan't no objection to how late we danced, just so there wasn't no cutting up going on. The strictest rule they had was about fighting. They wouldn't have none of that. If you do it anyway, and somebody gets bad hurt, you be put in the stocks for that. It was dark in there, too, to make it seem worse. That was the only jail slaves knowed anything about. For running off, stealing hogs, and not working, you was given a whipping and let go. I remember one night, my pa came in late. Soon as he stepped in the door, he said, "Cover that boy's head up quick." Wasn't no need to have my head covered then, 'cause I done seed him. My pa had stole that hog. Such a killing and a going on as there was. They never catch up with him neither.

The only book learning we ever got was when we stole it. Master bought some slaves from Cincinnati, that had worked in white folks houses. They had stole a little learning and when they came to our

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place they passed on to us what they knew. We wasn't allowed no paper and pencil. I learned all my A.B.C's without it. I knows how to read and ain't never been in a school room in my life. There was one woman by the name of Aunt Sylvia. She was so smart she foreknewed things before they took place. I has heard Master say many a time he wouldn't take nothing in this world for her. If he want to get the ages to put down in his book, she could tell it to him to the very day and month. How she knowed so much I can't tell. We didn't have no church. We used the children's house for our me sting place of prayer. Aunt Sylvia gave the lecture. She was a good thinker. Looked as if she knowed everything just from her mother wit. She was the only preacher we knowed anything about. Never had a baptizing or anything of that sort. There was another pretty smart one among the slaves. He was the carpenter for the place. He made all the beds we slept on, and they was beautiful. Every one of them had a tester, like a canopy over it. He made all the coffins too, and that kept him steady working whenever an epidemic broke out. Wasn't much attention paid to the burying of the dead. Not even a song or a prayer at the grave.

I often sets back and wonders if there is ever been held such celebrations as the ones we had on Christmas Day. There was presents for everybody from the youngest to the oldest. Then there was Santa Claus for the children. At night there was a big dance. The fiddlers and the tambourine and bone beaters, was the finest to

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be got out of Kentucky. Master sure wan't no stingy man. He gave us a barrel of whiskey every Christmas. The cups was tied on the barrell. We would ring around it and each person have his nip as his time come. All the while the songs was going on. The drivers was there to keep order. Better not be no fighting 'cause that shore meant the stocks. When the dancing started Master and old Miss always came to see them cut the Pigeon Wing and do the Rail road.

Fourth of July was the big barbecue. Weeks before time, they start telling us, "You better get your crops clean by the Fourth of July. We knowed what that meant and we knowed it so well that when the time come, them crops looked like they been swept with new brooms. If a person today could see the number of cows, sheep, goats and hogs that was barbecued for that one day, they would think the whole world was going to be fed. New Years was held at the big house. That was not public, like the other day. So I don't know much about it. I never liked to shuck corn, so I never got no enjoyment out of corn shuckings. Heap of them liked it, and they would try hard for the prize that was offered for the one that could shuck the most.

There never was no trouble between the ^{white} folks and us. They didn't try to keep the war news from us. They didn't exactly come out and tell us nothing but they didn't care if we heared it. The children would hear them say the soldiers were near Petersburg; they would tell it to us, and we pass it on to the next one, same

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as they do now. We knowed pretty much hat was going on. They was fighting right at us, at Milligan's Bend. The Yankee soldiers passing all the time taking our men off with them. That is, all that would go. They took everything with them they could lay hands on. What they couldn't use, they tore up. Them Yankee soldiers had buttons on their blue jackets that looked like real gold. They looked so rich and grand on them beautiful horses, it was no wonder so many wanted to go with them. My father went, and was in the Army 'till he got mustered out at Vicksburg. Us children didn't give it much thought, one way or 'tother. We kept right up with our little games of ball and marbles. Som time have our little ring play. The old folks told us all sorts of stories about hants and ghosts. They said I was so hardheaded they couldn't scare me. My wife believes in spirits and says she has seed them many times. I come pretty near getting up to it once. My hair started creeping on end, I was that scared. They kept telling the story, about the hant that was in the old gin house, where the man was killed. I was a grown man then. I kept telling my wife there wasn't nothing to it, and to prove it to her, I started out to investigate. When I got nearly to that gin house, so help me, if it didn't start up ruming. I could hear the wheels going and the engine puffing same as if it had up steam. I left there right now, and while I don't believe in ghosts I don't believe neither in making investigations. That was my last time. Whenever a slave got sick, he was cared for mighty nice. The white doctor 'tended

