

Station 1

WORKING CONDITIONS FOR Field Slaves

What can you tell about working conditions
for field slaves from these documents?



Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries

“The slaves in Alabama are worked very hard; that the lash is almost universally applied at the close of the day, if they fail to perform their task in the cotton-picking season. You will see them, with their baskets of cotton, slowly bending their way to the cotton house, where each one's basket is weighed....

Here comes the mother, with her children; she does not know whether herself, or children, or all of them, must take the lash; they cannot weigh the cotton themselves--the whole must be trusted to the overseer. While the weighing goes on, all is still. So many pounds short, cries the overseer, and takes up his whip... The poor slave begs, and promises, but to no purpose. The lash is applied until the overseer is satisfied.”

SLAVERY As it Is - Angelina Grimmke and Theodore Weld, 1839.

Port Royal Island, S.C.

African Americans
preparing cotton for the
gin on Smith's plantation,
Library of Congress



“Women are seen bringing their infants into the field to their work, and leading others who are not old enough to stay at the cabins with safety. When they get there, they must set them down in the dirt, and go to work. Sometimes they are left to cry until they fall asleep. Others are left at home, shut up in their huts.”

SLAVERY As it Is - Angelina Grimmke
and Theodore Weld, 1839.

Station 2

WORKING CONDITIONS FOR House Slaves

What can you tell about working conditions
for house slaves from these documents?



"There were four house-slaves in this family, including myself, and though we had not, in all respects, so hard work as the field hands, yet in many things our condition was much worse. We were constantly exposed to the whims and passions of every member of the family; from the least to the greatest their anger was wreaked upon us. Nor was our life an easy one, in the hours of our toil or in the amount of labor performed. We were always required to sit up until all the family had retired; then we must be up at early dawn in summer, and before day in winter."

Lewis Clarke, Narrative of the Sufferings of Lewis Clark, 1845.



“Dr. Flint was an epicure.* The cook never sent a dinner to his table without fear and trembling; for if there happened to be a dish not to his liking, he would either order her to be whipped, or compel her to eat every mouthful of it in his presence. The poor, hungry creature might not have objected to eating it; but she did object to having her master cram it down her throat till she choked.”

Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, 1861.

*someone who likes fancy food

Station 3

Housing Conditions for Slaves

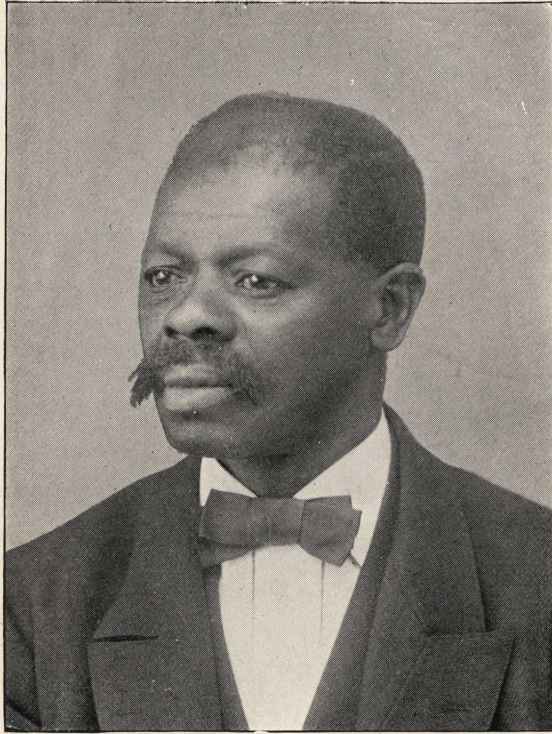
What can you tell about housing conditions
for slaves from these documents?



Cabin from Port of Pines Plantation in Charleston
County, South Carolina - 1800-1850

“The huts of the slaves are mostly of the poorest kind. They are not as good as those temporary shanties which are thrown up beside railroads. They are erected with posts and crotches, with but little or no frame-work about them. They have no stoves or chimneys; some of them have something like a fireplace at one end, and a board or two off at that side, or on the roof, to let off the smoke. Others have nothing like a fireplace in them; in these the fire is sometimes made in the middle of the hut.”

