An Interpretation of the Florida Ex-Slaves' Memories of Slavery & the Civil War

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AN INTERPRETATION OF THE FLORIDA EX-SLAVES’ MEMORIES
OF SLAVERY AND THE CIVIL WAR

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AN INTERPRETATION OF THE FLORIDA EX-SLAVES' MEMORIES
OF SLAVERY AND THE CIVIL WAR

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AN INTERPRETATION OF THE FLORIDA EX-SLAVES' MEMORIES OF SLAVERY AND THE CIVIL WAR

Dianna Zacharias March 1976 155 pages

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This study is an analysis and interpretation of oral folk history preserved in the Florida Narratives, one state collection of ex-slave narratives from the larger Federal Writers’ Project collection compiled in the 1930s. Fifty-four tales were extracted from this state collection and used as a basis for this study. These personal reminiscences, called memorates by folklorists, fell into two categories: slavery and the Civil War. The tales about slavery were compared to the theses and conclusions regarding slavery held by sociologists and social historians. The tales about the Civil War and emancipation were compared to data gathered by historians.

The comparisons revealed that there are many reasons these ex-slaves remembered and recounted these tales to collectors. The recording of history was not the primary purpose of these tales. The overriding factor in what was remembered and told about slavery and the Civil War appears to be how the tales functioned to contribute to the self-esteem of the narrators. Emphasis on the following subjects contributed to the dignity of the tale tellers: endurance of cruelty, punishment for excelling in areas supposedly closed to slaves, identification with white and Indian ancestors, interpretation of slavery as the only issue of the Civil War, identification with famous persons and regiments involved in the Civil War, participation in the Civil War effort, emancipation of slaves, administration of revenge or justice to former masters, and pers-
sonalizing the narratives. Because of their function as ego-builders, the tales in the *Florida Narratives* cannot be viewed as an accurate or complete picture of slave life and the Civil War.

It is evident that in many cases these personal reminiscences, or memorates, were fictionalized and distorted. The folk memory which distorts and fictionalizes, however, is also capable of amazing accuracy. Oral traditions, therefore, must be examined and interpreted individually to arrive at their accuracy and usefulness.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Scholarship in the field of slavery has been and continues to be prolific. The major part of the scholarship has focused on an investigation of the written record: diaries, plantation records, census returns and published slave narratives. Only recently have the oral narratives of the slaves been used as a serious source of scholarly research. What has been missing in those works which have used the oral narratives, usually with justified caution, is a knowledge of oral tradition. This analysis of one specific collection of oral narratives gleaned from ex-slaves proposes to show how a knowledge of oral tradition can provide insight into the field of slavery, a subject ordinarily considered the province of the historian and the sociologist.

Attention was drawn to the ex-slave narratives as a source of folklore during a class discussion of the folk beliefs related by ex-slave Frederick Douglass in his autobiography.¹ A preliminary investigation revealed that although the written ex-slave narratives have been utilized frequently as source material by sociologists and historians, the oral narratives until recently have been overlooked by both types of researchers. Both types of material have yet to be investigated by the folklorist.

The largest single collection of oral narratives is the recently pub-

¹Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, adapted by Barbara Ritchie (New York: Thomas E. Crowell Co., 1966).
lished Federal Writers' Project collection of ex-slave narratives. In- cluded in this collection are seventeen state collections, one of which is the Florida collection. A personal interest in my home state increased my desire to make this rarely used collection the primary resource for a folkloristic investigation of historical and sociological material. The subject of the material is slavery. The form in which it is related is primarily the memorete, a folkloristic term meaning personal reminiscence. A review of the relevant scholarship in both areas followed by a description of the material and methodologies used is an appropriate preliminary to this study.

The history of scholarship in the field of slavery is a long and complex one. The story of slavery has been related from widely diversified viewpoints and with every conceivable bias. Southern masters and their families have supported slavery; runaway slaves and northern abolitionists have joined forces to relate their tales of the horror of the institution; historians, sociologists, economists and politicians--black and white, Northern and Southern, conservative and liberal--have written about slavery. But for the most part, the story of slavery as told by the masses of slaves themselves has received little attention. It has been noted:


While slavery has left an indelible mark on American life, the slaves themselves have rarely been heard telling their own stories. The masters not only ruled the past in fact, they now rule its written history. Like the rest of the population which did not lead "notable" lives, the slaves appear usually as faceless and nameless people murmuring and mumbling offstage. At best, only the loud and demanding voice of an exceptional slave, such as the great abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass, is heard, and then only above the din of the speeches of politicians, statesmen, and ideologists of all persuasions.  

Among the extant accounts of the experience of slavery from the slaves' point of view are over six thousand commentaries, autobiographies, narratives and interviews, most of which appeared prior to the Civil War. Over one-third of them, however, resulted from the efforts of the Federal Writers who worked under the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s. The FWP Slave Narrative Collection, which was compiled from seventeen states during the years 1936 to 1938 by state writers' units and deposited in the Rare Books Division of the Library of Congress, contains over two thousand autobiographical accounts of former slaves.

Although a number of scholars have made use of published slave narratives, primarily for sociological studies of the institution of slavery, the unpublished FWP Slave Narrative Collection has largely gone unused by scholars. Its publication in 1972 may stimulate interest in the collection.

Partially because of their former inaccessibility and partially because of the skepticism with which oral history has been viewed, these life

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3Rawick, *The American Slave*, 19 vols. These volumes contain the entire FWP Slave Narrative Collection and the Fisk University collection of slave narratives.
histories have been overlooked by scholars as valid resource material for slavery scholarship. Some of the FWP slave narratives have been published since the completion of the project in 1939. However, most of them are edited portions of interviews with little or no interpretation, which merely provide raw material for possible significant contributions to slavery scholarship.

Most of the publications from the slave narratives have had the twofold purpose of making the material accessible and of letting the slaves speak for themselves. The first publication that included FWP slave life histories was These Are Our Lives, a 1939 Federal Writers' publication. It contains only a few slave narratives among the life histories of many white workers who lived in North Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia. Although the narratives were published in their entirety, the book lacks any interpretive material. A year later the Virginia Writers' Project published a selection of slave narratives in the book The Negro in Virginia. Although these were a result of the Virginia Writers' Project, these narratives were not forwarded to the Library of Congress to become part of the larger collection of slave narratives. Portions of the slave narratives appear in this book accompanied by a great deal of interpretive commentary, but without any significant conclusions regarding slavery.

B. A. Botkin, folklore editor of the Federal Writers' Project in 1938 and chief editor of the writers' unit of the Library of Congress from 1939 to 1941, published edited selections from a variety of interviews in his popular book, Lay My Burden Down. His purpose was to prepare a book that would

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1 Yetman, p. 354.
represent the more than ten thousand pages of interviews. By excerpting, titling, cutting and arranging the selections under a variety of topics he purported to "let the ex-slaves, and through them slavery and freedom, speak for themselves."\(^1\)

More recent publications have made more of the FWP slave narratives available; and the availability of the material rather than the interpretation of it appears to be their primary purpose. Julius Lester, after discovering this collection, published edited excerpts from the narratives and from other published and unpublished life histories to present a chronological view of slavery from the slave's capture in Africa to his emancipation. Again, the method is to let the slave speak for himself.\(^2\) Norman Yetman, an American Studies specialist, used this same technique in his book, *Voices From Slavery*. His purpose was twofold: to make an edited selection of the FWP slave narratives more accessible and to publish a representative selection. The 102 narratives, mainly from Oklahoma, North Carolina and Texas, are superior narratives edited according to Yetman's carefully stated standards.\(^3\) His major contribution, however, is not the publication of the narratives, but his detailed history of the FWP Slave Narrative Collection which appears as an introduction to the book.

More recently other scholars have tried to use the FWP slave narratives as valid resources for slave scholarship—primarily to arrive at sociological conclusions. In *Many Thousands Gone*, Charles Nichols made an early effort to tell the history of slavery from the slaves' point of


\(^3\) Yetman, pp. 5-6.
view. For his sources he relied primarily on selected biographies and autobiographies of slaves which were published between 1760 and 1865. However, he did make use of the already published FWP narratives to shed light on the sociology of slavery and the psyche of the enslaved.  

Historian Stanley Feldstein quoted extensively from the FWP Slave Narrative Collection as well as from other published and unpublished life histories in his book Once A Slave. His purpose, however, was not to make the slave narratives more accessible, but instead to interpret their meaning. He is interested in the sociology of slavery and the psychological effect it had on the slave. The basic theme which he sees throughout these narratives is the slaves' belief that slavery was a de-humanizing institution. The narratives are the "story of a crime related by the victim."  

Historian Lowell Harrison published the results of his studies of the Kentucky and Tennessee Writers' Project slave narratives. He summarized and made general conclusions regarding the subjects about which the ex-slaves most often spoke—food, clothing, housing, religion and punishment, for example. He frequently quoted from the narratives, letting the ex-slaves tell their own story. Additionally, he published an extraction of the folkloristic items from the Kentucky narratives, without commentary, however.  

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An interesting though controversial book in slave scholarship, *Time on the Cross*, includes excerpts from the FWP slave narratives. The authors, Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, use information gathered from the narratives to substantiate their claim that slavery did not rob the Negro of a culture, achievement or development for the first two hundred and fifty years in America.¹

George Rawick, however, makes the most thorough use of the FWP Slave Narrative Collection for primarily sociological and ethnological purposes. He relies almost totally on the narratives as a basis for his sociological generalizations regarding the slaves and the institution of slavery. The author asserts that his is the first attempt to utilize the narratives to shed light on black American society, community and culture. He says of his book:

> It's primary function is to raise questions, to make what will eventually probably be seen as crude attempts to develop an appropriate methodology for such work, and to present a general outline of American slave society, community and culture. There is no claim that what will be presented is a total picture of slave life in the United States.²

Although Rawick recognizes the unreliability of the FWP slave narratives as the basis for precise statistical conclusions, he opens the way for more valuable scientific and at the same time imaginative use of the narratives. However, he says, methodologies must be devised to use them.³

Rawick drew heavily from the FWP collection for his sociological treatise on slavery. One collection of slave narratives—the collection compiled by the Florida Writers' Project—provides the primary materials for the present analysis and discussion, and the basis for the conclusions reached.


³ Ibid., p. xix.
Of the seventeen state collections, only the Kentucky and Tennessee collections have been examined in any depth (above, p. 6). Prior to Rawick's publication of the entire FWP Slave Narrative Collection, the Florida narratives had not been published in their entirety. Short excerpts from the collection appear in Botkin's *Lay My Burden Down* and Feldstein's *Once a Slave*. In a recently published economic and historical account of slavery in Florida, Julia Smith included several of the Florida narratives in their entirety in an appendix to her book. She labels them as

... invaluable since they tell of the life and labor of the slaves from the slaves' view: how it felt to be a slave, the treatment they received, and their general activity on the plantation or the city. More than this, the narratives record the attitudes of former slaves, their feelings of dejection and hopelessness or of any resistance and rebellion while in bondage.¹

However, Ms. Smith fails to draw from the narratives in her discussion, making only one reference to the narratives in the body of her book.² The narratives also went unmentioned in two earlier books which detailed the Civil War in Florida.³

Although a number of scholars have used the FWP Slave Narrative Collection in their investigation of slavery, and some have made reference to the Florida Narratives, most have been skeptical of the narratives' value and have consequently ignored them or used them only as incidental and supplemental evidence to support their theses. For the most part, historians and sociologists have relegated the FWP slave narratives

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² Ibid., pp. 78-79.

to academic limbo. The folklorist has also been remiss in his failure to examine these ex-slave narratives thoroughly.

The form which these ex-slave narratives take is the personal reminiscence. Among folklorists, these narratives are called memorates, a term proposed by Swedish folklorist Carl von Sydow to mean a narrative told by individuals about a purely personal experience. These memorates are of two kinds—first person and derivative. In the former the individuals relate incidents in which they participated. The latter are related by friends or relatives of the original participants.\(^1\) In addition to their personal character, memorates are loosely structured and lacking in traditional elements,\(^2\) such as formulas and motifs. They are usually not widely diffused, but some do pass into oral tradition. Through a process which von Sydow called fabulation, memorates can be transformed into fiction, thus becoming fabulates.\(^3\) It is primarily the memorate and occasionally the fabulate which appear in the Florida collection of ex-slave narratives.

In a 1965 article which defined and classified folkloristic prose narratives, William Bascom notes, "Both jokes and anecdotes obviously require more attention by folklorists than they have received, but until more is known about them, particularly in non-literate societies, I prefer to consider them as sub-types of the folktale and the legend."\(^4\) The present concern among folklorists appears to be a re-definition of the memorate.

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\(^1\)Dundes, ed., *Mother Wit From the Laughing Barrel*, p. 595.


In a recent article, the question is raised, does the memorate exist at all in the form in which von Sydow has described it? The answer is no.\(^1\) Rather than a clarification, the article raises more unanswered questions. The status of the memorate remains undecided.

Sensitive use is made of the personal reminiscences of blacks in a recent study of night riders of slavery times. Gladys-Marie Fry collected memorates from blacks living in Washington, D.C. during the 1960s and 1970s. She used these narratives as a basis for her discussion. Recognizing the value of oral tradition in the black culture, she urges historians to supplement the written black history with an analysis of oral materials. "What remains to be done is the analysis and interpretation of these kinds of data in order to arrive at conclusions concerning generally held social attitudes, patterns of behavior, sentiments and aspirations.\(^2\)

The Florida Writers' Project collection of slave narratives, which is the focus of this study, is unique in two ways. First, the slave narratives were collected by blacks. "While Blacks were virtually excluded from Writers' Projects in several Southern states, this pattern was not universal. In several states—notably Virginia, Louisiana and Florida—ambitious black units flourished."\(^3\) Second, the collecting of the Florida narratives began prior to the initiation of the national effort to collect ex-slave narratives, and influenced the inclusion of slave narratives as a part of the Federal Writers' Project. The Florida collecting began in 1936 under the direction of Carita Doggett Corse. She

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\(^3\)Yetman, p. 349.
gained experience interviewing ex-slaves while researching the history of Fort George Island. When she became state director of the Florida Writers' Project she recalled these interviews and suggested using the Project personnel to interview ex-slaves. In that same year the black unit, which included novelist-anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, interviewed a number of ex-slaves as a part of the effort to collect Negro folklore. The narratives were originally associated with the compilation of the Florida Guide, and were later considered for inclusion in a projected book entitled *The Negro in Florida*, which was never completed. In March of 1937 several of the ex-slave narratives were sent to Washington where John A. Lomax, head of the Folklore Division, saw them. Recognizing their value, he initiated the collection of ex-slave autobiographies as an integral part of the Federal Writers' Project as of April 1, 1937.

The *Florida Writers' Project Slave Narrative Collection* in its completed form contains sixty-seven life histories related by sixty-nine informants. All but three informants state or imply that they had been ex-slaves. Ms. Smith notes as a weakness of the Florida collection that many of the interviews were conducted with Negroes who were not slaves in Florida, but, in fact, migrated there after the Civil War. And in fact, only seventeen of the interviewed were slaves in Florida. Nineteen were slaves in Georgia. Eleven were slaves in South Carolina. The others were in bondage in a variety of southern states. This circumstance weakens their value as a resource for investigation of Florida history.

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5. Other states which are represented by the ex-slaves are Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia.
The quality of the Florida narratives varies. They range from a few lines to a number of pages in length. Some are rambling; others are well-organized and reflect the use of a questionnaire. When a perceptive collector was matched with a retentive informant the result is a detailed account of slave life. Otherwise the narratives tend to be too general to be useful. Some of the life histories are inaccurately and inconsistently rendered in distorted Negro dialect; others have been rewritten by a collector in standard American English. Smith thinks the lack of accurately rendered dialect weakens the value of the narratives as Negro folklore.\(^1\) Their folkloristic value, however, lies in their rich content of beliefs, customs and material culture and not in the dialect. A third weakness that Ms. Smith points out is the great exaggeration in certain narratives.\(^2\) Exaggeration is a problem if the narratives are used solely as historical documents. But as documents which provide insight into both the conditions and psyche of the slave and ex-slave, the exaggeration itself is significant.

The mechanics of this investigation involved some major decisions. Since a complete analysis and interpretation of sixty-seven ex-slave narratives would be an overwhelming task, a method had to be devised to reduce this unwieldy body of material to a workable size. The tales which the ex-slaves related seemed the most logical choice of material. Eighty-five tales were extracted from the sixty-seven life histories. These yielded fifty-four tales told by thirty-five informants which have proven useful in the discussion of slavery and the Civil War in chapters two and three of this study. These fifty-four tales, which included both memorates and fabulates, fall into two chronological divisions which suggest two different types of analysis for the next two chapters. A large portion

\(^{1}\text{Smith, p. 195.}\) \(^{2}\text{Ibid.}\)
of the narratives deals with slavery, suggesting a sociological approach in the second chapter. A smaller number of tales relate to the Civil War, a body of tales which lends itself to historical investigation and documentation in the third chapter.

The next decision involved the presentation of these memorates. Only fourteen of the informants lived in Florida at some time during slavery. Two of the informants were not slaves. Some informants related incidents which occurred after emancipation. The Negro dialect is often incorrectly recorded. There are obvious grammatical and spelling errors. The present study will follow this plan:

1. Include all the memorates regardless of the status of the informant or the time period of the related incident;
2. Retain the attempts at rendering the black dialect;
3. Record the memorates exactly as they had been recorded in the original Florida Narratives.

Depending on the way in which the memorates are used, the status of the informant, the place in which he had been enslaved and the time of the event may be important or insignificant. Rawick points out that many of the ex-slaves did not distinguish between their experiences under slavery and those after the Civil War. For many slaves, their living conditions did not alter radically. He further states: "I believe that evidence of this important continuity between slavery and freedom must be made available if we are to understand the depths of the system of American racism." Rawick also sets the precedent for leaving the interviews exactly as they had been recorded—including both black dialect and grammatical errors. This method of presenting the tales minimizes the possibility of misinterpretation since attempts at editing could alter

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1 Rawick, vol. 1, p. xviii.  
2 Ibid., p. xvii.
the meaning of the narratives.

The fifty-four tales referred to in this study are grouped into two categories and appear in the appendix. The first category includes the tales about master/slave relationships. A second category includes tales about the Civil War and the slaves' emancipation. Entered with each tale is the significant data about collector and narrator obtained from the body of the life-histories. The memorates are numbered for convenient reference in the main body of this study.

The narratives of the Florida collection appear in the form of memorate and fabulate. It is not the author's intention to get involved in a discussion of re-definition of these genres, a subject of concern for many folklorists. Instead, the present study shows how a knowledge of folklore can be useful in the analysis of historical and sociological materials. Historian and folklorist Richard Dorson points out that orally preserved traditions of a people frequently have little relation to written history but have considerable value as records of what episodes of the past have endured and what forms they take in the popular memory.¹ Dorson suggests a set of criteria for establishing the validity of oral traditions. These include identification of folklore themes which have been grafted onto historical settings, cross checks of multiple traditions, corroboration of a tradition from geographical landmarks, and an allowance for personal and emotional bias slanting a tradition.²

An analysis of fifty-four of the tales in the Florida Narratives using the above methodology demonstrates that the recording of history was not the primary purpose of recounting these tales. The primary factor in what

¹"Sources for the Traditional History of the Scottish Highlands and Western Islands," Journal of the Folklore Institute 8 (August-December 1971): 147.

²Ibid., pp. 183-84.
was remembered and told by these narrators at least seventy-one years after the event appears to be how the tale contributed to their self-esteem. For the ex-slave narrator, these tales functioned as ego builders. Consequently, the tales must not be perceived as representative of the total experience of slavery or of slave life during the Civil War.

What follows is a story of what endured in the memories of the ex-slaves. Not as sophisticated as the historians, sociologists, economists and statesmen who have written about slavery, these ex-slaves simply relate the incidents which they best remember and which functioned to bring them status in the telling.
CHAPTER II

THE TALES AS SOCIOLOGY: SLAVERY

A majority of the ex-slave narratives which relate incidents about slavery deal with the master or authority/slave relationship. An examination of the content and form of this sociologically oriented material reveals that the primary psychological function of these tales was to contribute to the self-esteem of the ex-slaves who told them. The selective memory of the ex-slave recalled tales which functioned as ego-builders. Consequently, the story of master/slave relationships must not be viewed as an accurate or total picture of slave life.

Is there any value, then, in the use of the FWP Slave Narrative Collection by the student of slavery? One social historian, Kenneth Stampp, asks in his treatise on slavery:

What else was there in the lives of slaves besides work, sleep, and procreation? What filled their idle hours? What occupied their minds? What distinguished them from domestic animals? Much will never be known for surviving records provide only brief glimpses into the private life of the slave quarters. But much can be learned from the Negro songs and folklore, from the recollections of former slaves, and from the observations of the more perceptive and sensitive writers.1

The content of the FWP slave narratives would ostensibly fill in some gaps that have been left by the social historian of slavery. But of using the slaves as a source of information, Stampp says:

Direct evidence from the slaves themselves is hopelessly inadequate. Well over ninety percent of them were illiterate,

and even the small literate minority seldom found an opportunity to write or speak with candor. . . . For more than sixty years after emancipation, no one made a systematic attempt to record the narratives of former slaves. Three belated efforts in the 1920s and 1930s appear to have come too late to be of much value to the historians, though the narratives are of considerable interest to folklorists. Historians have no doubt failed to make as much use of the Negro's oral tradition of songs and folklore as they should; but this material as a source for slavery, also presents problems. Among other things, the songs and folklore are ever-changing; and since the collections were made for the most part after slavery, we can seldom be sure that what they contain are true expressions of the slaves.¹

Others, however, see some value in the narratives for scholarly research. In the first published collection of excerpts from the FWP narratives, it was suggested in the introduction that "the narratives have prime importance for the sociologist and the social anthropologist."² A more recent collection provides a key to the value of the narratives. Yetman suggests that among other uses the life histories can be used to test social scientific generalizations regarding slavery.³ This approach is utilized in this chapter. It is the story of slavery as recounted in the memories of Florida ex-slaves compared to the conclusions of scholars who have relied primarily on written texts for their information. The comparison is made, not to prove or disprove the ex-slaves' or scholars' inaccuracy and arrive at precise statistical conclusions, but to show, instead, how the use of oral tradition in scholarly study can aid and extend the work of the sociologist.

The narratives generally reveal that slavery left an unpleasant and indelible scar on the ex-slave, but that it also left him with a legacy of stories which he related to the black interviewer who prodded his memory to recall incidents which had occurred at least seventy-one years

¹Ibid., p. 368. ²Botkin, p. xiii. ³Yetman, p. 4.
in the past. It is only natural that the ex-slave reminisced most about slavery. Of the eighty-five tales extracted from the Florida narratives, forty-five relate to slavery. Of those, thirty pertain to the relationship between the slave and the authority figure who dominated his life—most often his master. The focus of this chapter is the group of thirty memorates which records that delicate relationship between a master and his slave. These memorates fall into two distinct categories. Nineteen tales relate incidents in which the master or other authority figure was successful in besting his slave. A discussion of this material shows that the master used cruelty, threats and trickery to control or get the best of his slaves. Following this analysis is a discussion of the remaining eleven tales. These relate a story of successful slave resistance. In these tales the slave uses overt resistance and pretense to get the best of his master. It is evident from these two groups of tales that Negroes found the management of whites as complex a matter as their masters found the management of their Negroes.¹

Master Bests the Slave

As the narratives reflect the folk memory, cruelty, threats and trickery were habitually employed by whites to control their slaves. Some of the most vivid recollections of slavery describe the slave as a victim of cruelty. Of the nineteen tales in the Florida Narratives that relate incidents in which authority bests the slave, fifteen deal with instances of cruelty. Another distinction appears in this small group of tales. In eight instances the cruelty inflicted on the slave is provoked. The provocation may have been real or imagined, but in both cases the slave was being punished. Five other memorates record instances of unprovoked

¹Stampp, p. 377.
cruelty which appear to be perversions of authority. In two other instances, it is unclear whether the slave viewed himself as being punished for a real or imagined offense or as a victim of the capriciousness of a cruel master. What provoked a master to severely punish a slave? Two tales report physical punishment that went beyond the acceptable whipping because two slaves could read and write.

"Dere wuz Uncle George Bull, he could read and write and, chile, de white folks didn't lak no nigger whut could read and write. . . . So dey useter jes take uncle George bull and beat him and take him to de lake and put him on a log and shev him in de lake, but he always swimm ed out. When dey didn' do dat dey would beat him tel de blood run ou ten him and den trow him in de ditch and kivver him up wid dirt, head and years and den stick a stick up at his haid." (Tale 1)

Ex-slave Douglas Dorsey relates a personal experience regarding reading and writing. Mistress Matair tricked young Douglas into proudly revealing the fact that he could read and write letters and numerals.

When he reached the number ten, very proud of his learning, she struck him a heavy blow across the face, saying to him "If I ever catch you making another figure anywhere I'll cut off your right arm. . . ." Naturally Douglas and also her son Willie were much surprised as each thought what had been done had been quite an achievement. She then called Mariah, the cook to bring a rope and tying the two of them to the old colonial post on the front porch, she took a chair and sat between the two, whipping them on their naked backs for such a time, that for two weeks their clothes stuck to their backs on the lacerated flesh. (Tale 2)

With the exception of both Kentucky and Maryland, every southern state had stringent laws forbidding anyone to teach slaves reading and writing. ¹ Although some slaves learned to read and write, either secretly or with the encouragement of bold masters, it was generally thought that "teaching slaves to read and write tends to dissatisfaction in their minds, and to

produce insurrection and rebellion."¹ However, it is in both recorded history and oral tradition that some slaves persisted and succeeded in their efforts to get an education despite punishment.

