



0. A CHILD SLAVE - Story Preface

1. A CHILD SLAVE

2. GET EDUCATED!!

3. ESCAPE!

4. ANNA MURRAY DOUGLASS

5. THE ABOLITIONISTS

6. ABOLITIONIST LITERATURE

7. FAME

8. DOUGLASS AT HOME

9. LATER LIFE

10. DEATH AND LEGACY

Art work depicting a Southern plantation scene, with a black slave girl caring for a white child. Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

Before the thought of freedom entered his mind, and before he was old enough to work the fields of a southern plantation, Frederick Bailey played with other children near his grandma's cabin. He could not read or write since most slave owners believed literate slaves were dangerous slaves. School held no place in a slave child's routine.

Lack of education was not the only factor which distinguished southern black children from southern white children. Where they lived, what they wore, what they ate always depended on the color of their skin. As an adult, in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, the now-literate man describes the clothes he wore as a child:

In hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked - no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees.

On what kind of bed did he sleep?

I had no bed. I must have perished with cold, but that, the coldest nights, I used to steal a bag which was used for carrying corn to the mill. I would crawl into this bag, and there sleep on the cold, damp, clay floor, with my head in and feet out. My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes.

What of the food he ate? Was there enough to keep him well-nourished?

Our food was coarse corn meal boiled. This was called mush. It was put into a large wooden tray or trough, and set down upon the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush; some with oystershells, others with pieces of shingle, some with naked hands, and none with spoons. He that ate fastest got most; he that was strongest secured the best place; and few left the trough satisfied.

Slave children, like young Fred, saw things children should never see. Beatings of loved ones, for example, were not uncommon. The day Fred saw his master beat his beautiful Aunt Hester, within a breath of her life, was life-changing:

I was so terrified and horror-stricken at the sight, that I hid myself in a closet, and dared not venture out till long after the bloody transaction was over. I expected it would be my turn next. It was all new to me. I had never seen any thing like it before. I had always lived with my grandmother on the outskirts of the plantation, where she was put to raise the children of the younger women. I had therefore been, until now, out of the way of the bloody scenes that often occurred on the plantation. (Narrative, page 21.)

It wasn't long before Fred himself met the end of the cowskin lash.

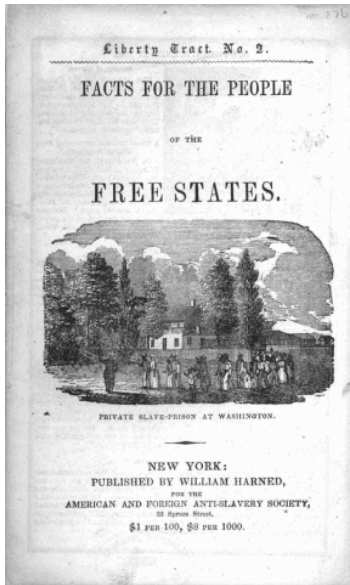
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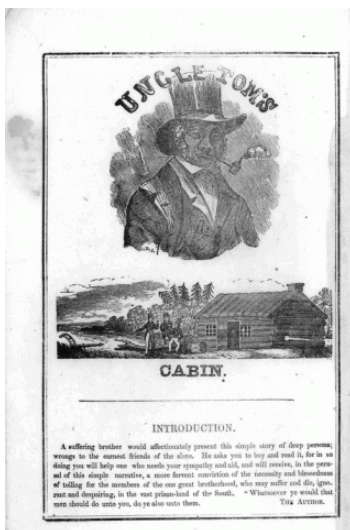


Facts For the People of the Free States

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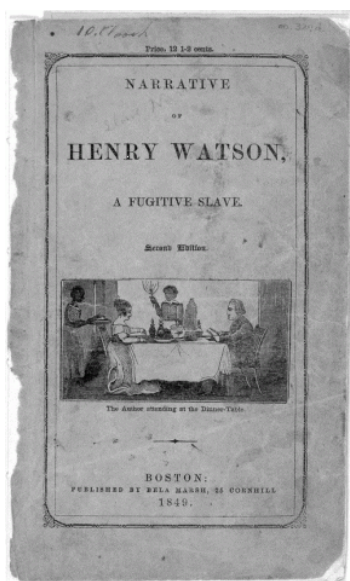
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Uncle Tom's Cabin

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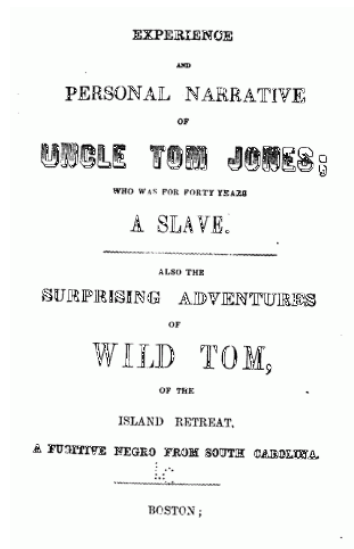


Narrative of Henry Watson, a Fugitive Slave

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Personal Narratives: Uncle Tom Jones and Wild Tom

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