

Mississippi Narratives

Prepared by

The Federal Writer's Project of The Works Progress Administration For the State of Mississippi

Aron Carter age 80

Aron Carter, born in Lincoln County, age 80, is one of those smiling, good-natured, happy-go-lucky, philosophical, deeply religious, backwoods Mississippi negros. He gesticulates wildly, both hands flying in all directions, a hearty stomp of one foot firmly on the ground, an alarming shaking of the head to indicate a firm "Yes Mam!" or "No Mam!", in his effort to emphasize his story.

About 5 feet 11 inches in height, thick black lips spread in a perpetual grin across crooked, yellow teeth, dressed in rags and tatters, Aron presents a comical picture that manages to touch the heart. He is strong in body, clear in mind, has a remarkable imagination, and a breath-taking vocabulary and this is his story told as nearly as a typewriter is able to reproduce his inimitable manner of expression.

Picture him seated on a homemade chair, tilted back against an ancient oak out in the front yard, whittling away with an accomplished and enviable technique and occasionally waving both stick and knife in mid-air as he is carried away---back to the days of war and slavery.

"Ma whars' dat bible? Go yanda and fetch it out 'chere. What Ah wants it fo'? Ah wants to see when I'se born! Get woman! Dat woman is the slowest creature what evah had the privilege of movin' on two foots. Hurry up dar Manda yo' is slow as a mule Ah does believe, an' she 'bout as stubborn too. Lawsy Mercy! But now Manda, she sho' been a good woman an' we gets 'long jes tolerable good Ah specks.

Now Ah show you all somethin'. See this heah Bible? Well suh this heah book has writ down in hit ebery birth an' death in our famby. Manda done dat. She been taught to read an' write an' she be able to do it fairly fine. Ah can read some ma' self but Ah din' larn hit so much. Ah knows ma' record in heah somewars'. Now, 'er iffen Ah kin' jest locate the page heah, 'er les us see heah now, 'er, right-'bout--' chere----oh yas Mam! Yas Mam! Ah sho' be 'bliged fer yo' to look Mam. Ah jest mos had ma' finger on hit dar fer a second. Yyyyasum, yasum dats' hit, you done got hit now Ah thinks. Aron Carter, dat's me, borned in 1857, on de 10th. day of November. Dats' right. Ise' satisfied dats' what it was gwine be all de time. Nov. 10, dats' co'rect.

Ma Marster was ole man William Gwinn. He had his plan'tation right 'chere ovah cross the way a'piece. He done owned a section of land an' had the likeliest looking crops in these pahts. Marster Gwinn was a fine man an' a good man, dat he was. Ah was borned right dar on the plan'tation an' libed dar long time. Ah recalls when de Marster call us all ovah to the big, long poarch an say- "Yo is all sot free. Those want to stay kin stay, those want leave kin leave." But Ah heah to tell yo' not one o' those niggahs lef Marster Gwinn. Ah reckon Ah was a growned man when Ah leaves. Sometimes Ah chops wood fer de folks what libes on de place where de plan'tation used to be 'situated. Ah tells you Mam, you knows whar' dat 51 road is, well suh it's right on dat road jest before you get to Bogue Chitty'.

Ah members the day dat ma Mistress died. Her name was Sally Gwinn. I seen she gettin' ill long fore she die. She was frail like an' peaked but she always has a smile fer all us an' dar warn't one o' us what wouldn't ha' died fer her. She tend our women folk an' always tellin' us what bes to do bout matters an' we use come to her with everythin'. She had six chillun an' de faihly' worship her. Ah members well as anythin' de day she died. We was all lowed' to come to de front room an' see her, an' we file in one by one an' dar warn't one O' us what could keep de tears back.

Marster Gwinn din' sell de fambily apart. He try to keep de married ones together. He say it more trouble to be alwuz' a 'huntin' de niggahs on somebody elses place den it war' jest to keep dem together. When dey go to get married de gal stan' on one side o' a broom an' de man on de other. Den he jest jump ovah' de broom--an' de was married-----an' he took her in de cabin dat he built fer her an' dats whar' de start libin'. Cos' nowadays yo' has to hev' a license an' sech, but in dem days dats all dere was to hit. Jest jumpin' ovah a broom, dats all.