Southern society had similar apprehensions that segregated black religious meetings might engender dissatisfaction among slaves. A typical expression of this concern was a South Carolina law which forbade religious meetings for slaves or free Negroes before sunrise or after sunset.² One ex-slave recalled how her oldest brother was whipped to death for attending a forbidden religious service. (Motif Q458.0.1, Flogging as punishment for disobedience to rulers.)³ The punishment was effective and the secret meetings stopped. (Tale 3)

The masters generally punished the overtly defiant slave who refused to submit to the rules. The slaves' persistence in attending forbidden religious meetings is an example of this overt defiance. Other instances involve theft. One ex-slave relates the consequences of stealing. Ex-slave Riviana Boynton reports the story of an uncle who loved blowhorts, or sweet potatoes, so much that he stole some. When the master caught him in the act of eating them, "Then Massy, he come in wid his big whip and caught him and tied him to a tree and paddled him until he blistered and then washed his sore back with salt water." (Tale 4) Another slave reports the consequences for those slaves who "wuz hard and jes' would not mind de boss."

They had what you call "pattyrollers" who would catch you from home and "wear you out" and send you back to your master. If a master had slaves he jes' could not rule ... he would ask him if he wanted to go to another plantation and if he said he did, then, he would give him a pass and that

pass would read: "Give this nigger hell." Of course when the pattyrollers or other plantation boss would read the pass he would beat him nearly to death and send him back. Of course the nigger could not read and did not know what the pass said. You see, day did not 'low no nigger to have a book or piece of paper of any kind and you know day wuz not go teach any of 'em to read. (Tale 5)

Some cruel punishment appeared to be the result of an imagined provocation. Ex-slave Douglas Dorsey witnessed the wrath of the mistress upon his mother.

Dorsey's mother was called by Mrs. Matair (the mistress), not hearing her, she continued with her duties, suddenly Mrs. Matair burst out in a frenzy of anger over the woman not answering. Anna explained that she did not hear her call, whereupon Mrs. Matair seized a large butcher knife and struck at Anna, attempting to ward off the blow, Anna received a long gash on the arm that laid her up for sometime. (Tale 6)

Another slave was beaten and permanently crippled when the overseer determined she was not "toting tater vines" to the field hands fast enough. (Tale 7) These incidents correspond with Frederick Douglass' description of the offense of impudence which could be committed "in the tone of an answer; in answering at all; in not answering; in the expression of countenance; in the motion of the head; in the gait, manner and bearing of the slave." 1

Miscegenation, real or imagined, between master and slave was also severely punished. Douglas Dorsey relates a second tale about his mother Anna and her master and mistress, Colonel and Mrs. Matair. When Mrs. Matair suspected that her husband had fathered Anna's light complexioned baby boy, Mrs. Matair insisted that the child be sold. She persisted in expressing this desire until Colonel Matair auctioned off the child at the age of eight months. (Tale 8)

Most of modern slave scholarship has accepted as fact the frequency

1 My Bondage, p. 92, quoted in Stampp, p. 145.
of master/slave sex relationships. Stampp concludes from his study of miscegenation that it was a frequent occurrence:

To measure the extent of miscegenation with precision is impossible, because statistical indexes are crude and public and private records fragmentary. But the evidence nevertheless suggests that human behavior in the Old South was very human indeed, that sexual contacts between the races were not rare aberrations of a small group of depraved whites but a frequent occurrence involving whites of all social and cultural levels.¹

Recent scholarship has challenged the assumption that slave women were frequent victims of the promiscuous white masters and overseers who "turned plantations into personal harems." Fogel and Engerman suggest that Victorian attitudes in the planter class and awareness of the detrimental effect on slave discipline that miscegenation would cause resulted in limited sexual activity between blacks and whites. Evidence offered in support of this thesis comes from the 1860 census, which shows that 10.4 percent of the entire slave population was mulatto. Of the informants in the EWP Slave Narrative Collection who identified parentage, 4.5 percent indicated that one of their parents had been white. Recent work by geneticists reveals this number may be too high. Fogel and Engerman speculate that between 1-2 percent of Negro children on slave plantations were fathered by whites.² Mary Chestnut, who kept a diary during the Civil War, wrote about miscegenation from the viewpoint of the southern white woman:

Under slavery we live surrounded by prostitutes. . . . The mulattoes one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all those mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. Those, she seems to think drop from the clouds. My disgust sometimes is boiling over. Thank God for my country women, but alas for the men! They are probably no worse than men everywhere, but the lower their mistresses, the more

¹Stampp, p. 350.
²Fogel and Engerman, pp. 129-34 passim.
degraded they must be. 1

If widespread miscegenation was not a fact, it was a reality in the mind of the white plantation mistress.

Miscegenation was also a reality in the oral tradition of the ex-slaves. Although none of the forty-one informants in the Florida tales relate personal examples of miscegenation, three suggest white ancestry. (Tales 8, 12 and 21) The wrath of a white wife who either knew or suspected unfaithfulness is also frequently reported in oral tradition. Four ex-slaves indicated they had a good master, but a mean mistress. The victim of the mistress's anger is female in four tales (Tales 6, 8, 13, 21) and male in two instances. (Tales 3, 14) In only two tales the mistress's wrath is incurred over miscegenation, and in both cases, as in the tale related above, the sexual relations are only suspected. The cruelty of some southern white mistresses toward both male and female slaves is well-documented throughout the entire FWP Slave Narrative Collection. Rawick suggests two reasons for such capricious cruelty: 1) jealousy caused by liaisons between husband and black women, and 2) brutality which served as an outlet for repressed sexuality. 2 If the narratives from the Florida collection are typical, the first explanation for the mistress's cruelty to the black female would be more accurate if it included the possibility that jealousy was not necessarily justified or rooted in fact. The latter reason explains, however, why she victimized male and female alike. The household slave was usually considered to be the best position of any plantation slave. In the oral tradition of the Florida ex-slaves, however, the position of the house slave was a precarious one. It must be men-


tioned here that some of the ex-slaves from the Florida narratives speak of good mistresses to whom they were very devoted. This fact balances the presentation here of the house slave as victim.

When the slave excelled in those areas of which he was supposed to remain ignorant, when he defied the master's rules, when what he did could be interpreted as impudence or overstepping the boundaries circumscribed for him by white society—in short, when the slave did not act like a slave, he was risking punishment.

The ex-slaves also discussed unprovoked cruelty, incidents which appear to be perversions of authority.

With a face full of frowns, "Parson" tells of a white man persuading his mother to let him tie her to show that he was his master promising not to whip her, and she believed him. When he had placed her in a buck (hands tied on a stick so that the stick would turn her in any direction) he whipped her until the blood ran down her back. (Tale 9)

Other ex-slaves tell of an experiment with bloodhounds that resulted in the death of a Negro child (Tale 10), sexual intercourse between slave husband and wife performed for the master (Tale 11), forced sex with the master (Tale 12), and unprovoked harrassment by a mistress (Tale 13). In these tales the white authority figure went to extremes to prove his dominance over the slave.

There were other methods of controlling slaves besides severe physical punishment. Threats were an effective form of controlling a slave's behavior. Ex-slave Titus Jynes recalls the time he was caught by his mistress writing on the ground. The mere threat of his mistress to cut off his right arm (Motif 451.0.2, Threat to cut off hand or foot) if he were caught writing again was enough to stifle Titus' precociousness. (Tale 12) The same threat, in addition to a severe lashing, was given to another

1Thompson, vol. 5, p. 229.
ex-slave who was discovered learning to read and write.

Some of the ex-slaves talk about the cleverness of the master who was able to outsmart his slaves. Bill Austin relates a personal experience with his mistress. Left with the responsibility of helping the mistress operate a store while the master was at war, Bill took advantage of the situation and on several occasions tried to escape. These attempts were always thwarted, however, and Bill was returned to his angry mistress, who berated him or had him whipped. But the punishment did not halt Bill's attempts to free himself. Mrs. Smith, the mistress, finally resorted to "child psychology" to outsmart Bill:

Mrs. Smith, however, thought of a surer plan of keeping him in Greensboro; she called him and told him he might have his freedom and Bill never attempted to again leave the place—although he did not receive a cent for his work—until his master had died, the store passed into the hands of one of Mrs. Smith's sons, and the emancipation of all the slaves was a matter of eight or ten years' history! (Tale 17)

A nearly identical incident is reported by another slave. When one particular slave on the plantation was caught after escaping, Master Jack Davis lightly whipped him and then gave him his freedom. The use of psychology was effective and the slave never again ran away. (Tale 18)

This motif has not been identified in either of the two major motif indexes. The repetition of specific actions in these tales, however, suggests a group of motifs perhaps unique to the slave tales.

Another ex-slave, Riviana Boynton, reports a trick her master played on her uncle.

"My Uncle took sick, he was so sick that when my Massy came to see him, he asked him to pray that he should die." So Massy Hoover, he went home and wrapped himself up in a big long sheet and rapped on the door real hard.

"Uncle, he say, 'Who's out there? What you want?'

"Massy, he change his voice and say, 'I am Death, I hear that you want to die, so I've come after your soul. Come with me! Get ready. Quick I am in a hurry!"

"Oh, my sakes!' my uncle, he say, 'NO, no I aint ready yet. I aint ready to meet you. I don't want to die.' (Tale 19)
This tale which was related as a true incident is recorded as Motif J217.0.1.1. Trickster overhears man praying for death to take him; the trickster appears at man's house, usually in disguise, says he is God (or the devil). The man tells him to take his wife (or runs away). This traveling anecdote has been collected in variants, primarily in the Southeast as Negro folklore.\(^1\) A similar story about Josh and the Lord also appears as a memorate in *Lay My Burden Down*.\(^2\) A search through the entire FWP Slave Narrative Collection would probably yield similar accounts.

The story, then, which was a well-circulated folktale, was also part of the ex-slaves' oral folk history. Significantly, in this tale, the master is the trickster and cleverly outsmarts the slave.

Whether by the administration of severe physical punishment, a mere threat, or cleverness, the authority figure in these nineteen tales manages to dominate or get the best of his slave.

Control of the slaves was a necessity for preservation of the institution of slavery. How this control was achieved has been a subject of discussion in a number of treatises on slavery. A number of scholars have concluded that cruelty was the central fact of slavery. Their argument proceeds along the following lines. Master and slave were in a constant war of control and resistance.

A wise master did not take seriously the belief that Negroes were natural-born slaves. He knew better. He knew that Negroes freshly imported from Africa had to be broken in to bondage, that each succeeding generation had to be carefully trained... In most cases there was no end to the need for control—at least not until old age reduced the slave to a condition of helplessness.\(^3\)

However humane a master wanted to be, the extraordinary power that

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\(^2\) Dotkin, p. 40.

\(^3\) Stampp, p. 144.
slavery conferred upon him frequently corrupted him. Although the average slaveholder was not an inhumane brute, acts of cruelty were not as exceptional as pro-slavery writers have claimed. The severity of the system produced slaves who were constantly resisting—overtly or in a subtle manner—a system with which they were dissatisfied. A second view of slavery also presents a system so cruel that it had a devastating effect on the psyche of the slave. The result of this system was the "docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing" plantation slave—the Sambo of tradition. A third opinion has challenged this view of slavery which "emphasized a plantation regime on which the exploitation of slaves was so severe that the slaves were completely demoralized by it." Instead, this view sees a system which allowed for achievement and the development of a black culture.

The ex-slaves themselves provided proof for this theory in the FWP Slave Narrative Collection. The majority of the interviewed ex-slaves who expressed themselves on the issue reported that their masters were good men. In this one area, the Florida Narratives are typical of the entire FWP collection. Nineteen of the forty informants who were slaves rated their masters with an unqualified good. Only five said their masters were cruel.

If cruelty was not the central fact of slavery, it was vivid in the memories of the ex-slaves and a dominant theme in their narratives. As the above tales reveal, cruelty, and not simply physical punishment, was the most frequently related method of slave control. This holds true in the Florida narratives as well as in earlier collections of oral narratives. John B. Cade, a history teacher who made a similar but earlier

1Ibid., pp. 181-82.  2Ibid., p. 110.  3Elkins, p. 88.
4Fogel and Engerman, pp. 108-09.  5Ibid., p. 146.
collection, noted the preoccupation of the ex-slaves with cruelty: "Negro men and women who passed through the ordeal of slavery dwell upon this feature of punishment more than any other."¹

The ex-slaves were very specific about the maltreatment which they received. Whipping was the most common form of punishment or harassment. Nine of the fifteen tales which record acts of cruelty refer to whipping. These tales corroborate the opinions advanced that whipping was in fact the most common punishment received by the slave. Even humane Southerners who did not believe in other forms of physical punishment did not object to giving a moderate whipping to a disobedient slave.² However, the beatings reported by the ex-slaves were not moderate whippings. Two incidents record whippings that end in death. (Tales 3, 16) Another informant was crippled by her beating. (Tale 7) One ex-slave cites a story about a pregnant slave who was beaten. (Tale 16) And one ex-slave reports that the whipping which her uncle received was accompanied by a salt water bath. (Tale 4) This punishment was considered one of the harshest and was to be given to only the most obstinate bondsman.³ Curiously, this master was the only one who inflicted a cruel punishment who was also rated as a good master by the informant. Perhaps this slave concurred with her master that stealing deserved a severe punishment, or possibly she understood the salt bath to be a means of preventing infection. A capriciously made gash with a butcher knife and the sale of a mother's child are also recorded as punishments.

Who administered these acts of cruelty, and who were the victims? Table 1 shows that in the fifteen cases of reported cruelty, the master

²Fogel and Engerman, p. 144. ³Stampp, p. 187.
and mistress shared equally in acts of cruelty.

### Table 1

**SLAVE VICTIMS OF WHITE CRUELTY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>House Slaves</th>
<th>Field Slaves</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistress</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patroller</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White men</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This limited sample of tales suggests that both the master and mistress shared in slave punishment, although the mistress was more concerned with the house servants. Recall, however, that much of her behavior has been attributed to jealousy. The victims of cruelty were both house servants and field hands. Since there were an equal number of house servants and field slaves among those informants who expressed their status as slaves, one might conclude that house servant was not the desirable position others believed it to be. Among slaves the position of house servant was an envied one. An ex-slave reported in his memories that the house servants were never treated as cruelly as the field slaves. But these tales are closer to a second view of this close relationship with the master as less satisfying than whites and other slaves might imagine.

The ex-slaves gave much attention to the problem of slave control. Through their voices we see slavery as an institution which victimized

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2 Stampp, p. 330.
the slave. We see a bondsman who was the victim of the whims of a master and a mistress and a system which was no respecter of slave status. Field hand and house servant alike suffered. However, these tales in which the white overcomes the black, by cruelty, fear or subtle psychology, were not the only memories which endured. The ex-slave also recounts a story of resistance. Sometimes the story is one of "day to day resistance" which allowed the slave to maintain his dignity without jeopardizing his life. Sometimes the story is one of overt protest which involved risking the slave's life. Whether the resistance was subtle or overt, actual or imagined, these stories show that the slaves conceived not only of ways to protest successfully, but at times of dominating their masters.

**Slave Bests the Master**

Successful slave resistance is the focus of eleven memorates. Recorded in these tales are incidents in which the slave overcomes authority. These memories reveal four ways in which the slave resisted. Uncle Dave shows that pretense was a successful technique for manipulating white authority.

"De young missus used to beat me a right smaht," he recalled with an amused smile. "I b'londed to her, y' see. She was a couple o' years younger'n me. I mind I used to be hangin' 'round de kitchen, watchin' 'em cook cakes an' otha good things. W'en day be done, I'd beg for one, an' dey take 'em off in de otha room, so's I couldn't steal any.

"Soon as de young missus be gone, I go an' kick ovah her playhouse an' upset her toys. When she come back, she be hoppin' mad, an' staht beatin' me.

"Jessie,' her ma'd say, 'you'll kill Buddy, beatin' him dat way.'

"'I don't care,' she say, 'I'll beat him to death, an' git me a bettah one.'

"I'd roll on de flo' an' holler loud an' preten' she hurt me pow'ful bad. By'm by, when she git ovah her mad spell, she go off in da otha room an' come back wid some o' dem good things fo' me." The old man's eyes twinkled. "Dat be w'at I'se atter all de time," he explained. (Tale 20)
Rebecca Hooks was a stubborn house slave whose persistent disobedience resulted in punishment. But it was her cunning and pretense that ultimately saved her from a worse punishment. Rebecca reports that she was a victim of all kinds of punishment, not only because she stubbornly refused to be obedient, but also because she resembled Master Lowe's daughter. In spite of attempts to emphasize differences in the two girls' appearance, notably by cutting Rebecca's hair, the slave girl was very conscious of this resemblance. Here again is a motif which appears in at least one other ex-slave narrative collection.1

Rebecca did not fear the form of punishment administered her and she had the cunning to keep "on the good side of the master" who had a fondness for her "because she was so much like the Lowes." The mistress' demand that she be sold or beaten was always turned aside with "Dear, you know the child can't help it; it's that cursed Cherokee blood in her." (Tale 21)

These incidents show the slave as the manipulator who through his cunning can get his own way. These slaves were engaged in a conscious but not overtly violent day-to-day resistance commonly practiced by bondsmen.2

One view of slave resistance disputed the existence of a plantation slave who used the principle of accommodation to manipulate the powerful slave owner "through aggressive stupidity, literal-mindedness, servile fawning and irresponsibility." This technique of resistance required alternative forces which did not exist for the slave.3 According to this view, the plantation slave was genuinely a Sambo and this silly,

1This memorate has a striking parallel in another ex-slave story which appears in Cade's early collection of ex-slave narratives (p. 308). A young house slave who had been fathered by the master was often terrorized by the mistress. The child's hair was also kept short to make her resemblance to the white child in the family less obvious. As in the above case, the slave child was protected by the master from the wrath of the mistress.


3Elkins, n. 106, pp. 132; 133.
servile behavior as Uncle Dave described above was not a role, but the real slave. Uncle Dave and Rebecca, however, were house servants, and not the typical Sambo Elkins describes as shuffling around the plantation. Their behavior was calculated to manipulate their masters. One would have to look elsewhere to document the presence of Sambo, who is noticeably absent from any memories related in the Florida collection of narratives.

Overt methods of resistance reported by the ex-slaves appear not only in those incidents reported in the earlier part of this chapter in which some of the slaves were severely punished for their defiance, but also in one narrative of a slave who dared defiance with impunity. Ex-slave Winston Davis tells the story about his mother who not only defied the patrollers—white men in charge of controlling the movement of slaves from off the plantation—but who also received protection from her master.

My mother was a very strong woman... and felt that she could whip any ordinary man, would not get a passport [a pass to leave the plantation] unless she felt like it; once when caught on another plantation without a passport, she had all of us with her, made all of the children run, but wouldn't run herself—somehow she went upstream, one of the men's horse's legs was broken and she told him "come and get me" but she knew the master allowed no one to come on his place to punish his slaves. (Tale 22)

More commonly reported as a method of resistance during slavery was escape. Six tales record successful slave escapes. William Sherman relates a story about an escaping slave who demonstrated extraordinary, even fabulous, strength.

This particular slave had quite a "head start" on the dogs that were trailing him and he hid among some floating logs in a large pond; the dogs trailed him to the pond and began howling, indicating that they were approaching their prey. They entered the pond to get their victim who was securely hidden from sight; they disappeared and the next seen of them was their dead bodies floating upon the water of the pond;
they had been killed by the escape. They were full-blooded hounds, such as were used in hunting escaped slaves and were about fifty in number. The slave made his escape and was never seen again. (Tale 23)

The exaggeration in this tale is obvious. This memorate has undergone the process of fictionalizing which von Sydow describes as fabulation. Two ex-slaves relate stories about slaves who managed to escape, two with the use of magic, to the surrounding woods. There they remained until emancipation when it was safe to come out. (Tales 24, 25) "En missus, when de big gun fiahed, de runnerway slaves come out de woods from all directions. We wuz in de field when it fiahed, but I 'members dey wuz all very glad." (Tale 24) Successful runaways who remained near the plantation are well-documented in published slave narratives. There were cases in which slaves, aided by other slaves, managed to successfully elude their pursuers for long periods of time. One Louisiana slave was found to have been lurking around the master's premises for nearly a year harbored by sympathetic slaves. ¹ Arnold Gragston reports a memorable story about his part in the underground railroad. He spent several years while still a slave in Mason County, Kentucky, rowing boats of escaping slaves across the Ohio River to the home of abolitionist John Rankins in Ripley, Ohio. Only after aiding in the escape of numerous other slaves did he and his wife escape the same way. (Tale 26) This underground railroad station is well-documented in written history. John Rankins was a prominent underground railway conductor who resided in Ripley, Ohio. He worked from 1821 through 1865 harboring fugitive slaves. ²

¹ Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, pp. 226-27, cited by Stampp, pp. 115-16.

reports) guided escaping slaves from Kentucky to his home across the Ohio River.¹

Evidence suggests that slave escape was a reality, but not as common as the oral tales lead us to believe. In reality there were relatively few successful escapes from the Lower South.² United States census returns show that only eighteen fugitive slaves escaped from Florida in 1850 and only eleven in 1860.³ Most runaways were only at large temporarily—for a few days to several weeks. And attempts of those who did run away with the intention of leaving the South usually ended in failure.⁴ In spite of the contrary evidence, successful slave escapes are the frequent subject of ex-slave tales. Their appeal to the slaves and ex-slaves is obvious. Six ex-slaves report successful escape attempts. One of these, however, cites only a temporary escape that allowed a slave child to avoid a whipping. This tale and one other are told as personal experiences.

Did all of these slaves run away for similar reasons? In five tales, no reason is given for the escape, and both ex-slaves who relate personal experiences with running away express a positive attitude about their masters. This fact and the frequency with which this type of memorate was related support the view that discontent, which in this case was expressed by running away, was not necessarily related to physical cruelty. All slaves had some understanding of freedom, desired more freedom and were consequently dissatisfied with their lot.⁵

²Stampp, p. 118.
⁴Stampp, pp. 115, 118. ⁵Ibid., pp. 88-90.
Accounts of violent rebellion among individual slaves also survive in the ex-slaves' memories. Similar accounts of violence come from two ex-slaves. In both cases, the overseer who reprimanded a field slave is murdered by the angry slave. In one case, no mention is made of a punishment.

"One day when an old woman was plowing in the field, an overseer came by and reprimanded her for being so slow—she gave him some back talk, he took out a long closely woven whip and lashed her severely. The woman became sore and took her hoe and chopped him right across his head, and child you should have seen how she chopped this man to a bloody death." (Tale 29)

In a similar tale the overseer is also killed with a hoe in the hands of an angry female field slave. (Motif 1041.16.33, Strength from anger enables man to tear opponent to bits.)\(^1\) This informant renders a much more graphic ending.

... The woman was hoeing at the time, she whirled around, struck the overseer on his head with the hoe, knocking him from his horse, she then pounced upon him and chopped his head off. She went mad for a few seconds and proceeded to chop and mutilate his body; that done to her satisfaction, she then killed his horse. She then calmly went to tell the master of the murder, saying "I've done killed de overseer." The master replied; "Do you mean to say you've killed the overseer?" she answered yes, and that she had killed the horse also. Without hesitating, the master pointing to one of his small cabins on the plantation said; "You see that house over there?" she answered yes- at the same time looking- "Well said he, take all your belongings and move into that house and you are free from this day and if the mistress wants you to do anything for her, do it if you want to." (Tale 30)

Antebellum records indicate that isolated acts of violence were not uncommon. Acts of violence were committed by a variety of slave types from house servant to field hand upon a variety of authority figures from master to overseer. The most common reason for violence was the attempt of an overseer to work or punish a slave too severely.\(^2\) Such was the

\(^1\)Thompson, vol. 3, p. 267.  
\(^2\)Stampp, pp. 130-31.
case reported in a Florida newspaper in 1856. When a Madison County, Florida, slaveowner prepared to whip a slave, he was suddenly attacked. His slave "while manifesting a great deal of submission, came forward, drew an axe which he had concealed, and split in twain the head of his master, scattering the brain in every direction." There are documented cases in which a rebellious slave was protected by his master from punishment for having committed severe crimes. In a diary from a Mississippi plantation it is recorded that when one slave nearly killed his overseer, the master merely kept the slave in irons for a few days and then allowed him to return to work. Such acts of violence, however, most often ended in death as in the case of a Marion County, Florida, doctor who was murdered by two slaves who were immediately hanged.