SLAVERY As it Is - Angelina Grimmke and Theodore Weld



JACOB STROYER.

*In compliment of the
author -
Jacob Stroyer.*

"Some had partitions (dividers), while others had none. When there were no partitions each family would fit up its own part as it could; sometimes they got old boards and nailed them up, stuffing the cracks with rags; when they could not get boards they hung up old clothes."

- Jacob Stroyer, former slave in My Life in the South, 1885.

Station 4

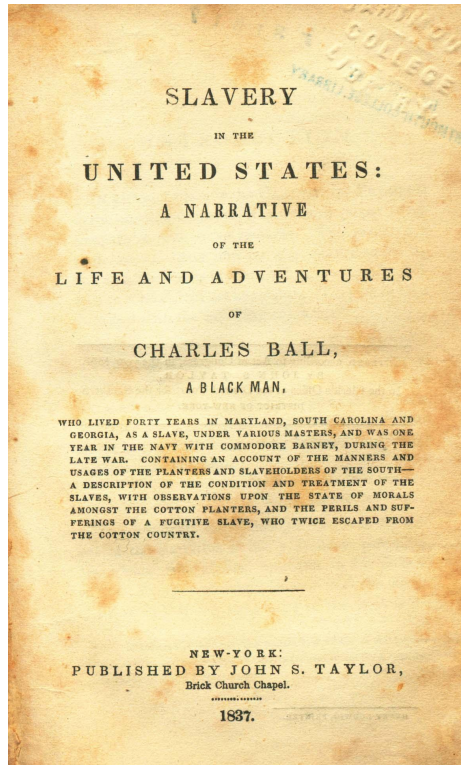
Food RATIONS for Slaves

What can you tell about food rations for slaves from these documents?

“The amount of food given out on the plantation per week, was invariably one peck of corn or meal for each slave. This allowance was given in meal when it could be obtained; when it could not, they received corn, which they pounded in mortars after they returned from their labor in the field. The slaves on our plantation were provided with very little meat. In addition to the peck of corn or meal, they were allowed a little salt and a few herrings. If they wished for more, they were obliged to earn it by over-work. They were permitted to cultivate small gardens... But these gardens were only allowed to some of the more industrious.”



- Austin Steward, Twenty-Two Years a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman, 1857.



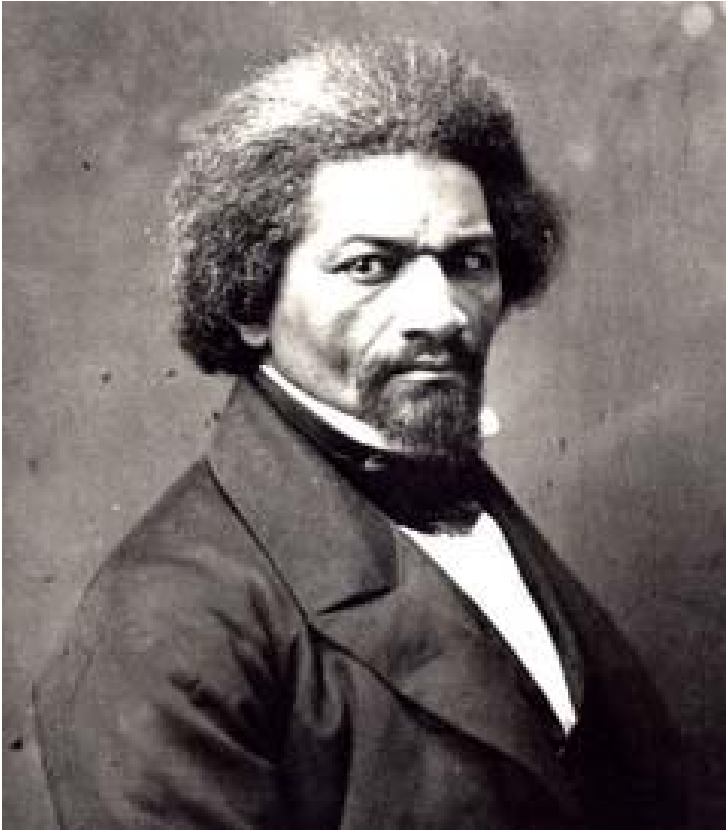
“In Calvert county, where I was born, the practice amongst slave-holders, was to allow each slave one peck of corn weekly, which was measured out every Monday morning; at the same time each one receiving seven salt herrings... It often happened, that the stock of salt herrings laid up by a master in the spring, was not [enough] to enable him to continue this rate of distribution through the year; and when the fish failed, nothing more than the corn was dealt out. On the other hand, some planters, who had large stocks of cattle; and many cows, kept the sour milk, after all the cream had been skimmed from it, and made a daily distribution of this amongst the working slaves. Some who had large apple orchards, gave their slaves a pint of cider each per day, through the autumn. It sometimes happened, too, in the lower counties of Maryland, that there was an allowance of pork, made to the slaves one day in each week; though on some estates this did not take place more than once in a month... The slaves were also permitted to work for themselves at night, and on Sunday.”

