

Florida Slave Narratives: Gilbert, Taylor

Federal Writers' Project

1937

Taylor Gilbert was born in Shellman, Georgia, 91 years ago, of a colored mother and a white father, "which is why I am so white", he adds. He has never been known to have passed as white, however, in spite of the fact that he could do so without detection. David Ferguson bought Jacob Gilbert from Dr. Gilbert as a husband for Emily, Taylor's mother. Emily had nine children, two by a white man, Frances and Taylor, and seven by Jacob, only three of whom Gilbert remembers—Gettie, Rena, and Annis. Two of these children were sent to school while the others were obliged to work on the plantation. Emily, the mother, was the cook and washwoman while Jacob was the Butler.

Gilbert, a good sized lad when slavery was at its height, recalls vividly the cruel lashings and other punishments meted out to those who disobeyed their master or attempted to run away. It was the custom of slaves who wished to go from one plantation to another to carry passes in case they were stopped as suspected runaways. Frequently slaves would visit without benefit of passes, and as result they suffered severe torturing. Often the sons of the slaves' owners would go "nigger hunting" and nothing—not even murder was too horrible for them to do to slaves caught without passes. They justified their fiendish acts by saying the "nigger tried to run away when told to stop."

Gilbert cannot remember when he came to Florida, but he claims that it was many years ago. Like the majority of Negroes after slavery, he became a farmer which occupation he still pursues. He married once but "my wife got to messin' around with another man so I sent her home to her mother." He can be found in Miami, Florida, where he may be seen daily hobbling around on his cane.

Source:

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