Stories which tell about a slave who rises up against an overseer seem to be even more common in the ex-slaves' oral tradition than in written records. Cade reports five such stories in his small collection of ex-slave narratives. A favorite version of the tale includes a happy ending for the slave whose aggression earns her respect and freedom from future punishment. The Florida Narratives preserve a similar story about the slave who not only brutally kills her overseer, but is rewarded for this action with a house and respect by her master and mistress. This tale was apparently shared by many ex-slaves, for Rawick cites a similar story from the Alabama collection of narratives. The frequent presence of this

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1Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, Nov. 8, 1856, quoted in Smith, pp. 104-05.
2Newstead Plantation Diary, June 8-11, 1860, cited by Stampp, p. 228.
4Cade, pp. 315, 319, 322, 326.
5Alabama Writers' Project Slave Narrative Collection, p. 46, cited by Rawick, vol. 1, p. 103.
motif in the ex-slaves' oral tradition may suggest that the story is fiction, even though the two Florida narrators imply personal knowledge of the event.

The oral tradition also provides a much more graphic picture of the event with a much happier ending for the slave than does recorded history. It is probable, however, that the two ex-slaves who related these incidents from the Florida collection did not witness such a slaying. The informants were ages eight and six at the time of emancipation in 1865. One was the son of a house slave; the other exslave does not reveal her status. Their youth and the fact that one was the child of a house slave suggest the improbability that these ex-slaves could have remembered and in one case had contact with an overseer. The ex-slaves, however, do share a similar attitude toward their ex-masters. One says and the other strongly implies that they were the property of very harsh masters—a fact that has probably influenced the tales they remembered and told. Unlike the tales of escape, five of which were told by ex-slaves whose masters were good, these two tales of violence seem to be related to the way in which the narrators remembered their former masters. This wish-fulfillment theme functioned as an outlet for the hostilities of these two ex-slaves. The lack of corroborating written records, the internal evidence which contradicts the personal experience these narrators imply, the familiar folklore motif and the wish fulfillment element of the tale make it obvious that the tale is a fabulate rather than a memorate.

The story of slavery is one of control and dominance by white masters; it is also a story of resistance to bondage. The Florida collection of exslave narratives preserves no Sambo. According to these ex-slaves, resistance was a conscious act among slaves. Whether house servant or field hand, the slave expressed his discontent with his conditions. Resistance
took the form of pretentious accommodation, defiance, escape and violence. And those who kept the slaves in bondage—master, mistress, patroller and overseer—frequently fell victim to the slave's resistance and sometimes to his control.

The Meaning of the Tales

It is the first task of the folklorist who studies oral folk history to determine what endures. Although the slaves had passed from bondage to freedom and their memories were at least seventy-one years old, the stories make it evident that neither new conditions nor time would make the slaves forget the pain of servitude and the victory over oppression. Rawick notes this truth: "After all, when individuals change the conditions of their lives, they do not totally eradicate the residues which the past has left on their personalities." Consequently, through their memorates, the ex-slaves kept alive a story of submission on the one hand and resistance on the other. Rawick describes this as a study of the slave as both object and subject:

On the one hand is the Object: the man who does not receive enough food, clothing and shelter to keep alive, and does not work well because of incompetence; the man who is whipped and humiliated; . . . he may demand the end of being the whipped Object and become the one who chooses not to work well as an act of rebellion. The Subject wants liberty and freedom and the opportunity to appropriate for himself and his family the best that is available in his time and place.

The folklorist's job, however, does not stop when oral tradition has been recorded and categorized. Increasingly, the folklorist has become interested in how the tales function for the narrator and his culture. Since these tales are preserved in written texts without benefit of an exact

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1 Rawick, vol. 1, p. 6.  
2 Ibid., p. 101.  
transcription, the narrator's expression or the audience's reaction, it is
difficult to determine how these tales functioned. With the aid of exter-
nal evidence, however, some plausible functions can be suggested.

Stampp describes slavery as a system which could hardly avoid estab-
lishing a feeling of personal inferiority in the slave. Consequently,
the slaves who had a need to feel superior to others devised methods of
achieving worth and dignity other than those prescribed by white society.
He cites seven of these methods: admiring the bold rebel who challenged
slave discipline, taking pride in physical feats and skills, excelling in
work, achieving rank in the slave aristocracy, identifying with wealthy
masters, boasting of prices masters paid for them and boasting about white
ancestors or light complexion. ¹ It has also been observed that numerous
slaves talked of their "perpetual war to prevent debasement."² It is
possible that the tales told by the ex-slaves are a continuation of this
war against debasement and for self-esteem. The selective memory and
narration of the ex-slave reflect his continuing struggle for worth. Zora
Neale Hurston, who worked on the Florida Writers' Project collection of
ex-slave narratives, grew up in Eatonville, Florida, where as a black she
observed the conflicting attitudes Negroes felt about themselves.

What fell into my ears from time to time tended more to
confuse than to clarify. . . .

For instance, come school-closing time and like formal
occasions, I heard speeches which brought thunderous applause.
I did not know the word for it at the time, but it did not take
me long to know the material was traditional. . . . (a) The
Negro had made the greatest progress in fifty years of any
race on the face of the globe. (b) Negroes composed the most
beautiful race on earth, being just like a flower garden with
every color and kind. (c) Negroes ware the bravest men on
earth, facing every danger like lions, and fighting with de-

¹ Stampp, pp. 334-40 passim.
mons. • • •
The people listening would cheer themselves hoarse and go home feeling good. • • •
But my own pinnacle would be made to reel and rock anyway by other things I heard from the very people who always applauded "the great speech", when it was shouted to them from the schoolhouse rostrum. For instance, let some member of the community do or say something which was considered either dumb or underhand: the verdict would be "Dat's just like a nigger!".

Ms. Hurston puzzled over this conflict throughout her early life. "Sometimes I was sure that the Negro race was all that the platform speakers said. Then I would hear so much self-deprecation that I would be defeated." 2

The use of slave narratives by one family to diminish feelings of inferiority such as those described by Ms. Hurston is discussed by one contemporary folklorist. Kathryn L. Morgan relates the oral tradition kept alive in her family about her great grandmother, Caddy, who was among the first generation of freed mulatto slaves. For the children in her family for four generations the Caddy legends served as "buffers."

Of their function she writes:

This was our folklore and it was functional. It was the antidote used by our parents and our grandparents and our great-grandparents to help counteract the poison of self-hate stirred up by the cesspool of contradictions found in the home of the brave and the land of the free.3

These tales were about events in Caddy's life that had occurred before, during and after the Civil War. One such tale emphasizes a proud, rebellious Caddy:

Caddy was only eight years old when she was sold on the block. After that she was always being sold. She was sent from plan-

1Lora Neale Hurston, "My People! My People!" in Dundes, Mother Wit From the Laughing Barrel, pp. 25-26.

2Ibid., p. 32.

3Kathryn L. Morgan, "Caddy Buffers: Legends of a Middle-Class Negro Family in Philadelphia," in Dundes, Mother Wit From the Laughing Barrel, p. 600.
tation to plantation but she would always run away. She grew
to be a beautiful young girl and that made the white women hate
her. The white men loved her and sometimes she was taken to
live in the big houses. Big houses or not, Caddy didn't want
to be a slave. She would run away. When she was caught, she
was usually hung in the barn and whipped across her naked back
with a cat-o-nine-tails. This didn't stop Caddy from running.
She would run and she would be caught and she would be whipped.
Do you think she'd cry when they whipped her with a cat-o-nine-
tails? Not Caddy. It would take more than a cat-o-nine-tails
to make Caddy cry in front of white trash.  

It was Ms. Morgan's desire as a child to be like Caddy. Caddy provided
the author with an admirable example of bravery and ability to conquer
insurmountable odds. The most popular Caddy tale told about what she
did when she heard of General Lee's surrender. The story concludes:

Caddy threw down that hoe, she marched herself up to the big
house, then, she looked around and found the mistress. She
went over to the mistress, she flipped up her dress and told
the white woman to do something. She said it mean and ugly.
This is what she said: Kiss my ass.

These memories did not rid the children of their feelings of inferiority,
but they helped diminish those feelings.

To say that internal conflict, race hatred and contempt
were destroyed by these accounts would be untrue. They
served the purpose of diminishing feelings of racial in-
feriority imposed upon us as children. I am sure that
Caddy had many counterparts throughout the land.

What was remembered and told by the ex-slave narrators endured for
a reason. If these memories are "buffers," in what specific ways did
the memories in the Florida Narratives contribute to the ex-slave's
self-esteem?

By dwelling on cruelty, the ex-slave enlisted the sympathy of his
listeners. Fifteen of nineteen tales in which the slave is dominated
by his master relate instances of cruelty. In these stories, the slave
is not a victim of a smarter master who is to be admired, but rather he

\[1\text{Ibid., p. 601.} \quad 2\text{Ibid.} \quad 3\text{Ibid., p. 603.} \quad 4\text{Ibid., p. 609.}\]
is the victim of a cruel master who had society on his side. When we hear about Joe Sanders, the overseer, our sympathy is clearly with ex-slave Margrett Nickerson.

Joe Sanders would hurry us up by beatin' us with strops and sticks and run us all over de tater ridge; he cripple us both up and den we couldn' git to all uv em. . . . I never walked straight from dat day to dis and I have to set here in dis chair now. (Tale 7)

If so many slaves survived such cruelty, that is a tribute to their strength and endurance. If memory exaggerated, the enduring power of the slave would seem all the more admirable from the narrator's point of view. Three narratives report the death of a slave by the whip or dogs. The other tales are stories of survival. No matter how many times George Bull, who had the ability to read and write, was beaten, put on a log and shoved into the lake, "he always swimmmed out." (Tale 1) Although a cruel and jealous mistress forced the sale of a slave's eight-month-old baby, "twenty years later he was located by his family, he was a grown man, married and farming." (Tale 8) It was the slave who survived in the end, the perennial theme of underdog victory running true to folk psychology.

Punishment for excelling in areas in which the slave was expected by whites to be incompetent is the subject of three tales. The slave's ability to read and write offers a good example. One collector reports, "Although he never received any education, Dynes was quick to learn. . . . Mistress Flowden called him and told him that if he was caught writing again his right arm would be cut off." (Tale 14) A similar incident contains the same motif. (Tale 2) The ex-slave probably relished these stories in which he was punished or threatened for being as smart as his white master.

Suggestion of white and Indian ancestry was a method of achieving worth by the ex-slaves. This method of achieving dignity was also cited
by Stampp (above, p. 39). One could conclude from the entire FWP Slave Narrative Collection that slave women were regularly used as sex objects by men.1 This conclusion has been challenged by recent evidence which suggests that statistics drawn solely from claims made by the ex-slaves who participated in the Federal Writers' Project may place white parentage of ex-slaves too high (above, p. 22). Whether fact or fancy, however, the suggestion or claim of miscegenation was common in the narratives. To ex-slave Douglas Dorsey's "mother and father was born a little baby boy, whose complexion was rather light. Mrs. Matair [the mistress] at once began accusing Colonel Matair as being the father of the child."

(Tale 8) Other informants claimed white ancestry. "Since Arnette worked at the 'big house' there was no alternative, and it was believed that out of the union with her master, Henry was born." (Tale 12) The claim of Indian ancestry was just as common. Rebecca Hooks, an ex-slave who was mistreated by her mistress because of her striking resemblance to the white children in the family, was excused for her bad behavior because of that "cursed Cherokee blood in her." (Tale 21) One ex-slave introduces her story with a seemingly unrelated claim, "My aunt, she was an Indian woman. She didn't want my uncle to steal, but he was full of all kind of devilment." (Tale 3) One ex-slave, Frank Berry, is very specific in his claim to be the "great grandson of Osceola, last fighting chief of the Seminole tribe."2 He goes on to relate a tale about his grandmother's capture by the Indian chief to whom she became squaw. (Tale 39)

Zora Neale Hurston observed this preoccupation with white and Indian ancestry among the blacks in the Florida community in which she grew up.

1Rawick, vol. 1, p. 55.

2Federal Writers' Project, Florida Narratives, p. 27.
She observed the conflict between the braggadocio of the black on the one hand and his self-deprecation on the other. She eventually learned, however, to consider blacks as individuals, not as a part of a race. She writes about her observations:

I began to laugh at both white and black who claimed special blessings on the basis of race. Therefore I saw no curse in being black, nor no extra favor by being white. I saw no benefit in excusing my looks by claiming to be half Indian. In fact, I boast that I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother's side was not an Indian chief. Neither did I descend from George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, or any Governor of a Southern state. I see no need to manufacture me a legend to beat the facts. . . . I neither claim Jefferson as my grandpa, nor exclaim, "Just look how that white man took advantage of my Grandma!"

The descriptions of forced sex with white masters or Indian captors and the subtle suggestions of white or Indian ancestry were in reality a method used by the ex-slave to achieve some dignity through identifying with a people he felt to be superior.

Admiration of the slave hero who overcame white authority is evident in some of the tales involving master/slave relationships. These heroes are deceitful and defiant characters. One opinion regarding the slave hero suggests that because the white way of life was beyond the reach of the black man, he rejected the white's values and ideals and sought prestige in other ways. Most slaves, then, admired the strong-willed field hand whom the overseer hesitated to punish, the habitual runaway and the slave who knew how to trick and deceive his master. These instances offered the slaves personal or vicarious triumphs. These stories offered the ex-slaves the same sense of satisfaction.

Of the several hero types in this small sample of tales, none of which is the docile stereotype, the trickster appears prominently. The trickster of Indian tales has been well-defined as one who is both

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1 Hurston, pp. 31-32.  
2 Stampp, p. 334.
creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and is duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being.¹

Unlike this trickster whose actions are unconscious, the slave trickster identified in the ex-slave narratives is conscious of socially accepted values and consciously defies them. He more closely resembles the Dahomean Legba, an African trickster whose "activity, again is calculated, highly conscious. His acts are rarely impulsive, but for the most part are directed toward the achievement of a well-defined end. He knows socially accepted values even when he behaves contrary to them."² Ex-slave Uncle Dave knew how to manipulate his young mistress. By throwing a tantrum and feigning hurt, he was rewarded with the cakes that he was "utter all de time." (Tale 20) Rebecca Hooks was equally conscious of her manipulative behavior. "She had the cunning to keep 'on the good side of the master'" who consequently protected her from the severe punishment of an angry mistress. (Tale 21) These tales recall conscious acts of defiance--slaves who knew what they wanted and knew how to get it. Other slaves were said to have beat incredible odds and made miraculous escapes to overcome a master. Uncle Dick and Uncle July used graveyard dust and lightwood splinters to escape successfully from their masters and the "nigger hounds" used solely to track down runaways. (Tale 25) Another slave was said to have made an incredible escape from his master and in the process left an ice cold pond full of fifty dead, full-blooded hounds.


²Dahomean Narrative, p. 100, quoted in Hampton, p. 56.
(Tale 23) The trickster figure has been the most commonly identified hero in Negro folklore throughout America and the West Indies. The tricksters in Negro lore have been identified as B'rer Rabbit who outsmarts the larger and stronger B'rer Fox, and Slave John who dupes his more powerful master. These characters, however, are noticeably absent from the Florida Narratives. In this collection, the trickster is a slave who consciously dupes the white authority figure. The actual trick, however, is not emphasized in these stories as much as the result of the trick, as in the case of the successful escapes.

Another hero type emerges in these tales. The female field hand who brutally kills the overseer when he angers her resembles the Badman hero. He is powerful, overcomes rivals and is secretly acclaimed as a hero because of his strength and will.

His is a world of overt rebellion. He commits acts against taboos and mores in full knowledge of what he is doing. In fact, he glories in this knowledge of revolt. He is consciously and sincerely immoral. As a social entity, he is rebelling against white man's laws.

The psychological function of the hero, particularly the trickster, has been widely recognized and discussed by folklorists, anthropologists and sociologists alike.

Psychologically, the role of the trickster seems to be that of projecting the insufficiencies of man in his universe onto a smaller creature who, in besting his larger adversaries, permits the satisfactions of an obvious identification to those who recount or listen to those tales.

And elsewhere, a similar conclusion:

His actions must represent a way of getting around taboos.

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2Ibid., p. 124.

and other restrictions without actually upsetting the order of society. In other words, Trickster functions primarily as a release valve for all of the anti-social desires repressed by the men who tell and listen to his stories.¹

The tales of the badman satisfy a similar psychological need for increased self-confidence and worth. The badman hero is a type that has replaced the trickster in northern urban areas among the poor, black males who do not achieve status in a white man's world or the matriarchal black world.² The emergence of the badman hero (or bad woman) in ex-slave tales and the scarcity of trickster tales may reflect a change in the status of the Negro in Florida in the 1930s. A parallel exists in the modern urban black lore. The Negro trickster who served a purpose in the ante and post bellum South where the Negro was forced to assume a subservient and childlike pose has been replaced by the badman. This change reflects the changed lot of the Negro.³

Another type of slave hero appears in the ex-slave tales—the Defender or Deliverer. This hero characteristically comes to rescue a person or group from danger or distress. Lincoln is identified as this type of hero.⁴ Lincoln, however, is seldom mentioned in the narratives. Instead, the ex-slaves speak of a slave whose suffering, defiance of authority or bravery relieved bad conditions for the slaves or even hastened their emancipation. When an overseer inadvertently killed a slave in a cruel device made to hold slaves while they were being whipped, the master discontinued its use. (Tale 15) Two other tales relate episodes that elicit such respect


³Ibid., p. 127.

for the slaves that they were eventually freed. Mrs. Lincoln is said to have observed the whipping of a pregnant slave in Richmond and reported the incident to the President. (Tale 8) A field hand who reportedly killed her overseer brought similar respect. These two incidents, according to the ex-slave narrators, caused Lincoln to eventually free the slaves. (Tale 30) Another slave claimed to have delivered personally many slaves to freedom by transporting them to one of the stations along the Underground Railroad. (Tale 26) The slave deliverer as well as the slave trickster and badman were heroes worthy of the ex-slaves' admiration.

Personalizing the narratives served the double function of fostering credibility in an event and contributing to the status of the narrator. A division into four categories of the thirty tales reviewed in this chapter reveals the narrator's tendency to personalize his stories:

- Personal Experience: 11
- Informant Knew Subject: 10
- Informant Implies Knowledge of Subject: 7
- Hearsay (Rumor): 2

Although it is impossible to prove or disprove the truth of the informants' claims of personal experience or knowledge of a person or event in all of the tales, it is plausible that the presentation of immediate testimonies is the conscious or unconscious result of an attempt to foster credibility in the event. The ex-slave narrators give frequent assurances that their testimony is credible. One ex-slave says, "Dis is what I know, not what somebody else say." (Tale 24) A similar description begins, "I remember this and can just see the dogs running around now." (Tale 25) This phenomenon supports the observations of other folklorists who have dealt in detail with personalizing memorates to convince listeners of their re-
Another division of the narratives demonstrates that the tales were told in such a way to benefit the narrator.

**TABLE 2**

**TYPES OF TALES PERSONALIZED**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Master</th>
<th>Slave</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bests</td>
<td>SLave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal experience</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation or rumor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cannot be determined)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reducing these figures to percentages shows that 32 percent of the tales in which the master dominated the slave were told as personal experiences. In contrast, 45 percent of the tales in which the slave outsmarted his master were told as personal experiences. It is possible that a slave bested by his master seldom lived to tell about it, thus accounting for the smaller percentage of first person stories of this type. It is also possible that the person in which a story was told was a direct function of how favorable it would be to the narrator, and it is this fact which accounts for the difference in percentages.

The tales which the ex-slaves remembered, or at least those they chose to tell, were primarily those stories which contributed to their self-esteem. The preponderance of stories about cruelty inflicted by the master on the slave are not as self-deprecating as they appear. The

1Degh and Vazsonyi, 225-239 passim.
slave's endurance, in spite of the odds, was something in which he could take pride. The tales of punishment administered to slaves who dared to act white were a subtle way of saying that the slaves were, in reality, equal to their white masters. The suggestion or claim of white or Indian ancestry was another method of identifying with the "superior" race. The cunning slave, defiant badman and brave slave hero who appear in these reminiscences were a source of pride for the ex-slaves who talked about them. Finally, personalizing these events and people contributed to the ex-slaves' status. For those who told and those who listened, these memorates were a source of dignity and a method of conquering self-debasement. The function of these tales as ego-builders must be a primary consideration when evaluating their accuracy.
CHAPTER III

THE TALES AS HISTORY: THE CIVIL WAR AND EMANCIPATION

Although the subject of slavery dominated the memories of the ex-slaves, a large portion of the narratives record historical events. Incidents of the Civil War and freedom were the most frequently reported events. An examination of this historical material suggests that, like the tales of slavery, what survived and was told by the ex-slave narrators was remembered for a reason. The folk memory selected, distorted and fictionalized people and events for the purpose of boosting the narrator's ego. Consequently, a large number of these narratives are inaccurate and incomplete pictures of the Civil War and freedom.

The FWP Slave Narrative Collection has been deliberately overlooked by historians who cite enough weaknesses in the narratives to make any historian skeptical of their valid use. The advanced age of the ex-slaves when interviewed, their early age as witnesses at the time, their bitterness against the institution of slavery, their distance from the conditions of slavery, their blurred memories, internal contradictions and inconsistencies, their reliance on hearsay rather than firsthand experience, the biases of the interviewers and renditions of the life histories in inaccurate dialect are among the reasons that the FWP slave narratives have been overlooked as a source of accurate history. Recent scholars, however, have taken a more liberal view toward their use.

\footnote{Cade, p. 295; Feldstein, p. 14; Botkin, pp. xi-xii.}
A blanket indictment of the narratives is as unjustified as their indiscriminate or uncritical use. Each kind of historical document has its own particular uses for providing an understanding of the past as well as its own inherent limitations. Therefore the utility of the narratives cannot be determined a priori, but only in the context of the objectives of the researcher.¹

Another opinion supports this view:

It hardly needs emphasis here that the majority of slaves were not permitted to enter the schoolhouse. If one is ever to know about their visions, their quests, their "mind," it is obviously necessary to turn to the oral record. . . . There are innumerable difficulties in using such sources—the specialists in folklore have been writing about them for generations—yet if the question is of vital importance, as it undoubtedly is, I would suggest that historians at least peek into the plethora of books on the usefulness and meaning of folk materials.²

The present discussion is a result of the above advice. Those ex-slave tales which document the two most memorable historical events of the slave's life—the Civil War and the Emancipation—are the subject of this investigation. A description of what endured in the ex-slave's memory and the accuracy of these memories form the major portion of this discussion. The conclusion suggests the function of these particular stories that withstood seventy-one years to survive in the ex-slave's oral tradition. The subject is categorized under two subheadings. Nine tales relate the slave's conception of the Civil War. Fifteen tales relate the momentous event of his emancipation.

I Remember Well When de War Wuz On

The slaves had no media to fix in their minds the dates of the Civil War. Instead, they related its beginnings to other events. Ex-slave Rev. Squires Jackson remembers the start of the Civil War "with the laying of the Atlantic Cable by the 'Great Eastern' being nineteen years

¹Yetman, pp. 3-4. ²Osofsky, p. 45.
of age at the time." (Tale 31) He correctly remembers his age and associates the war with the building of a transatlantic cable. Cyrus W. Field made unsuccessful attempts to build such a cable in 1856, 1858 and 1865. For a fourth attempt to lay a cable in the Atlantic, Field rented the British steamship Great Eastern, the largest ship afloat. Success finally came on July 27, 1866, at the close of the Civil War.¹ Ninety-six years old at the time of his interview, Squires correctly associates the war with the cable, but errs by five years on the date. Another ex-slave recalls the approximate date of the war's beginning and associates it with other events and people.

"I kin just remember leavin' Norfolk. My daddy an' mammy an' de odder chillun b'long to a Frenchman named Pinckney. Musta be'n 'bout 1860 or 1861, w'en Mahstah 'gins to worry 'bout what gwine happen effen war come an' de Vahginny slave-owners git beat."

The interviewer continued the story:

Antagonism aroused by the Dred Scott decision, and the further irritation caused by the Fugitive Slave law were kicking up plenty of trouble under Buchanan's administration. South Carolina had already seceded. Major Anderson was keeping the Union flag flying at Fort Sumter, but latest reports said that there was no immediate danger of hostilities when Pierre Pinckney, thrifty Virginia planter of French extraction, went into conference with his neighbors and decided to move while the getting out was still good. (Tale 32)

Ex-slave Uncle Dave renders an accurate account of events which occurred prior to or during the year following his birth. The Fugitive Slave Law and the Dred Scott Decision of the Supreme Court were instituted prior to the war. Both aroused the antagonism of abolitionists. The Fugitive Slave Law was a compromise measure passed to appease the South. The law was enacted September 18, 1850, under Millard Fillmore's administration as a result of the South's demand for more effective federal legislation.

regarding fugitive slaves. However, the severity of the measure actually increased the number of abolitionists and personal liberty laws in a number of Northern states. These state laws were among the grievances officially referred to by South Carolina in December 1860, as justification for its secession. The Dred Scott Decision was announced by the Supreme Court on March 6, 1857, shortly after the inauguration of President Buchanan. The decision declared that no Negro, free or slave, could claim United States citizenship, and that slavery could not legally be kept out of the territories.1 Under Buchanan’s administration which preceded Lincoln’s, the slavery issue was very much alive. Buchanan’s support of the Dred Scott Decision suggested Southern favoritism and created more hostilities.2 Uncle Dave correctly assesses the political air of the time and also remembers incidents and people. By the beginning of the Civil War on April 12, 1861, South Carolina and six other states had already seceded. Maj. Robert Anderson of the United States Army had kept the Union flag flying at Fort Sumter from December 26, 1860, through April 14, 1861. At this time the fort was surrendered and evacuated, never again to be in Union control until April 14, 1865.3 Although time has telescoped several events, distorting the distance which separated them, eighty-year-old Dave, who was a child of eight at the war’s end in 1865, has related with accuracy events which preceded and led to the Civil War.