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him and the old folks nursed him. Sometime the old folks did the doctoring with the medicine they made out of herbs. Their snake root tonic was mighty fine. Nothing better for the cramps than bur vine tea. They made little bags of asafele and buckeye to keep off disease. For the heart complaint they used a brass key or a piece of lead around the neck.

When the War ended, the word got around to all. Some of the slaves didn't have sense enough to know what it was all about, but they joined in with the others, shouting, "Free, at last! Free as a frog." They jumped and hollered and carried on something terrible. The boys in blue came by to excite them more. We stayed there, like heap of them did, for a many a year after the War. Then we moved off to another place near by but that wasn't the same, as the old home place. Seemed like we couldn't be contented no where else, so we moved back. After a number of years they changed overseers and for some reason my Grandma couldn't get along with him so we left. I never did give up till I had to, 'cause I wanted to stay. Didn't have no trouble with the KuKlux Klan, the Night Riders or nothing. The Reconstruction came and went but it didn't bother us none. In certain places the colored folks voted, and I has heared of them holding public office as high up as the Senate. None of them don't vote now. I 'speak they ain't got money enough to pay their taxes.

After we left the old homelace we moved to Greenville and there I lived for forty years. I worked by the day at the oil mill and ran a public dray wagon. Schools were started up for

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negroes. White teachers taught till the colored could learn to master the old Blue Back speller. When you get all there is, in that book its just the same as mastering the Bible. When I married my first wife, Linie, we was both dressed up in the best we had. Didn't get no special clothes for the occasion. We had four children. Two boys and two girls. Two of them is still living. The girl Carrie Belle is in Chicago, and the boy has been the cook in a restuarant in Clarksdale for years and years. I moved to Coahoma County in the year 1910. after my first wife died, I married Betsy and we is still living together. I am able to work a little yet. Up to this year Betsy could pick cotton, but she ain't no 'count now 'cept to do our little cooking. She can't remember 'bout all the noted men like I can. There is Abraham Lincoln, he was talked of much, 'cause he set us all free, and Jefferson Davis, he was a great man. He done his part for what he thought was right. He didn't think they had a right to take the slaves away from their owners, when they had done bought them. Some of the colored people thinks there ain't nobody like Booker T. Washington. I hears them talk about him, but for my part, I don't know nothing about his displays.

Nobody is raising their children up right these days. They got no manners. Don't come around the old folks, so fraid they will be asked to do something. Their mothers not much better. Don't come to the door to ask about us if we sick. Me and my wife

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lives to be honest and righteous. We is both members of the Baptist Church and we don't visit none, 'sept the ones that lives as we does. Its hard pulling to make a living these days. Even with the little money the Government gives me, its hard to get by. Things is so high, money won't buy much. You just handles it; thats all.

Everybody wants to be free and they should be. I don't believe its right to live in bondage, but I do say it bold and above board that the slaves with good masters like mine was a heap better off. Folks all say that's 'ceitful on my part, but it couldn't be, 'cause I wasn't old enough to know nothing about being 'ceitful. I can remember having every thing I wanted and it takes a long time to get used to not having nothing.