Charles Ball, A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, 1837.

Station 5

Clothing for Slaves

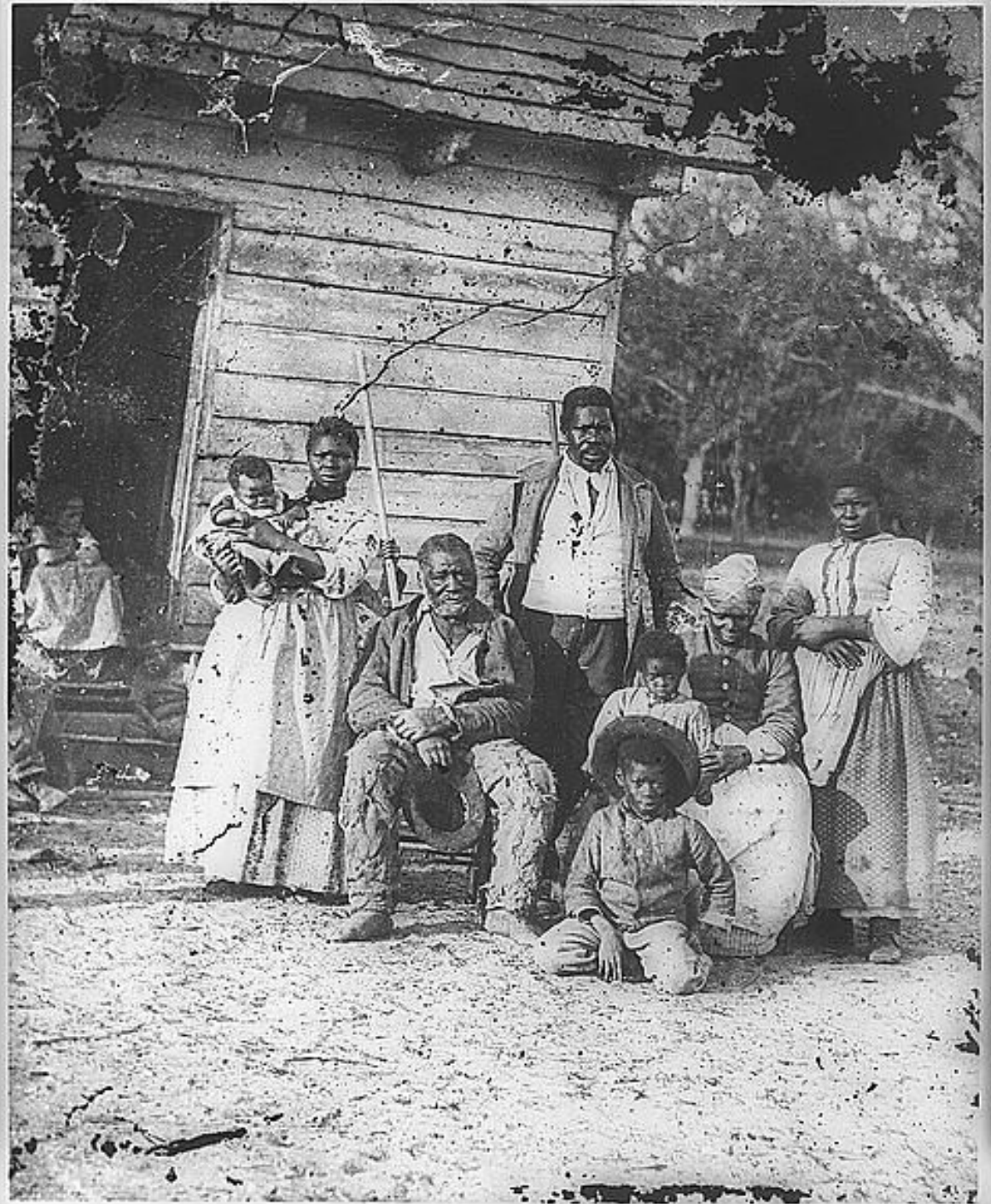
What can you tell about clothing for slaves from these documents?