2 World Book Encyclopedia, s.v. "Buchanan, James."

slave from Robertsville, South Carolina, mentions President Davis twice. He begins his tale with an unsubstantiated claim that his master, Jack Davis, is a nephew of Jefferson Davis. He ends his description of Sherman's Georgia and South Carolina campaign with the acknowledged rumor that "when Jefferson Davis was captured he was disguised in women's clothes." (Tale 33) William Sherman was repeating a belief that had its beginnings in an official report made by Col. Benjamin D. Pritchard, U.S.A., shortly after Davis' capture. He reported:

On the afternoon of the 23rd [after Davis' capture on the 11th] I received orders from the War Department, through General Miles, directing me to procure the disguise worn by Davis at the time of his capture, and proceed to Washington and report to the Secretary of War. Accordingly, I went over to the steamer Clyde and received from Mrs. Davis a lady's water proof cloak, or robe, and which Mrs. Davis had said was worn by Davis as a disguise at the time of his capture, and which was identified by the men who saw it on him at the time.

On the morning following the balance of the disguise was procured, which consisted of a shawl, which was identified and admitted to be the one by Mrs. Davis.¹

Recent scholarship has convincingly presented a case which reduces these "facts" to unsubstantiated and vicious rumor.² It is obvious, however, why such a story remained in the memories of the ex-slaves. The wealth of scholarship on the subject attests to the tenacity of oral tradition.

Two stories involving Lincoln appear to be apocryphal. William Sherman tells of a rumored verbal duel between Lincoln and Davis:

It was rumored that Abraham Lincoln said to Jefferson Davis, "Work the slaves until they are about twenty-five or thirty years of age, then liberate them." Davis replied: "I'll never do it, before I will, I'll wade knee deep in blood." The result was that in 1861, the Civil War, that


struggle which was to mark the final emancipation of the slaves began. (Tale 34)

A similar reply is attributed to President Lincoln on the occasion of an alleged visit to the southern plantation of Dr. Jameson, master of ex-slave Salena Taswell:

"I knowed de time when Ab'ram Linkum come to de plantation. He came through there on the train and stopped over night onces. He was known by Dr. Jameson and he came to Ferry [Georgia] to see about the food for the soldiers.

"We all had a part in entertainin' him. Some shined his shoes, some cooked for him, an' I waited on de table, I can't forget that. . . . You be sure we knewed he was our friend and we catched what he had t' say. Now he said this: (I never forget that 'slong as I live) 'If they free de people, I'll bring you back into the Union' (To Dr. Jameson) 'If you don't free your slaves, I'll "whip" you back into the Union. Before I'd allow my wife an children to be sold as slaves, Ill wade in blood and water up to my neck." (Tale 35)

From the viewpoint of these two ex-slaves, the major issue of the Civil War was slavery, and the fate of the war depended on what the South did about slavery. Ex-slave Sherman states Lincoln's policy on slavery. According to a rumor Lincoln believed the slaves should be worked for twenty-five or thirty years and then liberated. Lincoln's early slavery policy included two plans—gradual compensated emancipation and colonization of freed Negroes. Neither of these plans supports this ex-slave's interpretation. Salena Taswell recalls a Lincoln policy which was much firmer: the South's return to the Union hinged only on the freedom of the slaves. This view of the war obviously brought her some satisfaction, but historical fact does not support this view of the war. In an April 12, 1865, conversation with a prominent Confederate citizen, W. C. Bibb, Lincoln reported that he was personally willing to establish as the only requirement for peace the South's annulment of their ordinance of secession

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with a slavery policy of gradual or compensated emancipation. The threat to "whip" the South back into the Union is not recorded in the biographies of Lincoln, but evidence does not render it entirely implausible. Abolitionist Wendell Phillips demanded the destruction of the South's ruling classes with the call, "You must whip them." In some deleted paragraphs of a July 1862, *Atlantic Monthly* article about Lincoln, novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne described a visit with Abraham Lincoln. On this occasion President Lincoln was presented with a gift of a beautiful and long whip by a deputation of several people who thought the use for which it was intended was obvious. Lincoln, however, accepted the whip as an emblem of peace, not punishment. The replies to Lincoln's threats, attributed to both Jefferson Davis and a Dr. Jameson, are traditional expressions rendered elsewhere as "... war with blood up to the horse's bridle."

Historic fact does not fully support either of these conversations, one reported by ex-slave William Sherman as rumor and the other by ex-slave Selena Taswell as personal experience. Other evidence in the tale suggests the story about Lincoln's visit to the Jameson plantation, which is not recorded in the Lincoln biographies, is merely wish-fulfillment.

Salena tells more about Lincoln's visit:

"He came through after Freedom and went to the 'Sheds' first. I couldn't 'imagine what was going on, but that came runnin' to tell me and what a time we had.

"Linkum went to the smoke house and opened the door and said 'Help yourselves, take what you need; cook yourselves a good meal and we sho' had a celebration!" (Tale 35)

The smokehouse which stored an array of smoked pork, which any slave would have been glad to have, was traditionally kept under lock and key and therefore out of his reach. Ensuring that the corn and pork would

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1Ibid., 4: 239.  
2Ibid., 1: 558.  
3Ibid., 2: 321, 324.  
4Ibid., 1: 558.
last a year was the job of the overseer. One master wrote directions to his overseer who "must himself keep the keys of the cribs, smokehouse and all other buildings in which any property belonging to me is stored and must himself see to the giving out of food." These instructions were apparently widespread. "He [the overseer] was to stay constantly in the fields while the hands were at work, to search the cabins periodically for weapons or stolen goods, and to guard the keys to the corn crib, smoke house and stable."\(^1\) The improbability of a visit from Lincoln, the traditional form of the conversation, the date placed at "after Freedom"\(^2\) and the smokehouse incident suggest that the story is merely wish fulfillment, despite the authenticity that two absent witnesses might have provided: "If my mother and father were living, they'd tell y' the same thing." (Tale 35) The tale is a fabulate, not a memorate.

Although these ex-slaves recalled little of Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln, they frequently referred to particular officers and regiments. Two ex-slaves who had been in bondage in Georgia and South Carolina recalled the rivalry between Gen. Joseph Wheeler of the Confederacy and Gen. William Sherman of the Union.

When the Civil War came he remembers hearing one night "Sherman is coming." It was said that Wheeler's Cavalry of the Confederates was always "running and fighting." Lane (the master) had moved the family to Macon, Georgia, and they lived on a place called "Dunlap's Hill." That night four preachers were preaching "Fellow soldiers, the enemy is just here to Golden's brook sixteen miles away and you may be carried into judgment; prepare to meet your God." While they were preaching, bombs began to fly because Wheeler's

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\(^1\) Fogel and Engerman, p. 111; Southern Cultivator, 18 (1860), p. 305, quoted by Stampp, p. 149.

\(^2\) Freedom for the slaves came at various times, but usually was associated with the presence of Union troops in the area or with the war's end which was hastened by Lee's surrender on April 9, 1865. Five days later on April 14, Lincoln was shot. He could not have gone anywhere "after Freedom."
Cavalry was only six miles away instead of sixteen miles; . . .

He says he imagines the voice of Sherman now, saying: "Tell Wheeler to go on to South Carolina; we will mow it down with grape shot and plow it in with bombshell." (Tale 36)

Another ex-slave recalls a visit by both "the Wheeler boys" and "Sherman's soldiers" to her plantation home on the South Carolina and Georgia border.

"The Wheeler boys came through there ahead of Sherman's Army. Now, we thought the Wheeler boys were Confederates. . . . Well, they came an' tol' our boss that Sherman's soldiers were coming and we better hide all our food and valuable things, for they'd take everything they wanted." (Tale 37)

The Yanks, however, "never stopped for nothin'." They took the food, burned some outbuildings and left with some of the slaves who wanted to go. (Tale 37) The rivalry between Generals Wheeler and Sherman is well-documented in military reports. Wheeler and Sherman pursued one another through Georgia and South Carolina and opposed one another in battles and skirmishes throughout the two states.1 Wheeler appears to have offered no real threat to the determined and organized army of Sherman. Wheeler's reputation for "running and fighting" was spread by Union officers. In one report made by a major in the Union Army, it was stated, ". . . the men [Federals] marched right into town loading and firing as they advanced: bands playing, flags waving, and Mr. Wheeler and his Rebels, of course, running almost without firing a shot."2 One military report places them east of Macon, Georgia, near the Ocmulgee River where Wheeler's men were temporarily repelled by the Federals. This location coincides with that cited by ex-slave Samuel Andrews (above, Tale 36, p.


2Major Connolly, no title, quoted in Gibson, p. 56.
The Dunlap's Hill which he mentions was in fact the site of the Dunlap house which stood at the site of the present Ocmulgee National Monument. At this location two battles were fought during the Civil War—July 30, 1864, and November 20, 1864, the latter, five days after Sherman made his exodus from Atlanta. ¹ Ex-slave Andrews also gives credence to his story by mentioning another location, Golden's Brook. Either a misunderstanding by the collector or informant transformed Bolingbrooke on the Central of Georgia Railroad about fifteen miles north of Macon, to Golden's Brook. ² Wheeler and Sherman's clashes, pillaging and escapes throughout South Carolina are also well-documented. Both generals earned such a reputation for wreaking destruction and committing outrages on the countryside, that Wheeler's presence frequently instilled as much fear as did the presence of Sherman's men. ³ Both ex-slaves, then aged twelve and fourteen respectively, recall a famous rivalry that belongs to oral tradition as well as to written history.

Specific officers and regiments also survive in the memories of the ex-slaves. Rev. Squires Jackson gives an abbreviated and unclear account of his escape which was precipitated by the beginning of the war. Using the North Star, which was the fugitive's traditional guide, ⁴ and the Indian instinct inherited from his Indian grandmother, Jackson successfully escaped from Jacksonville to Tallahassee, Florida, after a number of personal encounters he claims to have had with army officers and

¹Spencer B. King, Emeritus Professor of History, Mercer University, to author, 2 May 1975. The presence of Sherman's Army between the Oconee and Ocmulgee Rivers in Georgia on November 18, 1864, is noted in E. B. and Barbara Long's The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac, 1861-1865 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1971), p. 598.

²King to author. ³Gibson, pp. 84-86.

⁴Stampp, p. 120.
He finally reached Lake City. Later reporting to General Scott, he was informed that he was to act as orderly until further ordered. On Saturday morning, February 20, 1861, General Scott called him to his tent and said "Squire, I have just had you appraised for $1000 and you are to report to Col. Guist in Alachua County for service immediately." That very night he ran away to Wellborn where the Federals were camping. (Tale 31)

The brevity of this account makes its verification a difficult task. The only facts which can definitely be substantiated are the place-names. Wellborn and Lake City are in two adjacent counties approximately fifteen miles apart. They are located in North Central Florida north of Alachua County, which is also mentioned in the account.1 The remainder of the information is vague. Soldiers of Florida records a number of officers by the name of Scott, although none prior to April of 1861 and none of them generals.2 The officers by the name of Scott who appear in Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders did not serve in Florida.3 Ex-slave Jackson claims to have had this encounter on February 20, 1861. Gen. Winfield Scott served as General Chief of the United States Army until 1861.4 Although his decisions were as far reaching as Florida, General Scott did not participate in Florida service.5 Perhaps Jackson, however, used General Scott's famous name to add import-

5William Watson Davis, pp. 104-05.
tance to the story. Jackson probably added the detail of his appraisal at one thousand dollars for the same reason. Boasting of their worth gave some slaves a sense of worth.\(^1\) In Florida where Jackson was a slave, field hands were selling for seven and eight hundred dollars in 1840 and for less than one thousand dollars in the 1850s.\(^2\) Since Squires, a field hand, was age twenty in 1861 and sold into slavery earlier when prices were lower, he might have been thinking that one thousand dollars was an exceptional price to be paid for a slave. Colonel Guist is even more elusive than General Scott. He does not appear in the Official Records or Soldiers of Florida. Apparently, shortly after this episode, Jackson escaped to Tallahassee.

In the silent hours of the evening he stole away to Tallahassee, thoroughly convinced that War wasn't the place for him. While in the horse shed make-shift hospital, a white soldier asked one of the wounded colored soldiers to what regiment he belonged; the negro replied "54th Regiment Massachusetts." (Tale 31)

The Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment, which Squires Jackson claims to have encountered, was the first all-Negro regiment organized by the Union. The regiment was organized to prove the Negro's equality in fighting. Mustered in May 1863, they fought their first battle on July 18, 1863, at Fort Wagner, South Carolina, two years after Jackson claims to have met them. Although the regiment participated in the Florida Campaign, participating in expeditions to Jacksonville and Lake City in 1864, they were not in Tallahassee.\(^3\) Because the regiment was celebrated in a

\(^1\) Stampp, p. 339.


famous song, "Give Us a Flag,"\(^1\) it is possible that Jackson heard the
song and incorporated the facts as personal experience. The vagueness
which makes documentation difficult, if not impossible, and the contra-
dictory evidence suggest that Squires Jackson wove a story around a
geographical location with which he was familiar, embellishing it with
the names of famous personages about whom he had heard. Recounting the
personal story about his escape, his meeting with specific officers and
especially his encounter with a black regiment most likely provided Squires
with a sense of importance.

Other ex-slaves were more accurate in their recollections of the
soldiers and officers they met. Willis Williams, a "town slave" in
Tallahassee, Florida, recalls the northern armies who brought them
good news of freedom and maintained order in the city after the war's
end.

*When the news of freedom came to Thomas Heyward's
town slaves it was brought by McCook's Cavalry...* McCoook's Cavalry did not remain in Tallahassee very
long and was replaced by a colored company; the 99th In-
fantry. Their duty was to maintain order within the
town...

The southern soldiers who returned after the war ap-
peared to receive their defeat as good "sports" and not
as much friction between the races existed as would be im-
aged. (Tale 41)

A letter from Brig. Gen. Edward McCook reports that he, accompanied
by five staff officers and a cavalry, arrived in Tallahassee on May 10,
1865, and raised the flag over the state-house the same day.\(^2\) Verifi-
cation of the Ninety-ninth Infantry's presence in the Tallahassee area
comes from a July 17, 1865, letter addressed to the commanding officer

\(^1\)Irwin Silber, comp. and ed., *Songs of the Civil War* (New York:

of the 99th United States Colored Infantry.\textsuperscript{1}

When freedom came, ex-slave Harriet Gresham remained in Barnwell, South Carolina, where she met her husband, Gaylord Jeanette of the Thirty-fifth Regiment in the Union Army. Harriet describes the military wedding which followed a whirlwind courtship that began on the citadel green, where the soldiers stationed there held their dress parade:

Music was furnished by the military band which offered many patriotic numbers that awakened in the newly freed Negroes that had long been dead—patriotism. Harriet recalls snatches of one of these songs to which she danced when she was 20 years of age; It is as follows:

Don't you see the lightening flashing in the cane brakes,  
Looks like we gonna have a storm  
Although you're mistaken it's the Yankee soldiers  
Going to fight for Uncle Sam.  
Old master was a colonel in the Rebel army  
Just before he had to run away;  
Look out the battle is a-falling.  
The darkies gonna occupy the land.

Harriet believes the two officers who tendered congratulations shortly after her marriage to have been Generals Bates and Beecher. This was an added thrill to her. (Tale 42)

Attempts to track down Gaylord Jeanette, a Negro Union soldier who belonged to Company I, Thirty-fifth Regiment, have proven fruitless. However, the names of the two Union Army officers, Generals Bates and Beecher, appear in several sources which list Union Army commanding officers. Possibly these two could be the Col. Delevan Bates of the Thirtieth Regiment, United States Colored Cavalry and Col. James C. Beecher of the Thirty-fifth Regiment, United States Colored Cavalry.\textsuperscript{2} Colonel Bates served under the Department of North Carolina from January through August, 1865,

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., Series 1, vol. 49, pt. 2, serial no. 104, pp. 1083-84.

and was on duty at various points throughout the state during that period. Colonel Beecher's Thirty-fifth Regiment was ordered to Charleston, South Carolina, in March of 1865 and remained on duty there and at various points in the Department of the South until June 1866. These facts do not offer positive proof that these two were in Barnswell, South Carolina, after the war's end; they do establish that both were in the vicinity, one in North Carolina and South Carolina, and could possibly be the officers that exslave Harriett fondly remembers. The song that Harriett recalls is identified as "Babylon is Fallen," a song written in 1863 by northern abolitionist, Henry C. Work. It was inspired by the decision to promote recruitment of Negro troops in the Union Army and was written as a sequel to the more popular "Kingdom Coming," which was reportedly sung by Negro troops as they marched into Richmond. The part which the Negro played in the war dominated the memory of this exslave who fondly reports her personal encounter with Negro soldiers and the songs they sang.

Sherman's march through Georgia and the Carolinas was retold from the viewpoint of exslave William Sherman who claimed to have run away with his brother to join the Yankees. The story began when Sherman was on his famous march. The "Yankees" had made such sweeping advances until they were in Robertsville, South Carolina, about five miles from "Black Swamp." He and his cousin who lived on the Davis' plantation slipped off and wended their way to all of the surrounding plantations spreading the news that the Yankees were in Robertsville and exhorting them to follow and join them. Soon the two had a following of about five hundred slaves. After marching about five miles they reached a bridge that spanned the Savannah River, a point that the "Yankees" held.


3Silber, pp. 306-07.
After surprising the Yankee soldiers, William's cousin assured them that "we's just friends," and they were consequently admitted to the camp which had been established around the pontoon bridge they had constructed while en route from Savannah, which they had already taken. The Union officers gave the slaves a choice of accompanying them to Blis Creek Fort near Barnswell or returning to Savannah, which was already occupied by Union troops. William made the wiser choice and returned to Savannah. Unfortunately, most of his comrades who proceeded to Barnswell were slain by bushwhackers. In this February of 1865, Savannah was cold, but warmed by the smoke of a recent battle:

Savannah was filled with smoke the aftermath of a great battle. Lying in the "Broad River" between Beaufort, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia were two Union gun boats, the "Wabash" and Man O War, which had taken part in the battle that resulted in the capture of Savannah. Everything was now peaceful again. Savannah was now a Union city. Many of the slaves were joining the Union army. Those slaves who joined were trained about two days and then sent to the front. (Tale 33)

William renders a detailed account of Sherman's march so that it can easily be compared with the written records. The location of Slack Swamp five miles from Robertsville, South Carolina, coincides with the information recorded on the Civil War map. 1 Three divisions of Sherman's Army as well as the cavalry came through Robertsville en route from Savannah to Columbia. 2 William mentions the pontoon bridge which spanned the Savannah River, just crossed by the Yankees. This detail is more vividly described by Major-General Henry W. Slocum in his report of the march through Georgia and South Carolina:

> On the arrival of the left-wing at Sister's Ferry on the Savannah, instead of finding as was anticipated, a river a

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1 Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 1891-1895, s.v. "South Carolina."

2 Johnson and Duel, 4: 676.
few yards in width which could be easily crossed, they found a broad expanse of water which was utterly impassable. . . . We were delayed several days in vain efforts to effect a crossing, and were finally compelled to await the falling of the waters. Our pontoon bridge was finally constructed and the crossing commenced. Each regiment as it entered gave three cheers. The men seemed to realize that at last they had set foot on the state which had done more than all the others to bring upon the country the horrors of Civil War.¹

Although it can not be definitely established that William and five hundred slaves joined Sherman's army on their march, in his directives for his march through the Southeast, Sherman specified that "able-bodied Negroes were to be allowed to join the marching columns provided the work they seemed capable of doing would compensate for the food they would eat."² William's companions supposedly went north with the Union Army to Barnswell where those few who survived bushwhackers helped win an heroic battle against the Confederates. Although one division of Sherman's army did bypass Robertsville and go to Barnswell, His Creek Fort eluded the historians who recorded Sherman's march. Luckily, William went to Savannah, which had just been captured. Reports date the occupation of Savannah by Union troops on December 21, 1864. There they remained a month before their march toward the Savannah River into South Carolina.³ William's account places him in Savannah in February 1862, after leaving Sherman's troops on the Savannah River. William errs by three years, but February coincides with the month that General Sherman was in the area. This error is possibly a typographical mistake or a misunderstanding on the collector's part, since William accurately dates the end of the war in May of 1865. William also claims that the Wabash and Man O' War were in the Broad River between Savannah, Georgia, and Beaufort, South Carolina. Although the

¹"Sherman's March From Savannah to Bentonville," in Johnson and Aucl, 4: 684.
²Gibson, p. 27.
³Slocum, in Johnson and Aucl, 4: 681, 683.
Broad River is not shown in this area in the Civil War or contemporary atlases, Gustavus Smith reports his movements during Sherman's march to the sea on a road "leading to the Broad River landing."¹ The landing appears to be near Beaufort, South Carolina, and matches the geographical information given by ex-slave William Sherman. Written records report that the U.S.S. Wabash was at Fort Fisher, North Carolina, on December 25, 1864.² The ship remained there through January 15, 1865, when Fort Fisher was captured. The Wabash was then ordered to report to Virginia. On January 25, 1865, the ship was ordered from Hampton Roads, Virginia to Boston.³ Although the Wabash was frequently off the southeastern coast at various times during the war, the official naval records show the unlikelihood of the ship's location off the South Carolina coast in February 1865. The man-of-war which William says he sighted is simply a type and not the name of a warship. William also recalls that the slaves in this recently occupied city were willingly joining the Union Army. Sherman did issue orders to encourage the "young and able-bodied negroes . . . to enlist as soldiers in the service of the United States."⁴ William adds a sad footnote to this order: "Due to lack of training they were soon killed." (Tale 33) The abundance of supporting evidence suggests the plausibility of most of ex-slave Sherman's story. The personal conversation with Union soldiers, especially the familiarity expressed in the phrase, "We's just friends,"

¹Smith, in Johnson and Duel, 4: 668.


suggests, however, that Sherman, in folk tale tradition, utilized his literary license to add or emphasize details that assured his importance in the story.

Except for Confederate General "Fighting Joe" Wheeler, the Confederate soldiers are noticeably absent from the tales of the ex-slaves. It was the Yankee officers and soldiers who dominated the Civil War reminiscences of the ex-slaves. Not all of the ex-slaves recall specific soldiers, officers and regiments. But almost all of them remember the "Yanks." One ex-slave takes the credit for helping to save her "missus." After helping the mistress bury the food to protect it from the Yankees, the slaves were gathered together in preparation for the attack.

Our missus had called us together and told us what to say. "Now you beg for me. If they ask you whether I've been good to you, you tell 'em 'yes'. If they ask you if we give you meat, you say 'yes'. Now, de res' didn't git any meat, but I did, 'cause I worked in the house. So I didn't tell a lie, for I did git meat.

So we begged, an' we say, "Our missus is good. Don't you kill her. Don't you take our meat away from us. Don't you hurt her. Don't you burn her house down. So they burned the stable and some of the other buildings, but they did not burn the house nor hurt us any. We saw the rest of the Yanks comin'. They never stopped for nothin'. Their horses would jump the worn rail fences and they come 'cross fields 'n everything. They bound our missus upstairs so she couldn't gay away, then they came to the sheds and we begged and begged for her. Then they loosed her, but they took some of us for refugees and some of the slaves went off with them of their own will. They took all the things that were buried all the hams and everything they wanted. But they did not burn the house and our missus was saved." (Tale 37)

Although the northern soldiers were kind to slave child Levi Lee and gave him food and several pieces of money, they were not so kind to the good master. As Randall tells the story, "The northern soldiers took all the food they could get their hands on and took possession of the cattle and horses and mules." (Tale 43) Another ex-slave recalls how he also was rewarded with money by the northern soldiers camped around the Georgia plantation when he brought them "bucket after bucket" of spring
water. With the money he bought his first pair of shoes. (Tale 44) The soldiers departed leaving the Georgia countryside devastated.

The soldiers finally departed, with all but five of the Overtree slaves joyously trooping behind them. Before leaving, however, they tore up the railroad and its station, burning the ties and heating the rails until red then twisting them around tree-trunks. Wheat fields were trampled by their horses, and devastation left on all sides. (Tale 44)

The Yankees, however, were also capable of kindness. The northern soldiers who brought news of emancipation to house slave Anna Scott and her beloved mistress, Mrs. Dove, extended an unexpected kindness to the South Carolina mistress.

When the chief officer of the soldiers came to the home of her mistress, she says, he demanded entrance in a gruff voice. Then he saw a ring upon Mrs. Dove's finger and asked: "Where did you get this?" When told that the ring belonged to her husband, who was dead, the officer turned to his soldiers and told them that they should "get back; she's alright!" (Tale 45)

If this story that was passed down to ex-slave Randall Lee by his grandfather is to be believed, the northern soldiers did not exclude the slaves from their depredations. Suspiciously similar to a well-circulated folktale (Motif N531, Treasure Discovered Through Dream, Type 834), the tale is told as a memorate.

