

Mississippi Narratives

Prepared by

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

Charlie Moses Age 84

Foreword: Charlie Moses, 84 year old ex-slave, lives at Brookhaven. He possesses the eloquence and the abundant vocabulary of all Negro preachers. He is now confined to his bed because of the many ailments of old age. His weight appears to be about 140 pounds, height 6 feet 1 inch high.

"When I gits to thinkin' back on them slavery days I feels like riain' out o' this here bed an' tellin' ever'body 'bout the harah treatment us colored folks was given when we was owned by poor quality folks.

"My marster was mean an' cruel. I hates him, hates him! The God Almighty has condemned him to sternal fiah. Of that I is cartain. Ivan the cows and horses on his plantation was scared out o' their minds when he come near 'em. Oh Lordy! I can tell you plenty 'bout the things he done to us poor Niggers. We was treated no better than one o' his houn' dogs. Sometimes he didn' treat us as good as he did them. I prays to the Lord not to let me see him when I die. He had the devil in his heart.

"His name was Jim Rankin an' he lived out on a plantation over in Marion County. I was born an' raised on his place. I spec I was 'bout twelve year old at the time o' the war.

"Old man Rankin worked us like animals. He had a right smart plantation an' kep' all his Niggers, 'cept one house boy, out in the fiel' a-workin'. He'd say, 'Niggers is meant to work. That's what I paid my good money for 'em to do.'

"He had two daughters an' two sons. Them an' his poor wife had all the work in the house to do, 'cause he wouldn' waste no Nigger to help 'em out. His family was as scared o' him as we was. They lived all their lives under his whip. No Sir! No Sir! There warnt no meaner man in the world than old man Jim Rankin.

"My pappy was Allen Rankin an' my mammy was Ca'line. There was twelve o' us chillun, nine boys an' three girls. My pa was born in Mississippi an' sol' to Marster Rankin when he was a young man. My mammy was married in South Carolina an' sol' to Marster Rankin over at Columbia. She had to leave her family. But she warnt long in gittin' her another man.

"Oh Lordy! The way us Niggers was treated was awful. Marster would beat, knock, kick, kill. He done ever'thing he could 'cept eat us - We was worked to death. We worked all Sunday, all day, all night. He whipped us 'til some jus' lay down to die. It was a poor life. I knows it aint right to have hate in the heart, but, God Almighty! It's hard to be forgivin' when I think of old man Rankin. If one o' his Niggers done something to displeas him, which was mos' ever' day, he'd whip him 'til he'd mos' die an' then he'd kick him 'roun in the dust. He'd even take his gun an', before the Nigger had time to open his mouth, he'd jus' stan' there an' shoot him down.

"We'd git up at dawn to go to the fiel's. We'd take our pails o' grub with us an' hang 'em up in a row by the fence. We had meal an' pork an' beef an' greens to eat. That was mos'ly what we had. Many a time when noontime come an' we'd go to eat our vittals the marster would come a-walkin' through the fiel with ten or twelve o' his houn' dogs. If he looked in the pails an' was displeas with what he seen in 'em, he took 'em an' dumped 'em out before our very eyes an' let the dogs grab it up. We didn' git nothin' to eat then 'til we come home late in the evenin'. After he left we'd pick up pieces of the grub that the dogs left an' eat 'em. Hongry - hongry - we was so hongry!

"We had our separate cabins an' at sunset all of us would go in an' shut the door an' pray the Lord Marster Jim didn' call us out.

"We never had much clothes 'ceptin' what was give us by the marster or the mistis. Winter time we never had 'nough to wear nor 'nough to eat. We wore homespun all the time. The marster didn' think we needed anything, but jus' a little.

"We didn' go to church, but Sundays we'd gather 'roun' an' listen to the mistis read a little out o' the Bible. The marster said we didn' need no religion an' he finally stopped her from readin' to us.

"When the war come Marster was a captain of a regiment. He went away an' stayed a year. When he come back he was even meaner than before.

"When he come home from the war he stayed for two weeks. The night 'fore he was a-fixin' to leave to go back he come out on his front porch to smoke his pipe. He was a-standin' leanin' up ag'in' a railin' when somebody sneaked up in the darkness an' shot him three times. Oh my Lord! He died the nex' mornin'. He never knowed who done it. I was glad they shot him down.

"Sometimes the cavalry would come an' stay at the house an' the mistis would have to 'tend to 'em an' see that they got plenty to eat an' fresh horses.

"I never seen no fightin'. I stayed on the plantation 'til the war was over. I didn' see none o' the fightin'".
"I don't 'member nothin' 'bout Jefferson Davis. Lincoln was the man that set us free. He was a big general in the war.

"I 'member a song we sung, then. It went kinda like this:

'Free at las',

Free at las',

Thank God Almighty I's free at las'.

Mmmmm,mmmmm,mmmmm'

"I only seen the Klu Klux Klan onct. They was a-paradin' the streets here in Brookhaven. They had a Nigger that they was a-goin' to tar an' feather.

"When the mistis tol' us we was free (my pappy was already dead, then) my mammy packed us chillun up to move. We travelled on a cotton wagon to Covington, Louisiana. We all worked on a farm there 'bout a year. Than all 'cept me moved to Mandeville, Louisiana an' worked on a farm there. I hired out to Mr. Charlie Duson, a baker. Then we moved to a farm above Baton Rouge, Louisiana an' worked for Mr. Abe Manning. We jus' travelled all over from one place to another.

"Then I got a letter from a frien' o' mine in Gainesville, Mississippi. He had a job for me on a boat, haulin' lumber up the coast to Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, Long Beach, Gulfport, an' all them coast towns. I worked out o' Gainesville on this boat for 'bout two year. I lost track o' my family then an' never seen 'em no more.

"In the year 1870 I got the call from the Lord to go out an' preach. I left Gainesville an' travelled to Summit, Mississippi where another frien' o' mine lived. I preached the words o' the Lord an' travelled from one place to another.

"In 1873 I got married an' decided to settle in Brookhaven. I preached an' all my flock believed in me. I bought up this house an' the two on each side of it. Here I raised seven chillun in the way o' the Lord. They is all in different parts o' the country now, but I sees one of 'em ever' now an' then. Las' April the Lord seen fit to put me a-bed an' I been ailin' with misery ever since.

"The young folks now-a-days are happy an' don't know 'bout mar an' slavery times, but I does. They don't know nothin' an' don't make the mark in the worl' that the old folks did. Old people made the first roads in Mississippi. The Niggers today wouldn' know how to act on a plantation. But they are happy. We was miserable.

"Slavery days was bitter an' I can't forgit the sufferin'. Oh, God! I hates 'em, hates 'an. God Almighty never meant for human beings to be like animals. Us Niggers has a soul an' a heart an' a min'. We aint like a dog or a horse. If all marsters had been good like some, the slaves would all a-been happy. But marsters like mine ought never been allowed to own Niggers.

"I didn' spec nothin' out o' freedom 'ceptin' peace an' happiness an' the right to go my way as I pleased. I prays to the Lord for us to be free, always.

"That's the way God Almighty wants it."