"....two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers, like the shirts, one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter, made of coarse (rough) negro cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes..."

-Frederick Douglass,
describing the
clothes provided to him

“Five Generations on
Smith’s Plantation, Beaufort,
S.C.” photographer,
Timothy O’Sullivan,
Library of Congress





“Family of slaves at the Gaines’ house” the Library of Congress



“Enslaved African Americans,” 1862, Library of Congress

Station 6

Punishment of Slaves

What can you tell about types of slave punishment from these documents?

In this image, a freed slave named Wilson Chinn is demonstrating some of the tools of torture used by slave masters. This photograph was used to raise money for the education of the newly freed slaves in Louisiana. It was taken in 1863.



Alabama Slave Code of 1852

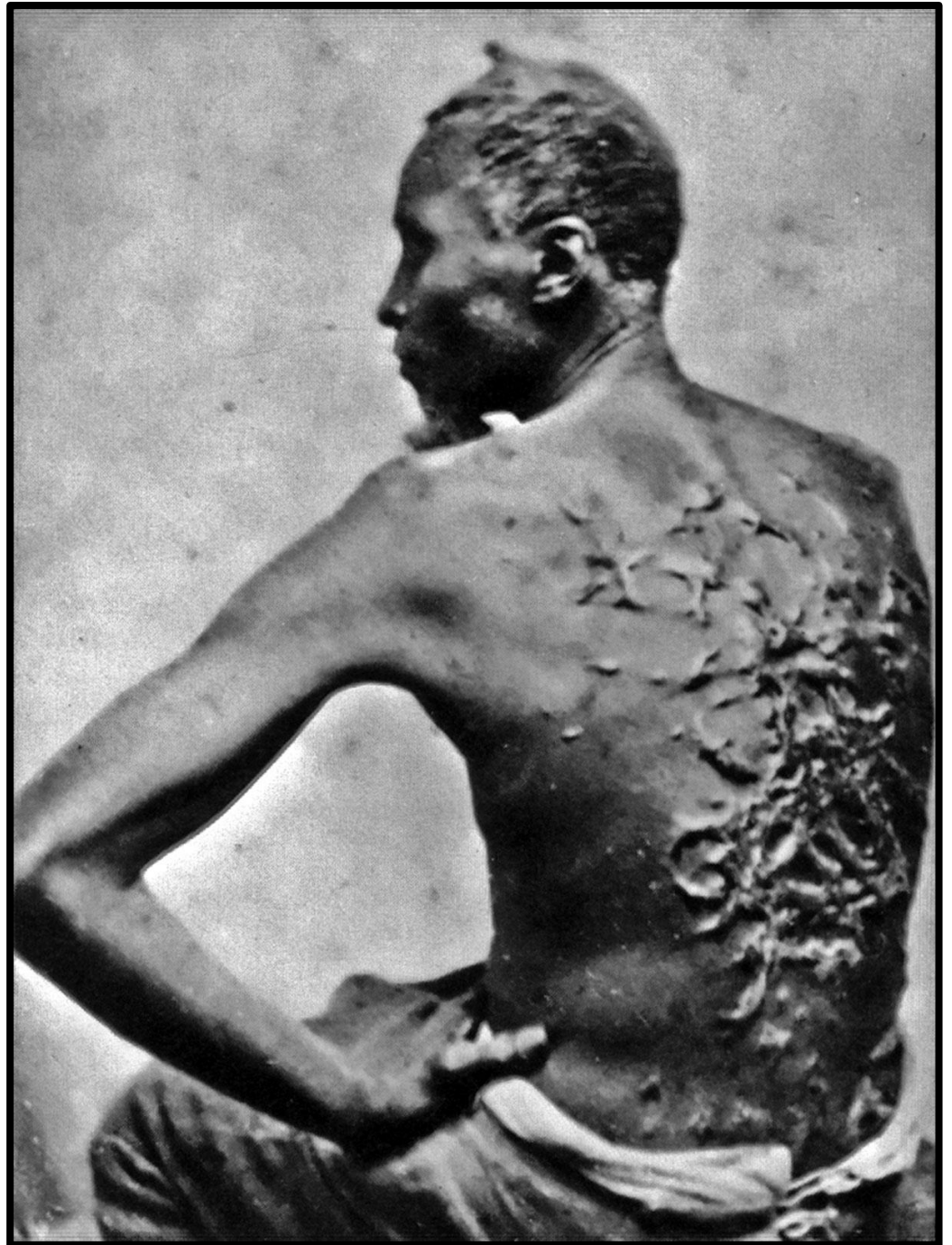
No slave must go beyond the limits of the plantation on which he resides, without a pass, or some letter or token from his master or overseer, giving him authority to go and return from a certain place; and if found violating this law, may be apprehended and punished, not exceeding twenty stripes, at the discretion of any justice before whom he may be taken.