Levi Lee . . . had a dream while the northern soldiers were encamped round about the place. He dreamed that a pot of money was buried in a certain place; the person who showed it to him told him to go dig for it on the first rainy night. He kept the dream a secret and on the first rainy night he went, dug, and found the pot of money right where his dream had told him it would be. He took the pot of money to his cabin and told no one anything about it. He hid it as securely as possible, but when the soldiers were searching for gold and silver money they did not leave the Negro's cabin out of the search. When they found the money they thought Levi's master had given him the money to hide as they took it from him. Levi mourned a long time about the loss of his money and often told his grandchildren that he would have been well fixed when freedom came if he had not been robbed of his money. (Tale 38)

A traditional folktale motif has been personalized and localized.

1 Thompson, 5: 113.
The devastation that Sherman heaped upon the Georgia and South Carolina countryside is as well-documented in written history as it is in the oral tradition of the ex-slaves. The devastation was not the result of excesses by a few soldiers. Destruction of the countryside was an order from Sherman. In preparation for their march through Georgia, the army was ordered to "forge liberally on the country during the march." Although they were permitted to gather corn, meat, vegetables, cornmeal and whatever they needed near their route, the soldiers were ordered not to "enter the dwellings of the inhabitants, or commit any trespass." On the South Carolina plantation where Randall Lee lived, the soldiers also took the cattle, horses and mules (above, p. 69). Again, the soldiers were following their orders: "As for horses, mules, wagons, etc., belonging to the inhabitants, the cavalry and artillery may appropriate freely and without limit, discriminating, however, between the rich, who are usually hostile, and the poor or industrious, who are usually neutral or friendly." Destruction of buildings, including mills, houses, cotton gins, etc., was also ordered by Sherman to be administered according to the hostility of the inhabitants. According to ex-slave Riviana Boynton, however, in addition to taking the food and burning the outbuildings, the soldiers tied up the mistress, although sparing her life (above, p. 69). Although Sherman ordered discriminating seizure and devastation of property, there were many reported instances of wanton destruction and outrages. A large portion of these outrages were committed by "bummers," the lawless element of the army. Although they were a part of the army, they went on long, unauthorized forays of their own. South Carolina, which was the home of several of these ex-slaves, was to receive an extra measure of destruction.

1 Bowman and Irwin, pp. 265-66.  
2 Gibson, pp. 39-40.  
3 Ibid., p. 78.
from the northern soldiers who blamed her for starting the war.¹ Destruction of the railroad was detailed by an ex-slave who remembers how the ties were heated and then twisted around the tree trunks (above, p. 70). Destroying the railroad in this fashion was found to be an effective and irreversible technique which the northern soldiers utilized throughout the Georgia and South Carolina countryside.

This section should be in command of an efficient officer who will see that the work is not slighted. Unless closely watched, soldiers will content themselves with simply bending the rails around trees. This should never be permitted. ... No rail should be regarded as properly treated until it has assumed the shape of a doughnut, it must not only be bent but twisted.²

The Yankee soldiers remained vivid in the memories of the ex-slaves. But the destruction they wreaked on the countryside was not as impressive as the good news they brought to the slaves.

The Greatest Event in the Life of a Slave

The Emancipation Proclamation technically freed the slaves in the Confederate slave-holding states on January 1, 1863.³ The actual emancipation of the slaves spanned a period of several years. The majority of the ex-slaves who talked about freedom associated it with the presence of Union soldiers in the area. Yankee soldiers delivered the news of freedom to ten of the fourteen slaves. When the Union soldiers visited the South Carolina plantation on which Harriett Gresham lived, they found it in perfect order. "The slaves were going about their tasks as if nothing unusual had happened. It was necessary to summon them from the fields to give them the message of their freedom." (Tale 42) Dr. Miller knew that his slaves would soon be free. The Union soldiers confirmed this fact. To Randall Lee's mother, he said:

¹Ibid., pp. 44-45. ²Slocum, in Johnson and Buel, 4: 685.
"Delhia you'll soon be as free as I am." She said, "Sho' nuf massy?" and he answered, "You sure will." Nothing more was said to any of the slaves until Sherman's army came through notifying the slaves they were free. (Tale 43)"

Two ex-slaves in Florida recalled a black Union soldier who brought them the good news. Claude Wilson, who was an eight-year-old slave at the end of the war, recalled that a "colored Union soldier" driving a six-mule team, rode up to the house and delivered the news of freedom directly to his mother. (Tale 46) Sometimes the master delivered the news to his slaves, but only when it became evident that the war was over. A slave near Lake City, Florida, Mary Minus Biddle remembers a Negro mounted on a mule who delivered the news to her master. Master Jamison promptly related the news to Mary's family. (Tale 47) Negro soldiers did, in fact, free some Florida slaves. A small number of Florida slaves were rescued by a small force of Negro troops who were stationed in Jacksonville. On March 7, 1865, they left Jacksonville, penetrated the interior of Florida and rescued ninety-one Negroes. 2 Margrett Nickerson recalls that "de big gun fiahed on a Sattidy" and Master "Carr read de free papers to us on Sunday." (Tale 54) To the majority of slaves, then, the end of slavery coincided with the end of the Civil War.

Few ex-slaves recalled the date of their emancipation. Those who did recalled dates from a month to a year after Confederate General Lee's surrender on April 9, 1865. The news of Lee's surrender spread, and other Confederate forces then surrendered. 3 In Beaufort, South Carolina, the war reportedly ended on May 15, 1865. (Tale 33) In one Mississippi county

1 See also Tales 41 and 44-50.


3 World Book Encyclopedia, s.v. "Civil War."
a slave recalled January 1, 1866, as the day the "declaration of freedom" came. These slaves were supposedly not freed by their cruel master until a government marshal enforced the law and set the slaves free on May 8, 1866. (Tale 51) Louis Napoleon, a slave near Tallahassee, Florida, remembers being told by other slaves that the sound of a gun would indicate the presence of the Yankees and freedom for the slaves. It was in the middle of the day in May when the cotton and corn were being planted that the guns were heard. (Tale 52) Another slave in that same Florida county pinpointed the day to a Saturday. (Tale 54) These last two tales lend themselves to documentation. Union Brig. Gen. Edward McCook entered Tallahassee on Wednesday, May 10, 1865, to receive the surrender of Confederate troops and property. On May 12, a Friday, he received the surrender of Fort Saint Marks at which time a national salute was fired. On May 20th, a Saturday, McCook returned to Tallahassee and raised the Union flag over the capitol. One witness reported that two hundred guns fired in celebration. Perhaps these are the big guns that were heard by the slaves on a Saturday which notified them of their freedom.

According to the ex-slaves, reaction to freedom varied. Generally, however, the slaves were happy and their masters were distressed. Mary Minus Biddie describes the impending emancipation: "The greatest event in the life of a slave was about to occur, and the most sorrowful in the life of a master." (Tale 47) Some of the masters willingly complied with the orders to free the slaves. Ex-slave Max Mullen remembers that his master "showed no resistance and he was not harmed." (Tale 49) When the Yankees arrived in Tallahassee, the slaves from surrounding plantations

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went to greet them. On their return to Dr. Randolph's plantation, "Dr. Randolph told them that they were free, and if they wanted to go away, they could, and if not, they could remain with him and he would give them half of what was raised on the farms." (Tale 52) Other masters made a similar offer to their departing slaves. Master Jamison offered to give his ex-slaves one-third of what they raised if they decided to stay. (Tale 47) Master Carr promised to give his slaves "de net proceeds." (Tale 54) When the crop was harvested, however, Master Jamison did not do as he had promised. So Mary enlisted the aid of a Union captain in nearby Newmansville, Florida. He sent a letter via Mary to Mr. Jamison ordering him to fulfill his promise or be put in jail. (Tale 47) Master Carr's slaves who expected to get the net proceeds of the corn and cotton crops did not get what they expected. Chuckling as she related this story, ex-slave Margrett Nickerson said the net proceeds "turned out to be de co'n and cotton stalks." (Tale 54) This memorate is reminiscent of the traditional rhyme popular among Negroes:

We raise de wheat, dey gib us de corn;
We sift de meal, dey gib us de huss;
We peel de meat, dey gib us de skin;
And dat's de way dey take us in.  

Some of the masters' reactions to losing their slaves reflected anger as well as sorrow. These were the masters who were most likely to resist the order to free their slaves. Mary Minus Middie's master did not take the news very well:

Mr. Jamison had never before been heard to curse, but this was one day that he let go a torrent of words that are unworthy to appear in print. He then broke down and cried like a slave who was being lashed by his cruel master. He called Mary's mother and father, Phyllis and Sandy, "I ain't got no more to do with you, you are free," he said. (Tale 47)

Sam and Louisa Everett, whose master is remembered as exceptionally cruel and perverted, describe their master's reaction to losing his property:

All the slaves gathered in front of the "Big House" to be told that they were free for the time being. They had heard whisperings of the War but did not understand the meaning of it all. Now "Big Jim" [the master] stood weeping on the piazza and cursing the fate that had been so cruel to him by robbing him of all his "niggers." He inquired if any wanted to remain until all the crops were harvested and when no one consented to do so, he flew into a rage; seizing his pistol, he began firing into the crowd of frightened Negroes. Some were killed outright and others were maimed for life. Finally he was prevailed upon to stop. He then attempted to take his own life.

Finally, a few frightened slaves offered to remain with "Big Jim" another year. Before these slaves were allowed to leave, it was necessary for the Union soldiers to make another visit to the plantation. (Tale 50)

One other master supposedly resisted as strongly as "Big Jim." The cruel Master Gay arrived at a solution to keep his slaves:

He barred all visitors from his plantation and insisted that his overseers see to carrying out this detail. They did with such efficiency that it was not until May 9, [1866] when the government finally learned of the condition and sent a marshall to the plantation, that freedom came to Gay's slaves. (Tale 51)

Among some Florida whites, hopes were still high as late as the Fall of 1865 for the restoration of slavery. In light of this expectation, strong prolonged resistance to freeing the slaves is plausible.

The slaves had quite a different reaction. All nine who expressed a specific opinion about their attitude or the attitude of the slaves in general described the reaction as a happy one. Their joy was not related to attitudes toward their masters. Seven expressed a positive attitude about their masters, one described a kind master but a mean mistress, and the remaining one expressed no opinion about his master. Some of the slaves celebrated. Ambrose Douglass recalled:

"I guess we musta celebrated 'Mancipation about twelve

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1Richardson, pp. 22-23.
times in Harnett County [North Carolina]. Every time a bunch of Northern soldiers would come through they would tell us we was free and we'd begin celebratin'. Before we would get through somebody else would tell us to go back to work, and we would go." (Tale 48)

Harriett Gresham remembered the religious effect of emancipation, whether the slaves left or remained on the plantation: "One and all they remembered to thank God for their freedom. They immediately began to hold meetings, singing soul stirring spirituals." (Tale 42) On a Georgia plantation, Mack Mullen recalls, "The slaves on hearing this good news of freedom burst out in song and praises to God; it was a gala day. No work was done for a week; the time was spent in celebrating." (Tale 49) Willis Williams remembered "that the slaves were jubilant, but not boastful." (Tale 41)

After the initial joy at their new conditions, the slaves had to make a decision about what to do with their freedom. Most were given a choice of leaving or staying. Master Carr made the choice clear: "He asked dem whut would stay wid him to step off on de right and dem dat wuz leavin' to step off on de left." (Tale 54) The reactions to this choice were varied, and the decision to go or stay mattered only if the master was exceptionally cruel, as in the case of "Big Jim" or Master Gay. (Tales 50 and 51) Some of the slaves left immediately, like the family of Claude Wilson whose master was good but whose mistress was mean. Claude details events of the day when a Negro Union soldier drove up in a wagon:

He helped move the household furniture from their cabin into the wagon. The family then got in, some in the seat with the driver, and others in back of the wagon with the furniture. When the driver pulled off he said to Claude's mother who was sitting on the seat with him, "Doan you know you is free now?" "Yeh Sir," she answered, "I been praying for dis a long time." "Come on den les go," he answered, and drove off.

Claude remembers that the Union soldier took them from Lake City, Florida, "through Olustee, then Sanderson, Maclenny and finally Baldwin." Eventu-
ally they reached Jacksonville where they lived in one of the homes abandoned by a white family. They remained in this city receiving government rations and peddling gingerbread to the Negro soldiers who "appeared to rule the town." (Tale 46) This account appears to be fairly accurate.

The route which they followed to get to Jacksonville coincides with that on the maps. The close of the war found principally Negro troops there. A number of residents fled from the city after the fourth federal occupation of that city on January 13, 1864. When they returned to the city after formal surrender of the Florida troops on May 20, 1865, they were depressed to find that many of their houses were occupied by United States officers and troops--many of them Negro. Claude, though, remembers that many of the homes were occupied by former slaves, a detail that is not included in Davis’s *A History of Early Jacksonville*. Perhaps this detail added by Claude reflects an element of wish fulfillment. Reports reveal that there was a large influx of ex-slaves expecting to be fed and clothed by the government, an influx which caused the citizens and authorities of Jacksonville some concern. Claude adds further authenticity to his story by identifying street names, all but one of which appear on an early map of the city. There are other accounts of slaves leaving, but none as

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2 T. Frederick Davis, *A History of Early Jacksonville* (Jacksonville, Florida: Board of Trade, 1911), pp. 150, 133, 149.

3 Ibid., p. 150; Richardson, pp. 13-18.

4 Claude states that his family lived on a house on Liberty Street near Adams. The map verifies this location. He had "heard" that "colored people had taken possession of one of the large white churches of the day, located on Hogan Street, between Ashley and Church Streets." Davis’s map does not show an Ashley Street or a church at this location (n. p.). Although federal troops did establish a hospital in some of the largest houses and churches, Davis does not report that "the colored people" took them over (pp. 33-34).
detailed as Claude Wilson's story of his family's journey to Jacksonville. Although the slaves on the Georgia plantation where Lindsey Moore was living had a good master, the slaves were delighted to see the northern soldiers. The Yankees finally left, "with all but five of the Overtree slaves joyously trooping behind them." (Tale 44) Mary Minus Biddle and her family left "the good old boss to seek a new abode in other parts," but only after he failed to fulfill his promise to give them a portion of the crops they had raised. (Tale 47) There did seem to be a desire among the slaves to test their new freedom by leaving home, a reaction which caused considerable concern from authorities.¹

Many of the slaves chose to remain with their former masters. For some of them relations with their ex-masters remained essentially the same. Master Randolph's offer to provide the ex-slaves with a portion of the crops if they remained with him elicited a variety of responses:

Some of them left, however, some remained, having no place to go, they decided it was best to remain until the crops came off thus earning enough to help them in their new venture in home seeking. Those slaves who were too old and not physically able to work, remained on the plantation and were cared for by Dr. Randolph until their death. (Tale 52)

Even though Master Snellings' two hundred slaves heartily enjoyed celebrating their freedom, most refused to leave him because he was considered a good master. (Tale 49) Ambrose Douglass, age twenty-one when the war ended, did not leave because he did not want to take a risk. He says,"Some of us wanted to jine up with the army, but didn't know who was goin' to win and didn't take no chances." (Tale 48) Whether the slaves remained with their masters or left them, the ex-slaves appeared to have enjoyed their mental and physical freedom.

The economic conditions in which the ex-slaves found themselves

¹Richardson, pp. 13-20 passim.
in the 1930s had little influence on their recollections of freedom. Fortunately the collectors of these slave narratives included a brief statement of the ex-slaves' living or economic conditions at the time the tales were collected. Although a number of the forty-five ex-slaves whose narratives were used in this discussion were living on old-age pensions or state welfare allowances, only one recalled that he was better off as a slave. "Never did I think I'd come to this," lamented ex-slave Mack Mullen, who felt that he had more dignity under slavery than free and "on relief." Yet even he recalled being joyful when he was freed. The economic conditions in which the ex-slaves found themselves had little to do with their opinions of freedom, and neither did their attitudes toward their masters. The physical scars of slavery are evident. The psychological burden of slavery is not so easily measured. Ex-slave Rev. Squires Jackson, who remembered a master who was kind, articulately summed up the feelings of many ex-slaves: "Even the best masters in slavery couldn't be as good as the worst person in freedom. Ooh, God, it is good to be free, and I am thankful."

The Meaning of the Tales

Like the tales about the master/slave relationship, the tales which the ex-slaves chose to recount about the Civil War endured for a reason. Like the slavery tales, these memorates of the war and freedom served as a means of combating self-debasement and increasing self-esteem. The type of tales told suggests a number of ways they could have contributed to the slave's sense of self-worth.

To the ex-slaves, the Civil War was fought solely over the slavery

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1 Federal Writers' Project, Florida Narratives, p. 240.
2 Ibid., p. 182.
issue. Economic and political factors were not a part of their oral history. In one tale, ex-slave William Sherman recalled a rumor that Abraham Lincoln issued to Jefferson Davis an ultimatum to free the slaves. (Tale 34) Ex-slave Salena Taswell claimed to have witnessed a similar conversation in which President Lincoln gave the same ultimatum to her master. (Tale 35) Ex-slave Uncle Dave recalled the beginning of the Civil War "w' en Mahstah 'gins to worry 'bout what gwine happen effen war come an' de Vahginny slave-owners git beat." (Tale 32) To Uncle Dave the war was fought between northern abolitionists and southern slaveholders. Only one informant suggested the war had other causes. Edward Lycurgas, a free Negro, recalled a Civil War tale told to him by his father, a Negro, English blockade runner.

"We English folks was atter de money. Whose War? The North and South's, of course. I hear my captain say many a time as how they was playin' ball wid de poor niggers. One side says 'You can't keep your niggers lessen you pay em and treat em like other folks.' Mind you dat wasn't de rale reason, they was mad at de South but it was one of de ways dey could be hurted- to free de niggers." (Tale 40)

His view of the part Negroes played in the war closely coincides with Lincoln's motivation for freeing the slaves. Although Lincoln did have compassion for the plight of the slaves, the major purpose of his Emancipation Proclamation was to shorten the war. "I believe it would be a club in our hands with which we could whack the rebels," Lincoln said in defense of the proclamation shortly after it was issued on January 1, 1863.¹

Predominant in the tales are memories of soldiers, officers and other important persons with whom the ex-slaves claimed to have had some association. Fourteen of the twenty-one informants recalled associations with the Union soldiers and three of these were with Sherman's men.²

In contrast, only one of the ex-slaves recalled an encounter with the Confederates. This encounter, however, was with the famous Joe Wheeler's cavalry. (Tale 37) Two ex-slaves recalled the names of three specific regiments which they remembered. (Tale 31 and 41) Four officers with whom two ex-slaves claimed to have conversed appear in two of the tales. (Tales 31 and 42) One ex-slave complimented herself with the story of a fictitious visit to her plantation by President Lincoln. (Tale 35) Significantly, the Union soldiers are predominant in these stories rather than the Confederates whose presence was probably just as prevalent on the Georgia and South Carolina countryside.

Other ex-slaves achieve status through their association with relatives or masters who had contact with Union and Confederate soldiers, officers, or in one case, Jefferson Davis. Ex-slave Uncle Dave asserts that his father was killed in the attack on Fort Sumter. (Tale 32) Official reports reveal that the battle there was a bloodless one. Not a single person was killed or seriously injured on either side.¹ One ex-slave tells a tale that his grandfather was robbed by the Union soldiers. (Tale 38) Two ex-slaves tell improbable stories of their masters' associations. Salena Taswell's master was supposedly a friend of Abraham Lincoln. (Tale 35) And ex-slave William Sherman said that his master was a nephew of Jefferson Davis. (Tale 33)

Personal and third person experiences of the Negro's participation in the Civil War are among the recollections from which the ex-slave received satisfaction. Some recalled with relish the Negro soldiers and regiments which they saw or met.² Other ex-slaves reported about the Negroes who left their masters and marched along with or joined the

¹Lee, in Johnson and Duel, 1: 79.
²See tales 31, 39, 41, 42, 46 and 47.
Union Army (Tales 32, 33, 44), what has been called the final act of resistance by the Negro. Three ex-slaves recall other ways in which they contributed to the war effort. Riviana Boynton recalled that she "used to turn the big corn sheller and sack the shelled corn for the Confederate soldiers." In addition, she saved her mistress from getting harmed by the Union soldiers. (Tale 37) One ex-slave reported that his brother earned some money by carrying provisions to the federal soldiers who camped around the plantation. (Tale 43) Ex-slave Lindsey Moore also reports earning some money by carrying buckets of water to the federal soldiers camped around the plantation. (Tale 44)

TABLE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Tales Personalized</th>
<th>Civil War</th>
<th>Freedom</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Personal experience</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation or rumor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A division of the narratives shows a large number of tales told in the first person. A conversion of these numbers to percentages shows that 50 percent of the tales about the Civil War and 71 percent of those about freedom were recounted as personal experiences. These percentages contrast sharply with the low percentage of first person stories which show the master besting his slave. Freedom, the ultimate act of the slave

besting his master, accounted for the largest percentage of first person tales. It is probable that the narrators personalized those incidents which would bring them status.

A few of the ex-slaves recalled stories in which the ex-slaves administered poetic justice to the whites who had held them in bondage or, at the very least, finally earned respect from their former owners. "Dozens of the Negro soldiers," one ex-slave recalled, "discarded their uniforms for the gaudier clothing that had belonged to their masters in former days." Additionally, some of the Negro soldiers reportedly stopped at the plantations to repay the meanest overseers by tying them backwards on a horse and forcing them to accompany the ex-slave soldiers. (Tale 39)

The detailed description of the Southern city of Jacksonville which was ruled by Negro soldiers and abandoned by whites whose homes and buildings had been taken over by ex-slaves is a picture of poetic justice. (Tale 46)

Ex-slave Willis Williams related a tale about a Negro who was in the orchestra which accompanied the black Ninety-ninth Infantry which was in charge of maintaining order in Tallahassee, Florida. An ex-slave named Singleton was the former slave of a man in Tallahassee and a member of the orchestra. What pleasure this ex-slave must have had if indeed this orchestra was invited by his former master to play in his home. (Tale 41)

These tales of reconciliation provide a hopeful note on which to conclude this discussion of the stories in which the slave ultimately bests his master.

Like the tales about slavery in Chapter Two, these historical tales about the Civil War and emancipation functioned as ego-builders. The selective folk memory recalled personal associations with soldiers, regiments and officers, a war in which the Negro played an active part, a war fought solely over slavery and the administration of poetic justice by the
ex-slaves to their former masters. The rendering of these experiences in the first person also contributed to the function of these tales as ego-builders. This function must be a primary consideration in the evaluation of oral narratives which purport to be history. Each fact must be individually evaluated, for the folk memory which selects, distorts and fictionalizes can also record details with amazing accuracy.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The memorates related by the ex-slaves reflect an oral tradition that in some cases is several generations old. Twenty-seven of the fifty-four tales are told as personal experiences. Many of the stories, however, are about events the informant could not have witnessed and people he could not have known. These tales were passed down by a process described by one collector: "Just a tot when the Civil War gave him and his people freedom, Maxwell's memories of bondage days are vivid through the experiences related by older Negroes." (Tale 10)

The ex-slaves who recounted these stories, either from personal experience or oral folk history, were not as sophisticated as those who have written about slavery and the Civil War. These stories simply told by aging black informants are no less valid, however, if the proper criteria are used for their analysis. Richard Dorson's criteria proved helpful in testing the validity of oral traditions. The identification of folklore themes grafted onto historical settings is one method that can be used to separate fact from fiction. Five specific traditional folk motifs were identified in the fifty-four tales. Four of these occurred in tales which were more sociological in nature and consequently unverifiable. Only one traditional motif is found among the historical tales. In this story, a treasure discovered by a slave through a dream is stolen by a Yankee soldier. In some cases a memorate, given the right conditions, can become codified, lose the identity of the individual teller and diffuse
among a local group of people. The opposite is true in the few examples cited above in which traditional elements have been localized and incorporated as first and third person experiences.

A cross check of multiple traditions is another criterion which can aid in the evaluation of oral history. An examination of some ex-slave narratives other than those which appear in the Florida Narratives yielded several motifs which appear to be common and perhaps unique to this type of narrative. The recurrence of motifs, such as cutting hair to disguise the mulatto house slave and the killing of the overseer, suggests the fictional nature of the tales. Here the memorate has undergone the process of "fabulation" to become the more stable fabulate.

The corroboration of a tradition from geographical landmarks is helpful in establishing the accuracy of oral narratives. An analysis of the tales indicates that the slaves were generally accurate in reporting towns, cities and other geographical landmarks. The accuracy of place names, however, does not necessarily prove the truth of a tale. It appears from the above study that at times the ex-slave narrator related a fictional event, but gave it a very specific, verifiable location with which he was familiar. This method was probably used by Squires Jackson who related a detailed account of an escape and subsequent encounter with officers and regiments. However, only the place names proved verifiable and accurate.

An allowance for personal or emotional bias also proves useful in the evaluation of oral narratives. The narrator's suffering as a slave and his economic insecurity and lingering hostility he experienced in the 1930s when these tales were collected certainly affected what he remembered and told. One ex-slave described a vivid tale about the murder of an overseer by a female slave. The fact that the narrator hated her former master
suggests that the tale was wish fulfillment rather than truth.

To these criteria should be added a consideration of how the tales function for the narrators. Although this consideration presents difficulties when one is studying oral tradition preserved in writing, apart from the narrator's actions and audience's reactions, a plausible case can be made for the social and psychological function of the tales for their tellers in the Florida Narratives. It has been observed that the slaves had to fight a persistent battle against self-debasement and for self-worth. Additional information suggests that this battle continued among blacks long after the Civil War and Emancipation freed the slaves. Illuminating on this point are comments on the psychological needs of Florida blacks by anthropologist/folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, and an analysis of one family's slave tales which served as ego builders for generations after slavery.