SUSAN JONES TRANSCRIPT, REDACTED VERSION

Oral history transcript, Works Progress Administration, Susan Jones, December 20, 1937
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Series 0436, Panola County)

<https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/federal/panola/436/jones-susan>

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Susan Jones ex-slave Autobiography
241-ex-slaves-Panola County
Margaret L. Pack

Susan Jones
95 years old

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AMERICAN
GUIDE

I wuz born on Mr. Charles Alexander's plantation in Panola County. My father and mother wuz Si and Easter Alexander. When de war broke out I wuz not big enough to work in the fields so I played in de yard and helped in de house. Both my parents died before freedom wuz declared. After de war I stayed with my brothers on de place for two years. All de slaves rejoiced and most of dem broke up and went to Memphis but when dey found dey couldn't git no work and live in de city so dey all come back. We all started one Sunday mawning and walked to Hernando and stayed all night under some plum bushes and walked to Memphis de next day.

I didn't see no fighting but jest heaps of fighting soldiers from both sides. One Sunday mawning early de Yankee soldiers come through and and sot de public blacksmith shop on fire and took all de hosses, meat, chickens dey could find and even got in de mild cellar and drunk all de milk.

All de slaves wuz fed jest what de white folks et and it wuz plenty good. Marsta Charlie Alexander wuz a pore man and he married Miss. Jane Byrd, who owned all de slaves and land and she wouldn't let him treat us mean but when she died he raised cain. He beat up all de slaves and most any time you could hear n [REDACTED] praying and hollering down at de neighbors house. He whipped 'em jestcause he could.

Why he'd take dem in droves down to de city and sell em jest cause he didn't like em. He'd put em in de cattle pen til he sold dem. My brother Henry Clay ran off in de woods after he whooped him so hard.

SUSAN JONES TRANSCRIPT, REDACTED VERSION (CONT.)

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He ran all day and de white folks set de coon dogs after him and he wuz caught. Dey put him in a barrell with a stick nailed over his shoulder and one between his ~~knées~~ so as he couldn't get out and dey put him in de yard so everybody could see him. Henry had a knife so he whittled de stick into de stick and got out and run off again after dat he wuz caught and whooped and de next time he run off he joined de Union soldiers

After Miss. died we had a overseer and he sho wuz pore white trash and a meaner man never lived. He and his famble lived on de place and de n [REDACTED] warn't no more than dogs on our place.

Miss had nine chillun and two daughters died.

I heard lots about de Klan but I neverdid see em, dey never done nothin' to us. We didn't expect so much from freedom but anything wuz better than what we had.

I kin remember when Abraham Lincoln wuz running for de Presidency I've heard lots about him and seen Jeff Davis' soldiers and Lincoln's soldiers come through and dey burnedall de fine houses and smoke houses and de white folks hid de silverware.

Dare wuz a man who come through and he looked jest like a tramp, we'll he inquired de way and counted all de plow hands, we had fifteen plow hands and thrity hoe hands. De next day de ground wuz darkened with soldiers and dey asked whare de plow hands wuz and my cousin Paul said dare wan't none, well said de yankee, who runs dem fifteen plows and he led dem soldiers right to de field and dey took all de mules and n [REDACTED] men and made de men fight. Some of dem deserted and de others fought in de war. De man what had come de day before wuz a spy.

My husband, imon Jones fought in de war, he wuz in de northern army under General Foster in Company K. Regiment 59. He wuz in de battle of Vicksburg and Gettisburg.

SUSAN JONES TRANSCRIPT, REDACTED VERSION (CONT.)

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I aint never seen no hants but I've heard em plenty of times, I wuz working in my garden one day and I heard some one walking in de house and I thought it wuz my sister and I called but shedidn't answer and jest kept on walking so I went in and looked high and low but there warn't no body there and when I started out de door it started again and my hair gan to creep off my head and I nearly broke my neck gitting to de white folk's house. We would stay in de house with the white girls after dey father died and lots of times we would hear de peanna playing and dey didn't even have no peanna but you could hear them keys jest a playing. andfolks would walk up and down de stairs.