If any slave go upon the plantation, or enter the house or out house of any person, without permission in writing from his master or overseer, or in the prosecution of his lawful business, the owner or overseer of such plantation or householder may give, or order such slave to be given, ten lashes on his bare back.

Not more than five male slaves shall assemble together at any place off the plantation, or place to which they belong, with or without passes or permits to be there, unless attended by the master or overseer of such slaves, or unless such slaves are attending the public worship of God, held by white persons.

Any slave who writes for, or furnishes any other slave with any pass or free paper, on conviction before any justice of the peace, must receive one hundred lashes on his bare back.

“Gordon” - An escaped slave who had left a Louisiana plantation in 1863. Gordon went on to serve in the Union Army during the Civil War, and the scars were discovered during a medical exam before he joined the Army. The scars were from on vicious beating he received before he escaped.



“I *have seen* a woman, a mother, compelled, in the presence of her master and mistress, *to hold up her clothes*, and endure the whip of the driver on the naked body for more than *twenty minutes*, and while her cries would have rent the heart of any one, who had not hardened himself to human suffering. Her master and mistress were conversing with apparent indifference. What was her crime? She had a task given her of sewing which she *must finish* that day. Late at night she finished it; but *the stitches were too long*, and she must be whipped. The same was repeated three or four nights for the same offence.

I have seen a man tied to a tree, hands and feet, and receive 305 blows with the paddle...”