The ex-slaves recounted memorates about slavery and the Civil War. What they recollected and chose to tell to the collectors functioned to provide them with self-esteem. The following subjects which appear frequently in the memorates contributed to achievement of dignity:

1. Endurance of cruelty;
2. Punishment for excelling in areas supposedly closed to slaves;
3. Identification with white and Indian ancestors;
4. Interpretation of slavery as the only issue of the Civil War;
5. Identification with famous persons and regiments involved in the Civil War;
6. Participation in the Civil War effort;
7. Emancipation of slaves, the ultimate victory over whites;
8. Administration of revenge or justice to former masters; and
9. Personalizing the narratives.
The function of the tales as ego-builders casts doubt on their validity as an accurate portrayal of slave life and the slave's part in the Civil War. This phenomenon is most obvious in the tales that lend themselves to precise historical documentation, exemplified in the claim of a post-emancipation visit by President Lincoln to a Southern plantation where he personally opened the smokehouse for the ex-slaves. How much the tales which are more sociological in nature and therefore less subject to scientific scrutiny have altered because of their function as ego-builders can only be surmised. One such example involves the tales which tell of severe cruelty. The tales which record subtle and overt claims of Indian or white ancestry serve as another example. An understanding of the psychological need for importance, especially among blacks, along with recent evidence tending to deny that cruelty or sexual abuse was typical of slave life, suggests that what was remembered, or at least told to the collectors, was the story that would help diminish the ex-slave's feeling of inferiority. The narratives, then, are not to be viewed as a faithful and complete picture of slavery.

Nevertheless, numerous research opportunities exist for the historian, sociologist, social historian and folklorist interested in the FWP Slave Narrative Collection. More than two thousand life-histories of ex-slaves appear in this collection, all relatively unused. The narratives are perhaps least valuable for the historian. If the Florida collection is typical, then these narratives are sparsely sprinkled with verifiable historical events. However, since the preponderance of events which appear pertain to the Civil War and Emancipation, students of the Civil War as it was perceived by the slaves would find this collection a rich source of information. Criticism of this body of material as a source for historical research has been made with only a cursory glance at the narratives. An
analysis of a large sample of these narratives using Dorson's criteria for analysis of oral tradition would make it possible to separate fact from fiction. Such a study would open the way for evaluating the historical accuracy of material now still in doubt. The resolution of even small details of Civil War history would help to balance the long-time white-oriented records of this war.

For the sociologist and social historian the opportunities for research are richer. For several years the theories in two books, The Peculiar Institution and Slavery, have dominated scholarly discussions of slavery. However, recent works, such as Time on the Cross, have challenged many of the more popular and tenaciously defended theories. The collection of ex-slave narratives offers a rich testing ground for some of these theories. One particular example comes from the Florida Narratives. It has been assumed by most authorities in the field that the slave family was destroyed by the institution of slavery. A preliminary analysis of the eighty-five tales extracted from the Florida collection indicates that this supposition is erroneous. A family member was the subject of twenty-six of the eighty-five tales. There were thirty-nine references in the tales to a specific family member, including mother and father, aunt and uncle, grandmother and grandfather, cousins and children. A study of the whole life-histories, and not just the tales, would certainly provide even more useful information. The very existence of an oral tradition about family members and events in their past suggests a stronger family tie than authorities on slavery have been willing to admit. The sociologist and social historian would find the ex-slave narratives an illuminating testing ground for the corroboration or disproof of this and other conjectures.

Folklorists may join the social historians and sociologists in further
investigation of the FWP Slave Narrative Collection. As suggested in Chapter Two, the ex-slave's hero, manifested in the tales, perhaps reflected the changing status of the Negro. An in-depth study of the tales along with additional information included in the narratives might offer further insight into the psyche and sociological conditions of the ex-slave narrator of the 1930s. Results of such an analysis could serve as an illuminating model for future studies of oral tradition as a reflection of social and psychological conditions.

The oral historian, sociologist and folklorist share an interest in examining what endured in the ex-slaves' memories. The form in which they endured, however, is the province of the folklorist. He is interested in the folkloristic traits of the narratives—their traditional and formulaic nature. It was pointed out in Chapter One that the primary form which these narratives take is the memorate. Although Carl von Sydow identified and defined the memorate, its form and meaning to the folklorist continue to be the subject of much discussion. A basic problem for the folklorist is to arrive at a precise workable definition of the memorate. The manner in which the narratives in the Florida collection were recorded, however, presents an obstacle for this kind of investigation. Some of the collectors presumably attempted to preserve with accuracy the dialect and words of the informants. Ten out of the twenty-six narratives which were recorded as personal experiences of the ex-slaves appear in quotation marks in the original suggesting that they were the actual words of the speakers. However, the collectors more often took liberties with the life-histories to create artistic and interesting stories. Despite these weaknesses in the Florida collection, the narratives offer insight into this problem of definition. The definition of the memorate was the discussion of a recent study which focused on the distinction between the memorate and the fabulate, only to
conclude that the distinction not only is unclear, but perhaps unnecessary to make. A commonly accepted definition of the memorate designates it as a narrative of an actual happening which can be told in the first person as a personal experience or in the third person as an experience of a friend or relative. The memorate is to be contrasted with the fabulate which is a fictional account of an event. Unlike the memorate, the fabulate contains poetic qualities and traditional elements which make a more stable and widely diffused form. Degh and Vazsonyi concluded that the distinction is not so easily made. An analysis of the narratives in the Florida collection supports their conclusion. The detection of poetic elements in the Florida narratives which have been edited or rewritten is a difficult if not impossible task. It is evident that some qualities which might be considered poetic—repetition and figures of speech, for example—are present in both the memorates and fabulates. Whether or not these elements are the narrator's or collector's, however, cannot satisfactorily be determined. In the Florida collection both memorate and fabulate contain traditional elements. It has already been pointed out that a group of motifs, perhaps unique to the ex-slave narratives, appears to emerge in these narratives. The presence of traditional motifs in a narrative ordinarily casts doubt on its authenticity as a purely personal experience and helps establish a memorate as a fabulate. It is likely, however, that some of the motifs, such as cutting the hair of a mulatto house slave to disguise her white identity, arise from experiences common to the slaves. In these cases traditional elements cannot be used as a determining factor in distinguishing memorate from fabulate.

The Florida Narratives yield both memorate and fabulate. Some narratives can be objectively documented and the possibility exists for their

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1 Degh and Vazsonyi passim.
occurrence. Other narratives have undergone the process of "fabulation" and are fiction. The Florida tales reveal, however, that neither the presence of traditional elements nor poetic qualities can be used as the determining factor in distinguishing these two types of tales. The larger FWP Slave Narrative Collection might yield a larger number of authentically recorded personal experience stories. A study of these might contribute to an understanding of the memorate and fabulate and might yield different conclusions.

The FWP collection might also provide a rich source of material for the study of the larger matter of the relationship between history and legend. The commonly held definition of a legend states that it is a narrative based on fact which contains an intermixture of traditional materials. It is told as a true story about a person, place or event. Although the style of the legend is fragmentary, the structure seems to follow a well-recognizable pattern: an introduction which presents the credibility of the story and the characters and a conclusion which presents the essential admonition of the narrative and again names the source. A few of the tales in the Florida narratives share legend characteristics. With the exception of one tale which was identified as a rumor by the narrator, all of the tales were told as the truth. It cannot positively be determined if the belief factor was present, but the narrators give no reason to suggest otherwise in these convincingly told tales. The stories are like the legends in that they are stories of persons, places and events. Some of the tales were either the product of a gifted narrator or a long tradition, for they do have a distinct style of verbal art. Some

1 Leach, s.v. "Legend."

have traditional motifs while others contain motifs common only to slave tales. Reassurances of the story's credibility are frequently offered by the narrators. The personal experience story, or memorate, is considered a precursor of the legend. Under favorable conditions the memorate may lose the identity of the teller, become codified, diffuse among a local group of people and thus become a legend. It is possible to argue that a few of the tales in the Florida collection share enough of these characteristics to be called legends. The tales about Mrs. Lincoln viewing a slave's beating (Tale 16), two slaves killing their overseers (Tales 29 and 30), a conversation between Lincoln and Davis (Tale 34) and Jefferson Davis's capture (Tale 33) apparently enjoyed circulation among a number of ex-slaves. It is impossible to tell, however, how widely circulated the tales were. The brief report of Davis's capture in women's clothes is the only tale that can be historically documented. The rumor had its beginnings in an official although erroneous Union officer's report. It is evident, however, from the content, why the tale would be popular among the slaves and ex-slaves. The remaining four tales have not proven to be verifiable. Whether they had their basis in historical fact is impossible to tell. It is evident from the collectors' and narrators' remarks, however, that these tales were believed by the narrators, told in a few cases to validate a belief (e.g., the belief that Lincoln's action to free the slaves was due in part to the slaves themselves) and functioned to bring the narrators status.

This small collection of fifty-four tales demonstrates that there are many reasons to pass on a tale. The overriding factor in what was remembered and told by the ex-slaves appears to be how the tale functioned psychologically for the narrator. Perhaps when the recording of history

1 Brandeis, p. 162.
bears the tale telling process than another function, then the tale has a good chance of becoming a legend. Further investigation of other and more accurately recorded ex-slave narratives from the FWP Slave Narrative Collection would probably yield a number of legends or memorates that can be identified as precursors of a specific legend. A study of these could provide clarification of the definition of a legend and offer insight into the relationship between the process by which memorate becomes legend.

An examination by the folklorist of the entire life-histories in the FWP collection would prove a mammoth task but a worthwhile contribution to the identification and meaning of the folklore of the slaves and ex-slaves.
APPENDIX A: SLAVERY

Master Beats the Slave

Number 1
Margrett Nickerson
Approximate Age - 89 or 90
December 5, 1936
Jacksonville, Florida
Slave in Leon County, Florida

"Dere wuz Uncle George Bull, he could read and write and, chile, de white folks didn't lak no nigger what could read and write. Carr's wife Miss Jane useter teach us Sunday School but she did not 'low us to tech a book wid us hands. So dey useter jes take uncle George Bull and beat him fur nothin'; dey would beat him and take him to de lake and put him on a log and shov him in de lake, but he always swimmmed out. When dey didn' do dat dey would beat him tel de blood run outen him den trow him in de ditch in de field and kivver him up wid dirt, head and years and den stick a stick up at his haid. I wuz a water toter and had stood and seen um do him dat way more'n once and I stood and looked at um tel dey went 'way to de other rows and den I grabbed de dirt ofen him and he'd bresh de dirt off and say 'tank yo', git his hoe and go on back to work. Dey beat him lak dat and he didn' do a thin' to git dat sort uf treatment."

Florida Narratives
Rachel A. Austin, Collector
F. 253

Number 2
Douglas Dorsey
Age 86
January 11, 1937
Jacksonville, Florida
Slave in Suwannee County, Florida

Young Douglas had the task each morning of carrying the Matair children's books to school. Willie, a boy of eight would teach Douglas what he
learned in school, finally Douglas learned the alphabet and numbers. In some way Mrs. Matair learned that Douglas was learning to read and write. One morning after breakfast she called her son Willie to the dining room where she was seated and then sent for Douglas to come there too. She then took a quill pen the kind used at that time, and began writing the alphabet and numerals as far as ten. Holding the paper up to Douglas, she asked him if he knew what they were; he proudly answered in the affirmative, not suspecting anything. She then asked him to name the letters and numerals, which he did, she then asked him to write them, which he did. When he reached the number ten, very proud of his learning, she struck him a heavy blow across the face, saying to him "If I ever catch you making another figure anywhere I'll cut off your right arm." Naturally Douglas and also her son Willie were much surprised as each thought what had been done was quite an achievement. She then called Mariah, the cook to bring a rope and tying the two of them to the old colonial post on the front porch, she took a chair and sat between the two, whipping them on their naked backs for such a time, that for two weeks their clothes stuck to their backs on the lacerated flesh.

To ease the soreness, Willie would steal grease from the house and together they would slip into the barn and grease each other's backs.

Florida Narratives
James Johnson, Collector
Pp. 95-96

Number 3
Charlotte Martin
Age 82
August 20, 1936
Live Oak, Florida
Slave in Sixteen, Florida

Wilkerson [the master] was very cruel and held them in constant fear of him. He would not permit them to hold religious meetings or any other kinds of meetings, but they frequently met in secret to
conduct religious services. When they were caught, the "instigators" -- known or suspected -- were severely flogged. Charlotte recalls how her oldest brother was whipped to death for taking part in one of the religious ceremonies. This cruel act halted the secret religious services.

Florida Narratives
P. 166

Alfred Farrell, Collector

Number 4

Riviana Boynton
Approximate Age - 88
June 30, 1938
Miami, Florida
Slave in South Carolina

"The Uncle what I libbed with, he was awful full of all kinds of devilment. He stole sweet taters out of the bank. He called them "pot" roots and sometimes he called them "blow horts". You know they would blow up big and fat when they were roasted in the ashes.

"My uncle, he liked those blow horts mighty well, and one day, when he had some baked in the fireplace, Ole Massy Hoover, he came along and peeked in through the "hold" in de chimley wall, where the stones didn't fit too good.

"He stood there and peeked in an' saw my uncle eatin' those blow horts. He had a big long one shakin' the ashes off on it. He was blowing it to cool it off so he could eat it and he was a-sayin'

'Um! does blowhorts is mighty good eatin'. "Then Massey, he come in wid his big whip and caught him and tied him to a tree and paddled him until he blistered and then washed his sore back with strong salt water. You know they used to use salt for all kinds of sores, but it sho' did smart."

Florida Narratives
Pp. 369-70

Collector Unknown
"They had what you call "pattyrollers" who would catch you from home and 'wear you out' and send you back to your master. If a master had slaves he jes' could not rule (some of 'em wuz hard and jes' would not mind de boss), he would ask him if he wanted to go to another plantation and if he said he did, then, he would give him a pass and that pass would read: "Give this nigger hell." Of course when the "pattyrollers" or other plantation boss would read the pass he would beat him nearly to death and send him back. Of course the nigger could not read and did not know what the pass said. You see, day did not 'low no nigger to have a book or piece of paper of any kind and you know day wuz not go teach any of 'em to read."

Florida Narratives
Rachel Austin, Collector
P. 142

Mrs. Matair [the mistress] being a very cruel woman, would whip the slaves herself for any misdemeanor. Dorsey recalls an incident that is hard to obliterate from his mind, it is as follows: Dorsey's mother was called by Mrs. Matair, not hearing her, she continued with her duties, suddenly Mrs. Matair burst out in a frenzy of anger over the woman not answering. Anna explained that she did not hear her call, thereupon Mrs. Matair seized a large butcher knife and struck at Anna, attempting to ward off the blow, Anna received a long gash on
the arm that laid her up for some time. Young Douglas was a witness to this brutal treatment of his mother and he at that moment made up his mind to kill his mistress. He intended to put strychnine that was used to kill rats into her coffee that he usually served her. Fortunately freedom came and saved him of this act which would have resulted in his death.

**Florida Narratives**

James Johnson, Collector

Pp. 94-95

Number 7

Margrett Nickerson

Approximate Age - 89 or 90

December 5, 1936

Jacksonville, Florida

Slave in Leon County, Florida

"I had to tote tater vines on my haid, me and Fred'rick and de han's would be a callin fur em all over de field, but you know honey, de two us could' git to all uvum at once, so Joe Sanders /the overseer/ would hurry us up by beatin' us with stroops and sticks and run us all over de tater ridge; he cripple us both up and den we couldn' git to all uv em. At night my pa would try to fix me up cos° I had to go back nex' day. I never walked straight from dat day to dis and I have to set here in dis chair now, but I don' feel mad none now. I feels good and wants to go to he'verr- I ain' gonna tel no lie on white nor black cose taint no use."

**Florida Narratives**

Rachel A. Austin, Collector

Pp. 253-54

Number 8

Douglas Dorsey

Age 86

January 11, 1937

Jacksonville, Florida

Slave in Suwanee County, Florida

He relates another incident in regard to his mistress as follows:

To his mother and father was born a little baby boy, whose complexion
was rather light. Mrs. Matair at once began accusing Colonel Matair as being the father of the child. Naturally the colonel denied, but Mrs. Matair kept harassing him about it until he finally agreed to his wife's desire and sold the child. It was taken from its mother's breast at the age of eight months and auctioned off on the first day of January to the highest bidder. The child was bought by a Captain Ross and taken across the Suwannee River into Hamilton County. Twenty years later he was located by his family, he was a grown man, married and farming.

Florida Narratives

Number 9

With a face full of frowns, "Parson" tells of a white man persuading his mother to let him tie her to show that he was master, promising not to whip her, and she believed him. When he had placed her in a buck (hands tied on a stick so that the stick would turn her in any direction) he whipped her until the blood ran down her back.

Number 10

Just a tot when the Civil War gave him and his people freedom,

Maxwell's memories of bondage-days are vivid through the experiences
related by older Negroes. He relates the story of the plantation owner who trained his dogs to hunt escaped slaves. He had a Negro youth hide in a tree some distance away, and then he turned the pack loose to follow him. One day he released the bloodhounds too soon, and they soon overtook the boy and tore him to pieces. When the youth’s mother heard of the atrocity, she burst into tears which were only silenced by the threats of her owner to set the dogs on her.

Florida Narratives
Alfred Farrell, Collector
Pp. 218-19

Number 11
Sam and Louisa Everett
Age 86 and 90 respectively
October 8, 1936
Mulberry, Florida
Slaves in Virginia

Louisa and Sam were married in a very revolting manner. To quote the woman:

"Marse Jim called me and Sam ter him and ordered Sam to pull off his shirt— that was all the McClain niggers wore— and he said to me: 'Nor, do you think you can stand this big nigger?' He had that old bull whip flung acrost his shoulder, and Lawd, that man could hit so hard! So I jes said 'yassur, I guess so,' and tried to hide my face so I couldn't see Sam's nakedness, but he made me look at him anyhow."

"Well, he told us what we must git busy and do in his presence, and we had to do it. After that we were considered man and wife. Me and Sam was a healthy pair and had fine, big babies, so I never had another man forced on me, thank God. Sam was kind to me and I learnt to love him."

Florida Narratives
Pearl Randolph, Collector
Pp. 127-28
So great was the fear in which Gay was held that when Kemp’s mother, Arnette Young, complained to Mrs. Gay, that her husband was constantly seeking her for a mistress and threatening her with death if she did not submit, even Mrs. Gay had to advise the slaves to do as Gay demanded, saying—“My husband is a dirty man and will find some reason to kill you if you don’t.” “I can’t do a thing with him.” Since Arnette worked at the ‘big house’ there was no alternative, and it was believed that out of the union with her master, Henry was born.

Florida Narratives
L. Rebecca Baker, Collector
P. 186

In the course of years Mr. Jamison [the master] married again. His second wife was a veritable terror. She was always ready and anxious to whip a slave for the least misdemeanor. The master told Mary and her mother that before he would take the chance of them running away on account of her meanness he would leave her. As soon as he would leave the house this was a signal for his wife to start on a slave. One day, with a kettle of hot water in her hand, she chased Mary, who ran to another plantation and hid there until the good master returned. She then poured out her troubles to him. He was very indignant and remonstrated with his wife for being so cruel. She met her fate in later years; her son-in-law becoming angry at
some of her doings in regard to him shot her, which resulted in her death. Instead of mourning, everybody seemed to rejoice, for the menace to well being had been removed.

Florida Narratives
P. 35

Collector unknown

Number 14
Titus B. Bynes
Age 90
September 25, 1936
Titusville, Florida
Slave in South Carolina

When Titus was five or six years of age he was given to Plowden’s wife who groomed him for the job of houseboy. Although he never received any education, Bynes was quick to learn. He could tell the time of day and could distinguish one newspaper from another. He recalled an incident which happened when he was about eight years of age which led him to conceal his precociousness. One day while writing on the ground, he heard his mistress’ little daughter tell her mother that he was writing about water. Mistress Plowden called him and told him that if he were caught writing again his right arm would be cut off. From then on his precociousness vanished.

Florida Narratives
Pp. 52-53

Alfred Farrell, Collector

Number 15
Charles Coates
Age 108
December 3, 1936
Jacksonville, Florida
Slave in Virginia and Georgia

Charles relates an incident of a slave named Sambo who thought himself very smart and who courted the favor of the master. The neighboring slaves screamed so loudly while being whipped that Sambo
told his master that he knew how to make a contraption which, if a slave was put into while being whipped would prevent him from making a noise. The device was made of two blocks of wood cut to fit the head and could be fastened around the neck tightly. When the head was put in the upper and lower parts were clamped together around the neck so that the slave could not scream. The same effect as choking. The stomach of the victim was placed over a barrel which allowed freedom of movement. When the lash was administered and the slave wiggled, the barrel moved.

Now it so happened that Sambo was the first to be put into his own invention for a whipping. The overseer applied the lash rather heavily and Sambo was compelled to wiggle his body to relieve his feelings. In wiggling the barrel under his stomach rolled a bit straining Sambo's neck and breaking it. After Sambo died from his neck being broken the master discontinued the use of the device, as he saw the loss of property in the death of slaves.

Florida Narratives

Viola B. Muse, Collector

Number 16

Irene Coates
Approximate Age - 77
December 16, 1936
Jacksonville, Florida
Slave in Georgia

The other incident occurred in Virginia. It was upon an occasion when Mrs. Abraham Lincoln was visiting in Richmond. A woman slave-owner had one of her slaves whipped in the presence of Mrs. Lincoln. It was easily noticed that the woman was an expectant mother. Mrs. Lincoln was horrified at the situation and expressed herself as being so, saying that she was going to tell the President as soon as she
returned to the White House. Whether this incident had any bearing upon
Mr. Lincoln's actions or not, those slaves who were present and Irene
says that they all believed it to be the beginning of the President's
activities to end slavery.

Florida Narratives
Viola B. Muse, Collector
Pp. 76-77

Bill Austin
Approximate Age - over 100
Interviewed March 18, 1937
Greenwood, Florida
Slave in Georgia

Bill learned much about the operation of the store owned by his
master, Mr. Smith, with the result that when Mr. Smith left with the
Southern Army he left his wife and Bill to continue its operation. By
this time there used to be frequent stories whispered among the slaves
in the neighborhood -- and who came with their masters into the country
store -- of how this or that slave ran away, and with the white man-
power of the section engaged in war, remained at large for long periods
or escaped altogether.

These stories always interested Austin, with the result that one
morning he was absent when Mrs. Smith opened the store. He remained
away 'eight or nine days, I guess' before a friend of the Smiths found
him near Macon and threatened that he would 'half kill him' if he didn't
return immediately.

Either the threat -- or the fact that in Macon there were no
readily available foodstuffs to be eaten all day as in the store --
caused Austin to return. He was roundly berated by his mistress, but
finally forgiven by the worried woman who needed his help around the
store more than she needed the contrite promises and effusive
declarations that he would 'behave alright for the rest of his life.'

And he did behave; for several whole months. But by this time he
was 'a great big boy', and he had caught sight of a young woman who
took his fancy on his trip to Macon. She was free herself; her father
had bought her freedom with that of her mother a few years before, and
did odd jobs for the white people in the city for a livelihood. Bill
had thoughts of going back to Macon, marrying her, and bringing her
back 'to work for Missus with me.' He asked permission to go, and was
refused on the grounds that his help was too badly needed at the store.
Shortly afterward he had again disappeared.

'Missus', however, knew too much of his plans by this time, and
it was no difficult task to have him apprehended in Macon. Bill may
not have had such great objections to the apprehension, either, he
says, because by this time he had learned that the young woman in
Macon had no slightest intention to give up her freedom to join him at
Greensboro.

A relative of Mrs. Smith gave Austin a sound beating on his return;
for a time it had the desired effect, and he stayed at the store and
gave no further trouble. Mrs. Smith, however, thought of a surer plan
of keeping him in Greensboro; she called him and told him he might
have his freedom. Bill never attempted to again leave the place —
although he did not receive a cent for his work — until his master had
died, the store passed into the hands of one of Mr. Smith's sons, and
the emancipation of all the slaves was a matter of eight or ten years'
history!

Florida Narratives
Pp. 23-25

Martin Richardson, Collector
Number 18

William Sherman
Age 94
August 28, 1936
Chaseville, Florida
Slave in South Carolina

After the outbreak of the Civil War, white men called "patarollers" were posted around the various plantations to guard against runaways, and if slaves were caught off their respective plantations without permits from their masters they were severely whipped. This was not the routine for Jack Davis' slaves for he gave the "patarollers" specific orders that if any of them were caught off the plantation without a permit not to molest them but to let them proceed where they were bound. Will said that one of the slaves ran away and when he was caught his master gave him a light whipping and told him to "go on now and run away if you want to." He said the slave walked away but never attempted to run away again.

Florida Narratives
Pp. 289-90

J. M. Johnson, Collector

Number 19

Riviana Boynton
Approximate Age - 88
June 30, 1938
Miami, Florida
Slave in South Carolina

"My aunt, she was an Indian woman. She didn't want my uncle to steal, but he was just full of all kind of devilment.