Miss. loved pretty things and they jest had common things and lived in a doubld log house. She begged for a safe and real china dishes but he wouldn't git em for her but jest after she died he bought de safe and dishes. Night after night dem dishes would rattle and shake and we'd look and there wuz no one. De master said it wuz cats but we didn't have no cats and we jest knew it wuz Miss and she rattled dem dishes til everyone wuz broke.

I live with my son Gundy Jones, he rents this farm. We've farmed all my life and my husband died sixteen years ago and I get a pension frum de Government. I got eleven children and too many grandchildren to count and I've even got great-great grand children and I've seen two of em.

ORAL HISTORY COMPARISON CHART

	Mark Oliver	Ebenezer Brown	Susan Jones
How did this person describe enslavement?			
In what ways did enslaved people show agency?			

ORAL HISTORY COMPARISON CHART (CONT.)

	Mark Oliver	Ebenezer Brown	Susan Jones
What did this person remember about the Civil War?			
How did this person describe their life from the end of the Civil War to the 1930s?			

ORAL HISTORY COMPARISON CHART ANSWER KEY

	Mark Oliver	Ebenezer Brown	Susan Jones
How did this person describe enslavement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -multi-generational family, raised by his grandparents after his mother died and his father joined the Union Army -June Ward (enslaver) purchased the family and brought them from Kentucky to Mississippi -cared for cows as a young boy -overseer described as threatening -described good food and clothing -activities were limited (curfew) -received medical care from a doctor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -describes how the enslaver (Bill McDowell) beat enslaved people -enslaved people did a variety of jobs on the farm. Some led to injuries or disability -children were workers, picking fruit, feeding animals, churning butter -Bill McDowell asked for money from his brother (possibly in debt?) -labor-intensive crops (potatoes, rice) -food was rationed each week -multiple accounts of violence and humiliation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -both parents died before the end of the Civil War -life of violence, beatings for no reason, humiliation, physical punishments -people could be sold and sent away without notice and against their will -could be sold away at a whim, inhumane
In what ways did enslaved people show agency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -enslaved people raised chicken, sold eggs and meat -option to fish, hunt for game -when the enslaver left, enslaved people would run to the woods and hide until he returned -learning was “stolen” (learned to read) -prayer services led by community leaders (Aunt Sylvia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -enslaved people formed strong family relationships -singing was part of work and life -singing was connected to prayer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -enslaved people would try to run away (at great risk) multiple times -joined the Union Army as a way to escape enslavement

ORAL HISTORY COMPARISON CHART ANSWER KEY (CONT.)

	Mark Oliver	Ebenezer Brown	Susan Jones
What did this person remember about the Civil War?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -news about the war was transmitted orally from person to person -Union soldiers took or destroyed large quantities of food and goods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -encounter with Union soldiers in the Civil War who took food and killed animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -soldiers (on both sides were feared) - they hid the silverware -Union soldiers stole or destroyed food -some enslaved people joined the Union Army, others were forced to join -some enslaved people joined the Union Army and then ran away -her husband fought at the Battles of Vicksburg and Gettysburg
How did this person describe their life from the end of the Civil War to the 1930s?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -after the Civil War, the family moved away but then moved back to the community -does not describe any experience with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) -heard of people voting or serving in office, but no one does now (suspects they cannot pay the tax) -worked at an oil mill, his children attended a segregated school -respects Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, doesn't understand Booker T. Washington 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -enslaver asked formerly enslaved people to stay -workers were paid but then charged for food -hard to make money (debt cycle) -described an encounter with the "white caps" (KKK) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -says that she did not experience the KKK -after the war, some enslaved people went to Memphis but couldn't find work and returned -lives with her son, who rents his farm (likely a sharecropper) -has a pension from the government (service in the Union Army) -has 11 children but hasn't met all her grandchildren (implying they live far away—Great Migration?)

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Teaching African American History