SLAVERY As it Is - Angelina Grimmke and Theodore Weld

Station 7

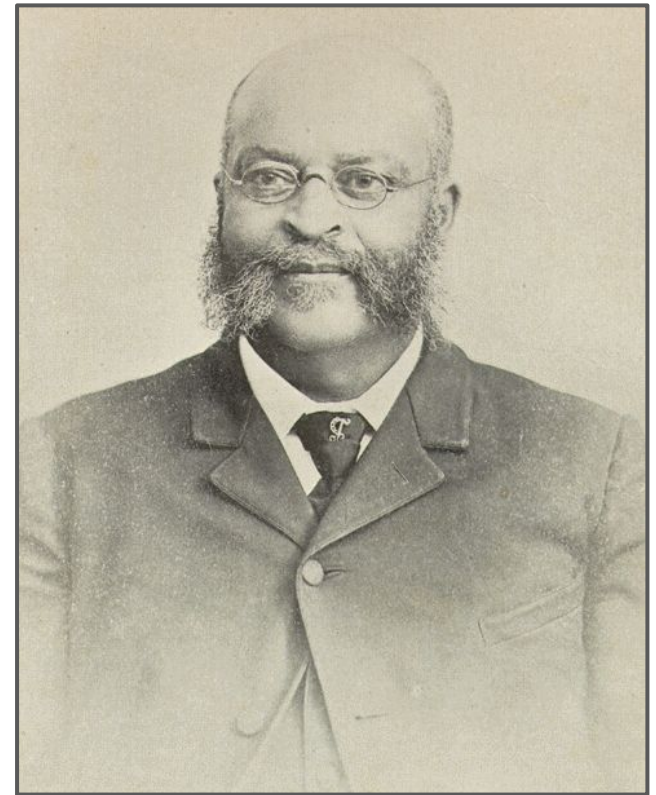
Slave Resistance

What can you tell about types slave resistance from these documents?

“I had his horse to water every day; and as I went out of, or across the yard, where I knew he would see me, I would pretend to be so weak that I could scarcely go. I would stagger along, to make him think that I should fall every moment. He one time called his wife to the window, saying, Missess, Missess, by Gad come here, do you see him? He is almost gone, by Gad I shall lose him; see how he staggers. By Gad he has not eat a mouthfull now for these three weeks. I must lose him by Gad; do you see that? ...I was determined not to eat any thing in his sight, or to his knowledge, in order to make him think he must either sell me or lose me. One morning he sent me to eat my breakfast, I told him I did not want any. He said, go along and get your breakfast. I went, and returned. When I came back, he asked me if I had eaten my breakfast. I told him, no, sir, I thank you, I did not wish for any...”

- William Grimes, Life of William Grimes: the Runaway Slave, 1825.

“During the summer, in Virginia and other southern states, slaves when threatened or after punishment would escape to the woods or some other hiding place. They were then called runaways, or runaway Negroes, and when not caught would stay away from home until driven back by cold weather. Usually they would go to some other part of the state, where they were not so well known, and a few who had the moral courage would make their way to the North, and thus gain their freedom. But such cases were rare. Some, if captured and not wishing to go back to their masters, would neither give their correct name nor that of their owner...”



- Henry Clay Bruce, The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave, 1895.

James Coles Bruce's List of Slaves, St. James Parish, Louisiana, November 22, 1849 (excerpt)

| Names | Ages | Value | Remarks |
|---------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Harriet | 25 | 500 | Good hand |
| Olive | 20 | 500 | Good hand |
| Hager | 50 | 200 | Excels in telling lies |
| Angelina | 30 | 400 | Very good hand |
| Mariah (Cook) | 40 | 400 | All mouth, plantation cook |
| Polly | 40 | 300 | Very Bad woman (great temper) |
| Eliza | 7 | 250 | Great Liar (but will do) |

“A fine looking negro woman aged about 28 years, belonging to Mr. Joseph Cline, living about four miles from Staunton, becoming unruly, he determined to bring her to town and sell her. While she was going to get her clothes, she picked up an axe which she had concealed, and deliberately cut three of her fingers off, taking two licks at them. She was brought to town, placed in jail, and her hand was dressed by Dr. Baldwin. She did the act for the double purpose of preventing her sale and taking revenge upon her master.”

ernment.

Refractory Negro Woman.

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Runaway slave ad, published in 1861.

Station 8

Slave Resilience

What can you tell about slave resilience from these documents?



“If it had not been for my beloved violin, I scarcely can conceive how I could have endured the long years of bondage. It was my companion - the friend of my bosom - triumphing loudly when I was joyful, and uttering its soft melodious consolations when I was sad.”