"My Massy liked him, but one day he played a trick on him.

"My Uncle took sick, he was so sick that when my Massy came to see him, he asked him to pray that he should die. So Massy Hoover, he went home and wrapped himself up in a big long sheet and rapped on the door real hard.

"Uncle, he say, 'who's out there? What you want?"
"Massy, he change his voice and say, "I am Death. I hear that you
want to die, so I've come after your soul. Com with me! Get ready.
Quick I am in a hurry!"

"Oh, my sakes!" my uncle, he say, 'NO, no I aint ready yet. I aint
ready to meet you. I don't want to die.'

Florida Narratives
Collector Unknown

Slave Bests the Master

Number 20
Uncle Dave
Approximate Age - 80
July 9, 1937
Ybor City, Florida
Slave in Virginia

While there have been many instances of atrocious cruelty to slaves,
Uncle Dave believes that other cases have been unduly magnified. He says
that he was never whipped by his master, but remembers numerous chastisements at the hands of Miss Jessie, his young owner, daughter of Pierre
Pinckney.

"De young missus used to beat me a right smaht," he recalled with an
amused smile. "I b'longed to her, y'see. She was a couple o' years
younger'n me. I mind I used to be hangin' 'round de kitchen, watchin' em
cook cakes an' otha good things. W'en day be done, I'd beg for one, an'
dey take 'em off in de otha room, so's I couldn't steal any.

"Soon as de young missus be gone, I go an' kick ovah her playhouse an'
upset her toys. When she come back, she be hoppin' mad, an' staht beatin'
me.

"'Jessie,' her ma'd say, 'you'll kill Buddy, beatin' him dat way.'

"'I don't care,' she say, 'I'll beat him to death, an' git me a bettah
one.'

"I'd roll on de flo' an holler loud, an' preten' she hurt me pow'ful
bad. By'm by, when she git ovah her mad spell, she go off in da otha
room an' come back wid some o' dem good things fo' me." The old man's
eyes twinkled. "Dat be w'at I'se atter all de time," he explained.

Florida Narratives
J. A. Frost, Collector
Pp. 323-24

Number 21
Rebecca Hooks
Age 90
January 14, 1937
Lake City, Florida
Slave in Georgia

As a child Rebecca learned to ape the ways of her mistress. At first
this was considered very amusing. Whenever she had not knitted her re-
quired number of socks during the week, she simply informed them that she
had not done it because she had not wanted to - besides she was not a
"nigger." This stubbornness accompanied by hysterical tantrums continued
to cause Rebecca to receive many stiff punishments that might have been
avoided. Her master had given orders that no one was ever to whip her, so
devious methods were employed to punish her, such as marching her down the
road with hands tied behind her back, or locking her in a dark room for
several hours with only bread and water.

Rebecca resembled very much a daughter of William Lowe. The girl was
really her aunt, and very conscious of the resemblance. Both had brown
eyes and long dark hair. They were about the same height and the clothes
of the young mistress fitted Rebecca "like a glove." To offset this like-
ness, Rebecca's hair was always cut very short. Finally Rebecca rebelled
at having her hair all cut off and blankly refused to submit to the treat-
ment any longer. After this happening, the girls formed a dislike for each
other, and Rebecca was guilty of doing every mean act of which she was cap-
able to torment the white girl. Rebecca's mother aided and abetted her in
this, often telling her things to do. Rebecca did not fear the form of
punishment administered her and she had the cunning to keep "on the good side of the master" who had a fondness for her "because she was so much like the Lowes." The mistress' demand that she be sold or beaten was always turned aside with "Dear, you know the child can't help it; its that cursed Cherokee blood in her."

**Florida Narratives**

 Pearl Randolph, Collector

Pp. 174-75

Number 22

Young Winston Davis

Age 81

No date

Jacksonville, Florida

Slave in Alabama

Many slaves ran away; others were forced by their treatment to do all kinds of mean things. Some slaves would dig deep holes along the route of the "Patrollers" and their horses would fall in sometimes breaking the leg of the horse, arm or leg of the rider; some slaves took advantage of the protection their masters would give them with the overseer or other plantation owners, would do their devilment and "fly" to their masters who did not allow a man from another plantation to bother his slaves. I have known pregnant women to go ten miles to help do some devilment. My mother was a very strong woman (as I told you she helped build a railroad), and felt that she could whip any ordinary man, would not get a passport unless she felt like it; once when caught on another plantation without a passport, she had all of us with her, made all of the children run, but wouldn't run herself - somehow she went upstream, one of the men's horse's legs was broken and she told him 'come and get me' but she knew the master allowed no one to come on his place to punish his slaves.

**Florida Narratives**

Rachel Austin, Collector

P. 89
Number 23

William Sherman
Age 94
August 28, 1936
Chaseville, Florida
Slave in South Carolina

On another occasion one of the Stokes' [a neighboring master] slaves ran away and he sent Steven Kittles, known as the 'dog man,' to catch the escape. (The dogs that went in pursuit of the runaway slaves were called "Nigger dogs"; they were used specifically for catching runaway slaves.) This particular slave had quite a "head start" on the dogs that were trailing him and he hid among some floating logs in a large pond; the dogs trailed him to the pond and began howling, indicating that they were approaching their prey. They entered the pond to get their victim who was securely hidden from sight; they disapeared and the next seen of them was their dead bodies floating upon the water of the pond; they had been killed by the escape. They were full-blooded hounds, such as were used in hunting escaped slaves and were about fifty in number. The slave made his escape and was never seen again. Will relates that it was very cold and that he does'nt understand how the slave could stand the icy waters of the pond, but evidently he did survive it.

Florida Narratives
P. 292

Number 24

Margrett Nickerson
Approximate Age - 89 or 90
December 5, 1936
Jacksonville, Florida
Slave in Leon County, Florida

Some uv de slaves ran away, lots uv um. Some would be cot and when dey ketched em dey put bells on em; fust dey would put a iron ban' 'round dey neck and anuder one 'round de waist and rivet um together
down de back; de bell would hang on de ban' round de neck so dat it would ring when de slave walked and den dey wouldn't git 'way. Some uv dem wore dese bells three and four mont'h and when dey time wuz up dey would take em off 'em. Jack Overstreet, George Bull, John Green, Ruben Golder, Jim Bradley and hos' uv others wore dem bells. Dis is whut I know, not whut somebody else say. I seen dis myself En missus, when de big gun fiahed, de runnerway slaves come out de woods from all directions. We wuz in de field when it fiahed, but I 'members dey wuz all very glad.

Florida Narratives
Rachel A. Austin, Collector

Number 25
Samuel Simeon Andrews (Parson)
Age 85
Interviewed October 27, 1936
Jacksonville, Florida
Slave in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and Texas

Asked about his remembrance or knowledge of the slaves' belief in magic and spells he said: "I remember this and can just see the dogs running around now. My brother's brother, "Uncle Dick" and "Uncle July" swore they would not work longer for masters; so they ran away and lived in the woods. In winter they would put cotton seed in the fields to rot for fertilizer and lay in it for warmth. They would kill hogs and slip the meat to some slave to cook for food. When their owners looked for them, "Bob Amos" who raised "nigger hounds" (hounds raised solely to track Negro slaves) was summoned and the dogs located them and surrounded them in their hide-out; one went one way and one the other and escaped in the swamps; they would run until they came to a fence—each kept some "graveyard dust and a few lightwood splinters" with which
they smoked their feet and jumped the fence and the dogs turned back
and could track no further. Thus, they stayed in the woods until
freedom, when they came out and worked for pay. Now, you know
"Uncle Dick" just died a few years ago in Sparta, Georgia.

"It was 'cause he [the master] used to let me go around in the
day and night so much that I came to be the one who carried the runnin' away slaves over the river. It was funny the way I started it, too.

"I didn't have no idea of ever gettin' mixed up in any sort of business like that until one special night. I hadn't even thought of rowing across the river myself."

"But one night I had gone on another plantation 'courtin,' and the old woman whose house I went to told me she had a real pretty girl there who wanted to go across the river and would I take her? I was scared and backed out in a hurry. But then I saw the girl, and she was such a pretty little thing, brown-skinned and kinda rosy, and looking as scared as I was feelin', an it wasn't long before I was listenin' to the old woman tell me where to take her and where to leave her on the other side."

"I didn't have nerve enough to do it that night, though, and I told them to wait for me until tomorrow night. All the next day I kept seeing Mister Tabb [the master] laying a rawhide across my back, or
shootin' me, and kept seeing that scared little brown girl back at the house, lookin' at me with her big eyes and asking me if I wouldn't just row her across to Ripley. Me and Mr. Tabb lost, and soon as dust settled that night, I was at the old lady's house."

"I don't know how I ever rowed the boat across the river the current was strong and I was trembling. I couldn't see a thing there in the dark, but I felt that girl's eyes. We didn't dare to whisper, so I couldn't tell her how sure I was that Mr. Tabb or some of the others owners would 'tear me up' when they found out what I had done. I just knew they would find out."

"I was worried, too, about where to put her out of the boat. I couldn't ride her across the river all night, and I didn't know a thing about the other side. I had heard a lot about it from other slaves but I thought it was just about like Mason County, with slaves and masters, overseers and rawhides; and so, I just knew that if I pulled the boat up and went to asking people where to take her I would get a beating or get killed."

"I don't know whether it seemed like a long time or a short time, now - it's so long ago; I know it was a long time rowing there in the cold and worryin'. But it was short, too, 'cause as soon as I did get on the other side the big-eyed, brown-skin girl would be gone. Well, pretty soon I saw a tall light and I remembered what the old lady had told me about looking for that light and rowing to it. I did; and when I got up to it, two men reached down and grabbed her; I started tremblin' all over again, and prayin'. Then, one of the men took my arm and I just felt down inside of me that the Lord had got ready for me. 'You hungry, Boy?' is what he asked me, and if he hadn't been holdin' me I
think I would have fell backwards into the river."

"That was my first trip; it took me a long time to get over my
scared feelin', but I finally did, and I soon found myself goin' back
across the river, with two and three people, and sometimes a whole boat-
load. I got so I used to make three and four trips a month.

"What did my passengers look like? I can't tell you any more about
it than you can, and you wasn't there. After that first girl -- no, I
never did see her again -- I never saw my passengers. It would have to
be the 'black nights' of the moon when I would carry them, and I would
meet 'em out in the open or in a house without a single light. The only
way I knew who they were was to ask them; 'What you say?' And they would
answer, 'Menare.' I don't know what that word meant-- it came from the
Bible. I only know that that was the password I used, and all of them
that I took over told it to me before I took them.

"I guess you wonder what I did with them after I got them over the
river. Well, there in Ripley was a man named Mr. Rankins; I think the
rest of his name was John. He had a regular station there on his place
for escaping slaves. You see, Ohio was a free state and once they got
over the river from Kentucky or Virginia, Mr. Rankins could strut them
all around town, and nobody would bother 'em. The only reason we used
to land 'em quietly at night was so that whoever brought 'em could go
back for more, and because we had to be careful that none of the owners
had followed us. Every once in a while they would follow a boat and
catch their slaves back. Sometimes they would shoot at whoever was
trying to save the poor devils.

"Mr. Rankins had a regular 'station' for the slaves. He had a big
lighthouse in his yard, about thirty feet high and he kept it burnin'
all night. It always meant freedom for a slave if he could get to this
light.

"Sometimes Mr. Rankins would have twenty or thirty slaves that had run away on his place at the time. It must have cost him a whole lot to keep them and feed 'em, but I think some of his friends helped him.

"Those who wanted to stay around that part of Ohio could stay, but didn't any of 'em do it, because there was too much danger that you would be walking along free one night, feel a hand over your mouth, and be back across the river and in slavery again in the morning. And nobody in the world ever got a chance to know as much misery as a slave that had escaped and been caught.

"So a whole lot of 'em went on North to other parts of Ohio, or to New York, Chicago or Canada; Canada was popular then because all of the slaves thought it was the last gate before he got all the way inside of heaven. I don't think there was much chance for a slave to make a living in Canada, but didn't any of 'em come back. They seem like they rather starve up there in the cold than to be back in slavery.

The Army soon started taking a lot of 'em, too. They could enlist in the Union army and get wages, more food than they ever had, and have all the little gals wavin' at 'em when they passed. Them blue uniforms was a nice change, too.

"No, I never got anything from a single one of the people I carried over the river to freedom. I didn't want anything; after I had made a few trips I got to like it, and even though I could have been free any night myself, I figgered I wasn't gettin' along so bad so I would stay on Mr. Tabb's place and help the others get free. I did it for four years.

"I don't know to this day how he never knew what I was doing; I used to take some awful chances, and he knew I must have been up to something; I wouldn't do much work in the day, would never be in my
house at night, and when he would happen to visit the plantation where
I had said I was goin' I wouldn't be there. Sometimes I think he did
know and wanted me to get the slaves away that way so he wouldn't have
to cause hard feelins' by freein' 'em.

"I think Mr. Tabb used to talk a lot to Mr. John Fee; Mr. Fee was
a man who lived in Kentucky, but Lord! how that man hated slavery! He
used to always tell us (we never let our owners see us listenin' to him,
though) that God didn't intend for some men to be free and some men be in
slavery. He used to talk to the owners, too, when they would listen to
him, but mostly they hated the sight of John Fee.

"In the night, though, he was a different man, for every slave who
came through his place going across the river he had a good word, some-
thing to eat and some kind of rags, too, if it was cold. He always knew
just what to tell you to do if anything went wrong, and sometimes I think
he kept slaves there on his place 'till they could be rowed across the
river. Helped us a lot.

"I almost ran the business in the ground after I had been carrying
the slaves across for nearly four years. It was in 1863, and one night
I carried about twelve on the same night. Somebody must have seen us,
because they set out after me as soon as I stepped out of the boat
back on the Kentucky side; from that time on they were after me. Some-
times they would almost catch me; I had to run away from Mr. Tabb's
plantation and live in the fields and in the woods. I didn't know what
a bed was from one week to another. I would sleep in a cornfield to-
night, or in the branches of a tree tomorrow night, and buried in a haypile
the next night; the River, where I had carried so many across myself,
was no good to me; it was watched too close.

"Finally, I saw that I could never do any more good in Mason County,
so I decided to take my freedom, too. I had a wife by this time, and one night we quietly slipped across and headed for Mr. Rankin's bell and light. It looked like we had to go almost to China to get across that river; I could hear the bell and see the light on Mr. Rankin's place, but the harder I rowed, the farther away it got, and I knew if I didn't make it I'd get killed. But finally, I pulled up by the lighthouse, and went on to my freedom -- just a few months before all of the slaves got their's."

*Florida Narratives*  
Martin Richardson, Collector  
Pp. 148-54

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Willis Dukes  
Age 83  
January 20, 1937  
Madison, Florida  
Slave in Georgia

Willis remembers the time when a slave on the plantation escaped and went north to live. This man managed to communicate with his family somehow, and it was whispered about that he was "living very high" and actually saving money with which to buy his family. He was even going to school. This fired all the slaves with an ambition to go north and this made them more than usually interested in the outcome of the war between the states. He was too young to fully understand the meaning of freedom but wanted very much to go away to some place where he could earn enough money to buy his mother a real silk dress. He confided this information to her and she was very proud of him but gave him a good spanking for fear he expressed this desire for freedom to his young master or mistress.

*Florida Narratives*  
Pearl Randolph, Collector  
Pp. 121-22
"Parson" describes himself as being very frisky as a boy and states that he did but very little work and got but very few whippings. Twice he ran away to escape being whipped and hid in asparagus beds in Sparta, Georgia until nightfall; when he returned the master would not whip him because he was apprehensive that he might run away again and be stolen by poorer whites and thus cause trouble. The richer whites, he relates, were afraid of the poorer whites; if the latter were made angry they would round up the owners' sheep and turn them loose into their cotton fields and the sheep would eat the cotton, row by row.

Florida Narratives  Rachel A. Austin, Collector
P. 13

"One day when an old woman was plowing in the field, an overseer came by and reprimanded her for being so slow—she gave him some back talk, he took out a long closely woven whip and lashed her severely. The woman became sore and took her hoe and chopped him right across his head, and child you should have seen how she chopped this man to a bloody death."

Florida Narratives  L. Rebecca Baker, Collector
P. 185
Two incidents which she [Irene] considers caused respect for slaves by their masters and finally the Emancipation by Abraham Lincoln she tells in this order.

The first event tells of a young, strong healthy Negro woman who knew her work and did it well. "She would grab up two bags of guana (fertilizer) and tote 'em at one time," said Irene, and was never found shirking her work. The overseer on the plantation, was very hard on the slaves and practiced striking them across the back with a whip when he wanted to spur them on to do more work.

Irene says, one day a crowd of women were hoeing in the field and the overseer rode along and struck one of the women across the back with the whip, and the one nearest her spoke and said that if he ever struck her like that, it would be the day he or she would die. The overseer heard the remark and the first opportunity he got, he rode by the woman and struck her with the whip and started to ride on. The woman was hoeing at the time, she whirled around, struck the overseer on his head with the hoe, knocking him from his horse, she then pounced upon him and chopped his head off. She went mad for a few seconds and proceeded to chop and mutilate his body; that done to her satisfaction, she then killed his horse. She then calmly went to tell the master of the murder, saying "I've done killed de overseer." The master replied- "Do you mean to say you've killed the overseer?" she answered yes, and that she had killed the horse also. Without hesitating, the master pointing to one of his small cabins on the plantation said- "You see
that house over there?" she answered yes— at the same time looking—
"Well said he, take all your belongings and move into that house and you are free from this day and if the mistress wants you to do any-
thing for her, do it if you want to." Irene related with much warmth the effect that incident had upon the future treatment of the slaves.

_Florida Narratives_  
_Pp. 75-76_  
Viola B. Muse, Collector
APPENDIX B: THE CIVIL WAR

The War

Number 31  Rev. Squires Jackson
            Age 96
            September 11, 1937
            Jacksonville, Florida
            Slave in Jacksonville, Florida

He remembers the start of the Civil War with the laying of the Atlantic Cable by the "Great Eastern" being nineteen years of age at the time. Hearing threats of the War which was about to begin, he ran away with his brother to Lake City, many times hiding in trees and groves from the posse that was looking for him. At night he would cover up his face and body with Spanish moss to sleep. One night he hid in a tree near a creek, overslept himself, in the morning a group of white women fishing near the creek saw him and ran to tell the men, fortunately however he escaped.

After four days of wearied travelling being guided by the north star and the Indian instinct inherited from his Indian grandmother, he finally reached Lake City. Later reporting to General Scott, he was informed that he was to act as orderly until further ordered. On Saturday morning, February 20, 1861, General Scott called him to his tent and said "Squire; "I have just had you appraised for $1000 and you are to report to Col. Guist in Alachua County for service immediately." That very night he ran away to Wellborn where the Federals were camping. There in a horse stable were wounded colored soldiers stretched out on the filthy ground. The sight of these wounded men and the feeble medical attention given them by the Federals was so repulsive to him, that he decided that he didn't want to join
the Federal Army. In the silent hours of the evening he stole away to Tallahassee, thoroughly convinced that War wasn't the place for him. While in the horse shed make-shift hospital, a white soldier asked one of the wounded colored soldiers to what regiment he belonged, the negro replied "54th Regiment, Massachusetts.

Florida Narratives

Number 32

"I wasn't born in Florida, but I been here so long I reckon hit 'bout de same thing. I kin jes remember leavin' Norfolk. My daddy an' mammy an' de odder chillun b'long to a Frenchman named Pinckney. Musta be'n 'bout 1860 or 1861, w'en Mahstah 'gins to worry 'bout what gwine happen effen war come an' de Vahginny slave-owners git beat."

He proceeded slowly, and in language almost unintelligible at times, as he talked, smoked and chewed, all at the same time; but here, the reporter realized, were all the elements of a true story that needed only notebook and typewriter to transform it into readable form.

Antagonism aroused by the Dred Scott decision, and the further irritation caused by the Fugitive Slave law were kicking up plenty of trouble during Buchanan's administration. South Carolina had already seceded. Major Anderson was keeping the Union flag flying at Fort Sumter, but latest reports said that there was no immediate danger of hostilities when Pierre Pinckney, thrifty Virginia planter of French extraction, went into conference with his neighbors and decided to move while the getting-out was still good.

With as little publicity as possible, they arranged the disposal of
their real estate. No need to sell their slaves and livestock; they would need both in the new location. If they could manage to get to Charleston, they reasoned, surely they could arrange for a boat to St. Augustine. The Indians might be troublesome there, but by settling near the fort they should be reasonably safe.

Before the caravan of oxcarts and heavy wagons came within sight of the old seaport town, it became evident that they had better keep to the woods. Union soldiers, although still inactive, might at any time decide to confiscate their belongings, so they pushed on to the southward.

Long weeks dragged by before they finally reached St. Augustine. War talk, and the possibility of attack by sea again caused them to change their plans. Pooling their money, they chartered a boat and embarked for Key West. Surely they would be safe that far south. One of their Virginia neighbors, Fielding A. Browne, had settled there thirty years before. Taking advantage of the periodic sales of salvaged goods from wrecks on the treacherous keys, he had become wealthy and was said to hold a responsible position with the city.

Everyone was in a cheerful mood as the blue outline of Key West peeped over the horizon, and all came on deck to catch a glimpse of their new home. Suddenly dismay clutched at every heart as a Federal man-of-war swung out of the harbor and steamed out to meet them. The long-feared crisis had come. They were prisoners of war.

Pinckney and his neighbors were marched into Fort Taylor. Their wives, children and slaves were allowed to settle in the city and care for themselves as best they could.

Pinckney's slaves consisted of one family, David Taylor and wife, with their family of ten pickaninnies. Colonel Montgomery, Federal recruiting officer, took advantage of the helplessness of the slave owners to sow dis-
cord among the blacks, and before many days big Dave, father of the subject of this sketch, had 'jined de Yankees' as color sergeant and had been sent north, where he was killed in the attack on Fort Sumter.

His determined and energetic 260-pound wife served Mrs. Pinckney faithfully through the war and long afterward.

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**Florida Narratives**

**J. A. Frost, Collector**

**Pp. 312-13**

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**Number 33**

**William Sherman**

**Age 94**

**August 28, 1936**

**Chaseville, Florida**

**Slave in South Carolina**

Jack Davis joined the artillery regiment of Captain Razors Company.

The war progressed, Sherman was on his famous march. The "Yankees" had made such sweeping advances until they were in Robertsville, South Carolina, about five miles from "Black Swamp." The report of gun fire and cannon could be heard from the plantation. 'Truly the Yanks are here' everybody thought. The only happy folk were the slaves, the whites were in distress. Jack Davis returned from the field of battle to his plantation. He was on a short furlough. His wife, "Missus" Davis asked him excitedly, if he thought the "Yankees" were going to win. He replied: "No, if I did I'd kill every damned nigger on the place." Will who was then a lad of nineteen was standing nearby and on hearing his master's remarks, said: "The Yankees ain't gonna kill me caus um goin to Laurel Bay" (a swamp located on the plantation.) Will says that what he really meant was that his master was not going to kill him because he intended to run off and go to the "Yankees."

That afternoon Jack Davis returned to the 'front' and that night Will told his mother, Anna Georgia, that he was going to Robertsville and join the
"Yankees." He and his cousin who lived on the Davis' plantation slipped off and wended their way to all of the surrounding plantations spreading the news that the "Yankees" were in Robertsville and exhorting them to follow and join them. Soon the two had a following of about five hundred slaves who abandoned their masters' plantations "to meet the Yankees." En masse they marched breaking down fences that obstructed their passage, carefully avoiding "Confederate pickets" who were stationed throughout the countryside. After marching about five miles they reached a bridge that spanned the Savannah River, a point that the "Yankees" held. There was a Union soldier standing guard and before he realized it, this group of five hundred slaves were upon him. Becoming cognizant that someone was upon him, he wheeled around in the darkness, with gun leveled at the approaching slaves and cried "Halt!" Will's cousin then spoke up, "Doan shoot boss we's jes friends." After recognizing who they were, they were admitted into the camp that was established around the bridge. There were about seven thousand of General Sherman's soldiers camped there, having crossed the Savannah River on a pontoon bridge that they had constructed while enroute from Green Springs Georgia, which they had taken. The guard who had let these people approach so near to him without realizing their approach was court martialed that night for being dilatory in his duties. The Federal officers told the slaves that they could go along with them or go to Savannah, a place that they had already captured. Will decided that it was best for him to go to Savannah. He left, but the majority of the slaves remained with the troops. They were enroute to Barnswell, South Carolina, to seize Ellic Creek Fort that was held by the Confederates. As the Federal troops marched ahead, they were followed by the volunteer slaves. Most of these unfortunate slaves were slain by
'bush whackers' (Confederate snipers who fired upon them from ambush.) After being killed they were decapitated and their heads placed upon posts that lined the fields so that they could be seen by other slaves to warn them of what would befall them if they attempted to escape. The battle at Eliz Creek Fort was one in which both armies displayed great heroism; most of the Federal troops that made the first attack, were killed as the Confederates seemed to be irresistible. After rushing up reinforcements, the Federals were successful in capturing it and a large number of "Rebels."

General Sherman's custom was to march ahead of his army and cut rights of way for them to pass. At this point of the war, many of the slaves were escaping from their plantations and joining the "Yankees." All of those slaves at 'Black Swamp' who did not voluntarily run away and go to the "Yankees" were now free by right of conquest of the Federals.

