

0. PLANTATION LIFE - Story Preface
1. SLAVES IN THE NEW WORLD
2. KIDNAPPED AFRICANS
3. PASSAGE TO THE NEW WORLD
4. FREEDOM - BUT NOT FOR SLAVES
5. POWERS OF THE MIND
6. REBELLION
7. ESCAPE
8. TRIPS ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
9. TRICKS AND DETERMINATION
10. FUGITIVE SLAVE LAWS
11. PUNISHMENT for HELPING RUNAWAYS
12. FORMER SLAVES BECOME ABOLITIONISTS
13. BUYING AND SELLING PEOPLE
14. A TERRIBLE TIME
- 15. PLANTATION LIFE**
16. SPLIT-UP FAMILIES
17. LAST FREE LABOR
18. WHAT WAS IT LIKE?
19. HUMAN SPIRIT PREVAILS



Richard Holmes Laurie published this colored engraving, by an unidentified artist, in London on April 12, 1821. The bottom half of the illustration depicts slaves packing tobacco - a major crop in the American South - for shipment. Online via Slavery Images, sponsored by Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library. Click on the image for a better view.

Charley Williams, age 94, lived on a largely self-sufficient Louisiana tobacco plantation. His mother knew just what local herbs she would need to treat her children when they were ill. Mr. Williams was interviewed in 1937:

Everything boughten we got come from Shreveport, and was brung in by the stage and the freighters, and that was only a little coffee or gunpowder, or some needles for the sewing, or some strap iron for the blacksmith, or something like dat. We made and raised everything else we needed right on the place.

I never did see any quinine till after I was free. My mammy knowed jest what root to go out and pull up to knock de chills right out'n me. And de bellyaches and de running off de same way too.

The slaves were summoned to work by "bells" and "horns," according to Mr. Williams' narrative:

Bells and horns! Bells for dis and horns for dat! All we knowed was come and go by de bells and horns!

One thing slave children did NOT hear was the school bell. John W. Fields, born in Kentucky and interviewed in Indiana at age 89, described how Southern "white folk" could be punished if they were caught educating slaves.

In most of us colored folks was the great desire to be able to read and write. We took advantage of every opportunity to educate ourselves. The greater part of the plantation owners were very harsh if we were caught trying to learn or write.

It was the law that if a white man was caught trying to educate a Negro slave, he was liable to prosecution entailing a fine of fifty dollars and a jail sentence. We were never allowed to go to town and it was not until after I ran away that I knew that they sold anything but slaves, tobacco and whiskey.

Our ignorance was the greatest hold the South had on us. We knew we could run away, but what then? An offender of this crime was subject to a very harsh punishment.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/PLANTATION-LIFE-Slave-Voices>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/PLANTATION-LIFE-Slave-Voices>

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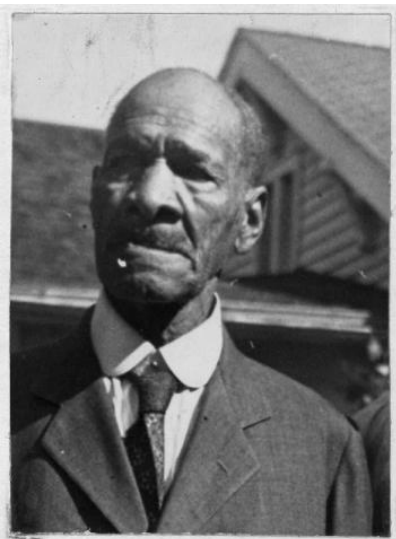


Charley Williams

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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John W. Fields - Former Slave

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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Slaves - Summoned by a Horn

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PLANTATION LIFE

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