- Solomon Northup, Twelve Years a Slave, 1847

“Once a week Mr. Heard allowed his slaves to have a frolic and folks would get brown down from so much dancing” Mrs. Avery remarked The music was furnished with fiddles. When asked how the slaves come to own fiddles she replied, “They bought them with the money they earned selling chickens.”

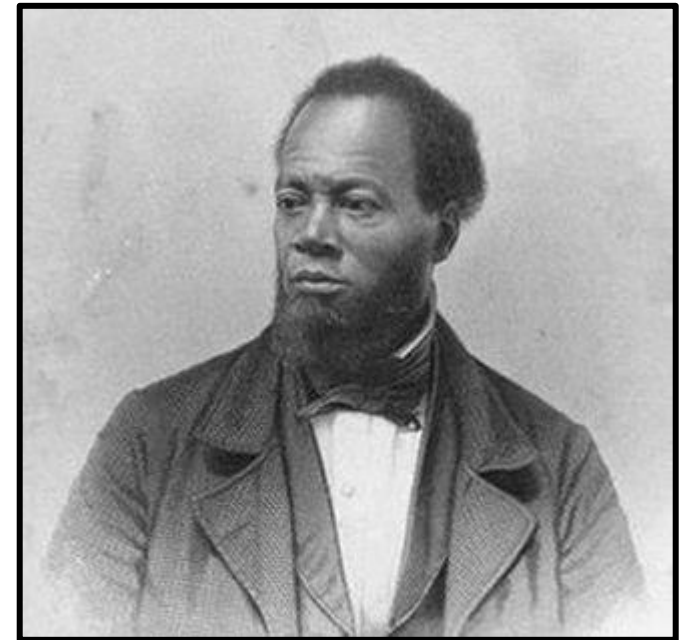
Another form of entertainment was the quilting party. Everyone would go together to a different person’s home on each separate night of the week and finish that person’s quilts. Each night this was repeated until everyone had a sufficient amount of covering for the winter. Any slave from another plantation, desiring to attend these frolics, could do so after (securing) a pass from their master.”

- Celestia Avery, “A Few Facts of Slavery”

This quote comes from an interview conducted by an individual hired by the Federal Writer’s Project during the 1930s. Writers were hired to conduct interviews with ex-slaves.

Some have attempted to apologize for the enslaving of the Negro, by saying that they are inferior to the Anglo-Saxon race in every respect. This charge I deny; it is utterly false. Does not the Bible inform us that "God hath created of one blood all the nations of the earth?"

True, God has given to the African a darker complexion than to his white brother: still, each have the same desires and aspirations. The food required for the sustenance of one is equally necessary for the other. Naturally or physically, they alike require to be warmed by the cheerful fire, when chilled by our northern winter's breath; and alike they welcome the cool spring and the delightful shade of summer. Hence, I have come to the conclusion that God created all men free and equal, and placed them upon this earth to do good and benefit each other, and that war and slavery should be banished from the face of the earth.



-Austin Steward, Twenty-Two
Years a Slave, 1857.

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
A long ways from home
A long ways from home
True believer
A long ways from home
Along ways from home
Sometimes I feel like I'm almos' gone
Sometimes I feel like I'm almos' gone
Sometimes I feel like I'm almos' gone
Way up in de heab'nly land
Way up in de heab'nly land
True believer
Way up in de heab'nly land
Way up in de heab'nly land
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
A long ways from home
There's praying everywhere

This is a very well known spiritual song that dates back to the slavery era. It has been interpreted to have many meanings.

MOTHERLESS CHILD.

1. O some-times I feel like a
moth - er - less child, Some-times I feel
like a moth - er - less child, O my Lord,
sometimes I feel like a moth-er-less child;
Den I gi' down on my knees and pray,
pray, Gi'down on my knees and pray.

The image shows a musical score for the spiritual song "Motherless Child." It consists of seven staves of music in a 3/4 time signature with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff begins with a fermata over the first note. The second staff ends with a double bar line. The third staff ends with a double bar line. The fourth staff ends with a double bar line. The fifth staff ends with a double bar line. The sixth staff ends with a double bar line. The seventh staff ends with a double bar line.