Us chillun use get fed in a long trough. Yassum you knows, a trough. Long, wooden contraption thing jest like de pigs are fed outten of. It was a fine thing an' dey keep it spic an' span an' feed us good. Yassum de whole shootin' match got fed outten hit. Ha, sometimes we gets to fightin' when wes' eatin' an' right dar was a good opporlunty to sly like, all o' a sudden---QUICK'.---smear some tatters right smackin somebodys face. Ho, ho, ho, Ah reckon Ah been sont away frum de trough a million times fer dat very trick.

Din' many o' de niggars run away. Marster din' even hev any dawgs to hunt em' down like mos de plan'tation men had. But dere was a Plantation right neah us and Marster Gwinn had bought dis gal frum ovah dere an' she had a man what was plum crazy in de haid fer her an' he lib on dis other place. As ah recolect she was pert as a cricket and dis niggah jes' natural couldn't stay long frum her. So he slip away an' com see her ovah' at our place. He hide up in a tree an' us chillun ud slip him water in a gourd on a pully string. An' speakin' uf gourds, now dat was de biggest gourd ah ever had de pleasure ub seeing any time or any place. Ma Marster got it as a present frum North Carolina an' it was a buet.

Dar warn't no overseer on de place an' we was punished sometimes but it was a rare 'currence. My Uncle done somethin' one time an' de Marster whip him a little an' den he took him ovah to a tub o' water an' duck his haid up an down in it. We sho laugh dat time.

Ah jest recollects one time when de Yankees done come to our place. Dey stop at de other plan'tation firs an' we got wind dey was ovah dar. Was dere a scurrin' an' bustlin' den. Ah'll say. Right ovah' back o' de fiels dere was a big ditch like an' de Marster say--

"All yo' chillun an' women git' now an' hide an' not a squeak outten any o' you all or else de Yankees will get you sure as yo' faces is black." An ah mos choke in dat place ah was so scare o' breathin' too loud. When he com' back to get us we was mos fraid to believe him dat dey was gone an' he had a time tryin' to revince' us dat dey had sho' nough departed. Dey lef' one o' dere hosses an' lem me tell yo' somethin' dat dere was de biggest hoss ah ever did see outside o' a circus.

Ma Mammy was born on Marster Gwinn' plan'tation an ma daddy com' frum Maryland. He name was George Washington an' her name was Silia Gwinn. Ah had three brothers an' one sister. Dey is all daid now ceptin' me. Ah is de onlyiest one lef.

We slep on hay beds. Yo don believe dat? Yas mam it sho is de livin' truth jest as sho as ah' is settin' heah on dis heah chaih' now, this minute. Hay beds. Mos everythin' we wears is made right on de plan'tation. All out clothes, an everythin'. At killin' time de leather o' de animals was dried an' cured an' soaked to get it brown an' when it was ready we cut it an' make our shoes. We even make homemade tacks.

De eats was good. Better dan ah' gets now by a long shot. Dere was greens, bacon, peas, rice, milk, butter, loads o' fish, possum, rabbits, birds, jes eberythin'. De niggahs din hev dere own gardens. Dey had it in with the Marster.

Right ovah' dar a'piece is de graveyard whar all de slaves on Marster Gwinn Plantation is buried. An not far frum' it is his own grave.

Now les see, iffen ah' recalls some o' de songs we use to sing. Manda yo' members some? Less' see now, hmmtttttt, now jest what was some o' de 'propiate songs den?

Da, de da, de, How firm a Foundation,

What more kin' ah see?

An another one was,

Jesus is my alter, Heaben is gone.

Yassum now dey was de 'propiate songs den.

Marster had 'bout ten old slaves an' 'bout twenty chillun, ah thinks. Us chillun din hev any duties an' de older folks work in de fiels an in de house same as on other plantations. De got up usual time, afore sun-up and wuk all day. When dey get sick de Marster call on Dr. Bennett to come, but mos time dey use more herbs to get dem well den dey do doctors.

Yo knows sometime' ah thinks dey is more barbo'rus now den dey ever was then. Foks is jest plain barbo'rus now. Fas, fas, fas, fas, everythin' is fas. Scurry heah, scurry there, all everybody do is hurry. But I'se so glad, so glad I'se livin' this long. Ah done liv' to be a slave an be sot free. Ah certainly 'preciates livin' dis long, ah certainly does. Ah hopes de 'propiate time fer me to die is far off frum now. Times is hard now but all de same de niggahs nowa'days come up in a sunlight world. Dats' de truf. Dats' jest naturall' de truf. Dis worl is on its las' roun'. Iffen ah could lib to see 'bout thirty-five year more ah bet ah sees de end o' de' whole shootin' match. Niggahs ain' gwine eber lib like we use to lib on de plantation any mo.