Will now found himself in Savannah, Georgia, after refusing to go to Barnwell, South Carolina, with the Federals. This refusal saved him from the fate of his unfortunate brothers who went. Savannah was filled with smoke, the aftermath of a great battle. Lying in the 'Broad River' between Beaufort, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia were two Union gun boats, the "Wabash" and "Man O' War", which had taken part in the battle that resulted in the capture of Savannah. Everything was now peaceful again; Savannah was now a Union city. Many of the slaves were joining the Union army. Those slaves who joined were trained about two days and then sent to the front; due to lack of training they were soon killed. The weather was cold, it was February, 1862, frost was on the ground. Will soon left Savannah for Beaufort, South Carolina which had fallen before the "Yankee" attack. Soldiers
and slaves filled the streets. The slaves were given all of the food and clothes that they could carry—confiscated goods from the 'Rebels.' After a bloody struggle in which both sides lost heavily and which lasted for about five years, the war finally ended May 15, 1865. Will was then a young man twenty-three years of age and was still in Beaufort. He says that day was a gala day. Everybody celebrated (except the Southerners). The slaves were free.

Thousands of Federal soldiers were in evidence. The Union army was victorious and 'Sherman's March' was a success. Sherman states that when Jefferson Davis was captured he was disguised in women's clothes.

It was rumored that Abraham Lincoln said to Jefferson Davis, "work the slaves until they are about twenty-five or thirty years of age, then liberate them." Davis replied: "I'll never do it, before I will, I'll wade knee deep in blood." The result was that in 1861, the Civil War, that struggle which was to mark the final emancipation of the slaves began.

Salena Taswell
Age unknown
June 30, 1938
Miami, Florida
Slave in Perry, Georgia
"Ole Dr. Jameson, he wuz my Massy. He had a plantation three miles from Perry, Georgia. I can 'member whole lots about working for them. Y' see I was growned up when peace came.

"My mother used to be a seamstress and sewed with her fingers all the time. She made the finest kind of stitches while I worked around de table or did any other kind of house work.

"I knewed de time when Ab'ram Linkum come to de plantation. He come through there on the train and stopped over night oncet. He was known by Dr. Jameson and he came to Perry to see about the food for the soldiers.

"We all had part in intertainin' him. Some shined his shoes, some cooked for him, an' I waited on de table, I can't forget that. We had chicken hash and batter cakes and dried venison that day. You be sure we knowed he was our friend and we catched what he had t' say. Now, he said this: (I never forget that 'along as I live) 'If they free de people, I'll bring you back into the Union' (To Dr. Jameson) 'If you don't free your slaves, I'll "whip" you back into the Union. Before I'd allow my wife an' children to be sold as slaves, I'll wade in blood and water up to my neck'.

"Now he said all that, if my mother and father were living, they'd tell y' the same thing. That's what Linkum said.

"He came through after Freedom and went to the 'Sheds' first. I couldn't 'magine what was going on, but that came runnin' to tell me and what a time we had.

"Linkum went to the smoke house and opened the door and said 'Help yourselves; take what you need; cook yourselves a good meal! and we sho' had a celebration!"

"The Dr. didn't care; he was lib'ral. After Freedom, when any of
us got married he'd give us money and send a servant along for us.
Sometimes even he'd carry us himself to our new home."

When the Civil War came he remembers hearing one night "Sherman
is coming." It was said that Wheeler's Cavalry of the Confederates
was always "running and fighting." Lane [the master] had moved the
family to Macon, Georgia, and they lived on a place called "Dunlap's
Hill." That night four preachers were preaching "Fellow soldiers, the
enemy is just here to Holden's Brook sixteen miles away and you may be
carried into judgment; prepare to meet your God." While they were
preaching, bombs began to fly because Wheeler's Cavalry was only six
miles away instead of 16 miles; women screamed and children ran.
Wheeler kept wagons ahead of him so that when one was crippled the other
would replace it. He says he imagines he hears the voice of Sherman
now, saying: "Tell Wheeler to go on to South Carolina; we will mow it
down with grape shot and plow it in with bombshell."

I remember well when de war wuz on. I used to turn the big corn
sheller and sack the shelled corn for the Confederate soldiers. They used to sell some of the corn and they gave some of it to the soldiers. Anyway the Yankees got some and they did not expect them to get it. It was this way: The Wheeler boys came through there ahead of Sherman's Army. Now, we thought the Wheeler boys were Confederates. They came down the road as happy as could be, a-singin' "Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah, Hurrah for the Broke Brook Boys, Hurrah for the Broke Brook Boys of South Carolina." So of course we thought they were our soldiers a-singin' our songs. Well, they came an' tol' our boss that Sherman's soldiers were coming and we'd better hide all our food and valuable things, for they'd take everything they wanted. So we "hoped" our Massy hide the tings. They dug holes and buried the potatoes and covered them with cotton seed and all that. Then our massy give dem food and thanked them for their kindness and he set out wid two of the girls to tote them to safety, but before he got back after the missus, the Yanks were on us.

Our missus had called us together and told us what to say. "Now you beg for me. If they ask you whether I've been good to you, you tell 'em 'yes'. If they ask you if we give you meat, you say 'yes'. Now, de res' didn't git any meat, but I did, 'cause I worked in the house. So I didn't tell a lie, for I did git meat.

So we begged, an' we say, "Our missus is good. Don't you kill her. Don't you take our meat away from us. Don't you hurt her. Don't you burn her house down. So they burned the stable and some of the other buildings, but they did not burn the house nor hurt us any. We saw the rest of the Yanks comin'. They never stopped for nothin'. Their horses would jump the worn rail fences and they come 'cross fields 'n' everything. They bound our missus upstairs so she couldn't
get away, then they came to the sheds and we begged and begged for her. Then they loosed her, but they took some of us for refugees and some of the slaves went off with them of their own will. They took all the things that were buried all the hams and everything they wanted. But they did not burn the house and our missus was saved.

Florida Narratives
Cora N. Taylor, Collector
Pp. 44-45

Number 38
Randall Lee
Approximate Age - 77
No date
Palatka, Florida
Slave in South Carolina

Levi Lee, the grandfather of young Levi and Randall, had a dream while the soldiers were encamped round about the place. He dreamed that a pot of money was buried in a certain place; the person who showed it to him told him to go dig for it on the first rainy night. He kept the dream a secret and on the first rainy night he went, dug, and found the pot of money right where his dream had told him it would be. He took the pot of money to his cabin and told no one anything about it. He hid it as securely as possible, but when the soldiers were searching for gold and silver money they did not leave the Negro's cabin out of the search. When they found the money they thought Levi's master had given him the money to hide as they took it from him. Levi mourned a long time about the loss of his money and often told his grandchildren that he would have been well fixed when freedom came if he had not been robbed of his money.

Florida Narratives
Viola B. Muse, Collector
P. 200
"Several amusing incidents are related by the ex-slave of the events of this period. Dozens of the Negro soldiers, he says, discarded their uniforms for the gaudier clothing that had belonged to their masters in former days, and could be identified as soldiers as they passed only with difficulty. Others would pause on their trip at some plantation, ascertain the name of the 'meanest' overseer on the place, then tie him backward on a horse and force him to accompany them. Particularly retributive were the punishments visited upon Messrs. Mays and Prevatt -- generally recognized as the most vicious slave drivers of the section."

Florida Narratives
Martin D. Richardson, Collector
Pp. 81-82

Edward relates this story about his father told to him almost sixty years ago:

"It all begun with our ship being took off the coast of Newport News, Virginia. We wuz runnin' the blockade—sellin' guns and what—not to them Northerners. We aint had nothin' to do wid de war, understand. We English folks was etter de money. Whose War? The North and South's, of course. I hear my captain say many a time as how they was playin' ball wid de poor niggers. One side says 'You cant keep your niggers lessen you pay em and treat em like other folks. Mind you dat wasn't
de rale reason, they was mad at de South but it was one of de ways
dey could be hurted- to free de niggers."

"De South says "Dese is our niggers and we'll do dum as we please,
and so de rumpus got wuss dan it was afore. The North had all do
money, and called itself de Gov'ment. The South aint had nothin',
but a termination not to be out-did, so we dealt wid de North. De
South was called de Rebels."

"So when dey see a ship off dey coast, they hailed it and when
we kep goin', they fired at us. 'Twan't long afore we was being un-
loaded and marched off to de lousiest jail I ever been in. My cap-
tain kep tellin' em we was English subjects and could not be helt. Me,
I was a scairt man, cause I was always free, and over here day took it
for granted dat all black men should be slaves."

"The jailer felt of my muscles one day, when he had marched me
out at de point of his musket to fill de watering troughs for de
horses. He wanted to know who I blong ter, and offered to buy me.
When nobody claimed me, they was forced to let me got long wid de
other Britishers and as our ship had been destroyed, we had to git
back home best we could. Dey didn't dare hold us no longer."

"As de war was still being fit, we was forced to separate, cause
a lot of us would cause spicion, traipsing 'bout do country. Me- I
took off southward and way from de war belt, traveling as far as
Saint Augustine. It was a dangerous journey, as anybody was liable to
pick me off for a runaway slave. I was forced to hide in de day time
if I was near a settlement and travel at night. I met many runaway
slaves. Some was trying to get North and fight for de freeing of dey
people; others was jes runnin' way cause dey could. Many of dey didn't
had no idea where dey was goin' and told of havin' good marsters. But
one and all dey had a good strong notion ter see what it was like to own your own body."

"I felt worlds better when I reached Saint Augustine. Many ships landed there and I knowed I could get my way back at least to de West Indies, where I come frum. I showed my papers to everybody dat mounted ter anything and dey knowed I was a free nigger. I had plenty of money on me and I made a big ter do mong de other free men I met. One day I went to the slave market and watched em barter off po niggers lake dey was hogs. Whole families sold together and some was split- mother gone to one marster and father and children gone to others."

"They'd bring a slave out on the platform and open his mouth, pound his chest, make him harden his muscles so the buyer could see what he was gittin'. Young men was called 'bucks' and young women 'wenches'. The person that offered the best price was de buyer. And dey shore did git rid uf some pretty gals. Dey always looked so shame and pitiful up on dat stand wid all dem men standing dere lookin' at em wid what dey had on dey minds shinin' in dey eyes. One little gal walked up and left her mammy mourning so pitiful cause she had to be sold. Seems like dey all belong in a family where nobody ever was sold. My she was a pretty gal."

"And dats why your mamma's named Julia stead of Mary Jane or Hannah or somethin' else- She cost me $950.00 and den my own freedom. But she was worth it-every bit of it!"

_Florida Narratives_  
Pp. 204-7  

Pearl Randolph, Collector  

Emancipation
Number 41

Willis Williams
Age 81
March 20, 1937
Jacksonville, Florida
Slave in Tallahassee, Florida

When the news of freedom came to Thomas Hayward's town slaves, it was brought by McCook's Cavalry. Willis remembers the uniform worn by the northerners was dark blue with brass buttons and the Confederates wore gray. After the cavalry reached Tallahassee, they separated into sections, each division taking a different part of the town. Negroes of the household were called together and were informed of their freedom. It is remembered by Willis that the slaves were jubilant but not boastful...

McCook's Cavalry did not remain in Tallahassee very long and was replaced by a colored company; the 99th Infantry. Their duty was to maintain order within the town. An orchestra was with the outfit and Willis remembers that they were very good musicians. A Negro who had been the slave of a man of Tallahassee was a member of the orchestra. His name was Singleton and his former master invited the orchestra to come to his house and play for the family. The Negroes were glad to render service, went, and after that entertained many white families in their homes.

The southern soldiers who returned after the war appeared to receive their defeat as good 'sports' and not as much friction between the races existed as would be imagined.

Florida Narratives
Pp. 351-52

Number 42

Harriett Gresham
Age 98
December 18, 1936
Jacksonville, Florida
Harriett still remembers very clearly the storming of Fort Sumpter. The whole countryside was thrown into confusion and many slaves were mad with fear. There were few men left to establish order and many women loaded their slaves into wagons and gathered such belongings as they could and fled. Mrs. Bellinger was one of those who held their ground.

When the Union soldiers visited her plantation they found the plantation in perfect order. The slaves going about their tasks as if nothing unusual had happened. It was necessary to summon them from the fields to give them the message of their freedom.

Harriett recalls that her mistress was very frightened but walked upright and held a trembling lip between her teeth as they waited for her to sound for the last time the horn that had summoned several generations of human chattel to and from work.

"Some left the plantation; others remained to harvest the crops. One and all they remembered to thank God for their freedom. They immediately began to hold meetings, singing soul stirring spirituals.

Harriett recalls one of these songs. It is as follows:

T'ank ye Marster Jesus, t'ank ye,  
T'ank ye Marster Jesus, t'ank ye,  
T'ank ye Marster Jesus, t'ank ye  
Da Heben gwinter be my home.  
No slav'ry chains to tie me down,  
And no mo' driver's ho'n to blow fer me  
No mo' stocks to fasten me down  
Jesus break slav'ry chain, Lord  
Break slav'ry chain Lord,  
Break slav'ry chain, Lord,  
Da Heben gwinter be my home.

Harriett’s parents remained with the widowed woman for a while. Had they not remained, she might not have met Gaylord Jeannette, the
knight in blue, who later became her husband. He was a member of Company "I", 35th Regiment. She is still a bit breathless when she relates the details of the military wedding that followed a whirlwind courtship which had its beginning on the citadel green, where the soldiers stationed there held their dress parade. After these parades there was dancing by the soldiers and belles who had bedecked themselves in their Sunday best and come out to be wooed by a soldier in blue.

Music was furnished by the military band which offered many patriotic numbers that awakened in the newly freed Negroes that had long been dead - patriotism. Harriett recalls snatches of one of these songs to which she danced when she was 20 years of age; It is as follows:

Don't you see the lightening flashing in the cane brakes,  
Looks like we gonna have a storm  
Although you're mistaken its the Yankee soldiers  
Going to fight for Uncle Sam.  
Old master was a colonel in the Rebel army  
Just before he had to run away—  
Look out the battle is a-falling  
The darkies gonna occupy the land.

Harriett believes the two officers who tendered congratulations shortly after her marriage to have been General Bates and Beecher. This was an added thrill to her.

Florida Narratives  
Pearl Randolph, Collector  
Pp. 160-162

Number 43  
Randall Lee  
Approximate Age - 77  
No date  
Palatka, Florida  
Slave in South Carolina

"There was talk about freedom and Doctor Miller [the master] knew it would be only a matter of time when he would loose all of his
slaves. He said to Randall’s mother one day, "Delhia you'll soon be free as I am." She said, "Sho' nuf mansy?" and he answered, "You sure will." Nothing more was said to any of the slaves until Sherman’s army came through notifying the slaves they were free.

The presence of the soldiers caused such a commotion around the plantation that Randall's mind was indelibly impressed with their doings.

The northern soldiers took all the food they could get their hands on and took possession of the cattle and horses and mules. Levi, the brother of Randall, and who was named after his paternal grandfather, was put on a mule and the mule loaded with provisions and sent two miles to the soldier's camp. Levi liked that, for beside being well treated he received several pieces of money. The federal soldiers played with him and gave him all the food he wanted, although the Miller slaves and their children were fed and there was no reason for the child to be hungry.

Florida Narratives
Pp. 199-200

Number 44

Lindsey Moore
Age 87
January 13, 1937
Palatka, Florida
Slave in Georgia

Lindsey’s first knowledge of the approach of freedom came when he heard a loud brass band coming down the road toward the plantation playing a strange, lively tune while a number of soldiers in blue uniforms marched behind. He ran to the front gate and was ordered to take charge of the horse of one of the officers in such an abrupt tone until he 'begin to shaking in my bare feet!' There followed much
talk between the officers and Lindsey’s mistress, with the soldiers finally going into encampment a short distance away from the plantation.

The soldiers took command of the spring that was used for a water supply for the plantation, giving Lindsey another opportunity to make money. He would be sent from the plantation to the spring for water, and on the way back would pass through the camp of the soldiers. These would be happy to pay a few pennies for a cup of water rather than take the long hike to the spring themselves; Lindsey would empty bucket after bucket before finally returning to the plantation. Out of his profits he bought his first pair of shoes — though nearly a grown man.

The soldiers finally departed, with all but five of the Overtree slaves joyously trooping behind them. Before leaving, however, they tore up the railroad and its station, burning the ties and heating the rails until red then twisting them around tree-trunks. Wheat fields were trampled by their horses, and devastation left on all sides.

Florida Narratives  
Martin Richardson, Collector  
Pp. 231-32

Number 45  
Anna Scott  
Age 91  
January 11, 1937  
Jacksonville, Florida  
Slave in South Carolina

Mrs. Scott remembers vividly the joy that she felt and other slaves expressed when first news of their emancipation was brought to them. Both she and her mistress were fearful, she says; her mistress because she did not know what she would do without her slaves, and Anna because she thought the Union soldiers would harm Mrs. Dove. When the chief officer of the soldiers came to the home of her mistress, she says, he demanded entrance in a gruff voice. Then he saw
a ring upon Mrs. Dove's finger and asked: "where did you get this?"
When told that the ring belonged to her husband, who was dead, the
officer turned to his soldiers and told them that they should 'get
back; she's alright!"

Florida Narratives  Viola B. Muse, Collector
P. 281

Number 46  Claude Augusta Wilson
Age 79
November 6, 1936
Sunbeam, Florida
Slave in Lake City, Columbia
County, Florida

Claude recalls that a six-mule team drove up to the house driven
by a colored Union soldier. He helped move the household furniture
from their cabin into the wagon. The family then got in, some in the
seat with the driver, and others in back of the wagon with the
furniture. When the driver pulled off he said to Claude's mother
who was sitting on the seat with him, "Doan you know you is free now?"
"Yeh Sir," she answered, "I been praying for dis a long time." "Come
on den les go," he answered, and drove off. They passed through
Olustee, then Sanderson, Macclenny and finally Baldwin. It was raining
and they were about 20 miles from their destination, Jacksonville, but
they drove on. They reached Jacksonville and were taken to a house
that stood on Liberty Street, near Adams. White people had been living
there but had left before the Northern advance. There they unloaded
and were told that this would be their new home. The town was full of
colored soldiers all armed with muskets. Horns and drums could be
heard beating and blowing every morning and evening. The colored
soldiers appeared to rule the town. More slaves were brought in and
there they were given food by the Government which consisted of hard
tack (bread reddish in appearance and extremely hard which had to be soaked in water before eating.) The meat was known as 'salt horse.' This looked and tasted somewhat like corned beef. After being in Jacksonville a short while Claude began to peddle ginger bread and apples in a little basket, selling most of his wares to the colored soldiers. . . .

By this time many of the white people began to return to their homes which had been abandoned and in which slaves found shelter. In many instances the whites had to make monetary or other concessions in order to get their homes back. It was said that colored people had taken possession of one of the large white churches of the day, located on Hogan Street, between Ashley and Church Streets. Claude relates that all this was when Jacksonville was a mere village, with cow and hog pens in what was considered as downtown.

*Florida Narratives*
*James Johnson, Collector*

*Pp. 360-361*

Number 47

Mary Minus Biddle
Age 105
No date
Eatonville, Florida
Slave in Columbia County
Florida

The greatest event in the life of a slave was about to occur, and the most sorrowful in the life of a master, *FREEDOM* was at hand. A Negro was seen coming in the distance, mounted upon a mule, approaching Mr. Jamison who stood upon the porch. He told him of the liberation of the slaves. Mr. Jamison had never before been heard to curse, but this was one day that he let go a torrent of words that are unworthy to appear in print. He then broke down and cried like a slave who was being lashed by his cruel master. He called Mary's mother and father,
Phyliss and Sandy, "I ain't got no more to do with you, you are free," he said, "if you want to stay with me you may and I'll give you one-third of what you rise." They decided to stay. When the crop was harvested the master did not do as he had promised. He gave them nothing. Mary slipped away, mounted the old mule "Mustang" and galloped away at a mules snail speed to Newmansville where she related what had happened to a Union Captain. He gave her a letter to give to Mr. Jamison. In it he reminded him that if he didn't give Mary's family what he had promised he would be put in jail. Without hesitation the old master complied with these pungent orders.

After this incident Mary and her family left the good old boss to seek a new abode in other parts. This was the first time that the master had in any way displayed any kind of unfairness toward them, perhaps it was the reaction to having to liberate them.

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"I guess we musta celebrated 'Mancipation about twelve times in Hornets County [North Carolina]. Every time a bunch of No 'thern sojers would come through they would tell us we was free and we'd begin celebratin'. Before we would get through somebody else would tell us to go back to work, and we would go. Some of us wanted to jine up with the army, but didn't know who was goin' to win and didn't take no chances."

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Florida Narratives
Collector unknown

Number 48 Ambrose Douglass
Age 91
No date
Place of interview unknown
Slave in Virginia; North Carolina; Suwannee County, Florida et al.

Florida Narratives
Martin D. Richardson, Collector
Mullen vividly recalls the day that they heard of their emancipation; loud reports from guns were heard echoing through the woods and plantations; after awhile "Yankee" soldiers came and informed them that they were free. Mr. Snellings [the master] showed no resistance and he was not harmed. The slaves on hearing this good news of freedom burst out in song and praises to God; it was a gala day. No work was done for a week; the time was spent in celebrating. The master told his slaves that they were free and could go wherever they wanted to, or they could remain with him if they wished. Most of his 200 slaves refused to leave him because he was considered a good master.

Florida Narratives  
J. M. Johnson, Collector

Pp. 238-39

Louisa and Sam last heard the ringing of this bell in the fall of 1865. All the slaves gathered in front of the "Big House" to be told that they were free for the time being. They had heard whisperings of the war but did not understand the meaning of it all. Now "Big Jim" [the master] stood weeping on the piazza and cursing the fate that had been so cruel to him by robbing him of all his "niggers." He inquired if any wanted to remain until all the crops were harvested and when no one consented to do so, he flew into a rage; seizing his pistol, he began firing into the crowd of frightened Negroes. Some were
killed outright and others were maimed for life. Finally he was prevailed upon to stop. He then attempted to take his own life. A few frightened slaves promised to remain with him another year; this placated him. It was necessary for Union soldiers to make another visit to the plantation before "Big Jim" would allow his former slaves to depart.

The possible loss of his [Master Gay's] slaves upon the declaration of freedom on January 1, 1866 caused Gay considerable concern. His liquor-ridden mind was not long in finding a solution; however, he barred all visitors from his plantation and insisted that his overseers see to the carrying out of this detail. They did, with such efficiency that it was not until May 8, when the government finally learned of the condition and sent a marshall to the plantation, that freedom came to Gay's slaves. May 8, is still celebrated in this section of Mississippi as the official emancipation day.

At the closing of the war, word was sent around among the slaves
that if they heard the report of a gun, it was the Yankees and that they were free.

It was in May, in the middle of the day, cotton and corn being planted, plowing going on, and slaves busily engaged in their usual activities, when suddenly the loud report of a gun resounded, then could be heard the slaves crying almost en-masse, "dems de Yankees." Straightway they dropped the plows, hoes and other farm implements and hurried to their cabins. They put on their best clothes "to go see the Yankees." Through the countryside to the town of Tallahassee they went. The roads were quickly filled with these happy souls. The streets of Tallahassee were clustered with these jubilant people going here and there to get a glimpse of the Yankees, their liberators. Napoleon says it was a joyous and un-forgettable occasion.

When the Randolph slaves returned to their plantation, Dr. Randolph told them that they were free, and if they wanted to go away, they could, and if not, they could remain with him and he would give them half of what was raised on the farms. Some of them left, however, some remained, having no place to go, they decided it was best to remain until the crops came off, thus earning enough to help them in their new venture in home seeking. Those slaves who were too old and not physically able to work, remained on the plantation and were cared for by Dr. Randolph until their death.

Florida Narratives  J. M. Johnson, Collector
Pp. 245-46

Number 53  Margrett Nickerson
Approximate Age - 89 or 90
December 5, 1936
Jacksonville, Florida
Slave in Leon County, Florida
"When de big gun fiahed old man Carr [the master] had six sacks uf confederate money what he wuz carrying wid him to Athens Georgia an' all de time if any uf us gals whar he wuz an' ax him 'Marse please gi us some money' (here she raises her voice to a high, pitiful tone) he says 'I ain't got a cent' and right den he would have a chis so full it would take a wholg passle uv slaves to move it. He had plenty corn, taters, pum'kins, hogs, cow ev'ething, but he didn' gi us nuthin but strong plain close and plenty to eat; we slept in ole common beds and my pa made up little cribs and put hay in dem fur de chillun."

Florida Narratives
P. 252

Margrett Nickerson
Approximate Age - 89 or 90
December 5, 1936
Jacksonville, Florida
Slave in Leon County, Florida

"When de big gun fiahed on a Sattidy me and Cabe and Minnie Howard wuz settin' up co'n fur de plowers to come 'long and put dirt to 'em; Carr read de free papers to us on Sunday and de co'n and cotton had to be tended to - he tole us he wuz goin' to gi' us de net proceeds (here she chuckles), what turned out to be de co'n and cotton stalks. Den he asked dem what would stay wid him to step off on de right and dem dat wuz leavin' to step off on de left."

Florida Narratives
P. 251


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