

**Mississippi Narratives**  
**Prepared by**  
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**Clara C. Young age 95**

Clara C. Young, ex-slave, Monroe County, is approximately 95 years old, about five feet two inches tall and weighs 105 pounds. She is a frail, darkskinned Negro, with the typical broad nose and the large mouth of the southern Negro. Her physical condition is especially good for a woman of her age. She is very talkative at times, but her memory appears to come and go, so that she has to be prompted at intervals in her story telling by her daughter or granddaughter, with whom she lives. Familiarly known as "Aunt Classie," she is very proud of her age and more especially of her long line of descendants.

"Law, Miss, I doan know when I was born, but I do know dat I'se seibenteen years old when I was fust sol'. Dey put me an' my brudder up on de auction block at de same time. He brung \$1,400 but I dis'members zactly what dey paid fer me. Wa'nt dat much, tho', fer big strong mens brung mo' dan wimmens an' gals."

Long pauses accentuated the quavery voice of the old Negro, whose head resembled a nappy patch of cotton, and who was so enthusiastic over reminiscing about the days when she was young and carefree.

"I was born in Huntsville, alabamy, an' my mammy an' pappy was name Silby an' Sharper Conley. Dey tuk de las' name frum de old marster dat owned 'em. I lived dar wid 'em 'til de chullun drew dey parts an' us was 'vided out. While I was wid old marster, he let Miss Rachel – dat was his wife – have me fer de house. She larned me how to cook an' wait on de table, an' I declar', she call me her ver' smartest

gal! Sometimes, tho', I wouldn' come right quick lak when she ring de bell fer me, an' she'd start ringin' it harder an' harder. I knowed den she was mad. When I'd get dar, she'd fuss at me an' tu'n my dress up an' whup me – not hard 'cause she wa'nt so strong – but I'd holler some!”

“Dey had a nigger woman to teach all de house darkies how to read an' write an' I larned how to sign my name an' got as fur as b-a-k-e-r in de Blue Back Speller.”

“Marse Conley an' Miss Rachel had fo' chullun, Miss Mary, Miss Alice, Miss Willie, an' Marse Andrew, an' when de time come, dey give me to Marse Andrew. He car'ied me an' de rest out to Texas whar he thought he would go an' git rich. We neber stayed long, tho', fer lots of de niggers runned 'way to de Free State an' Marse Andrew didn' lak dat.”

“It was when he brought us back to Huntsville dat I was sol'. All de white folks was a gittin' scared dey was gwine to lose dey slaves an' dere was a pow'ful lot er nigger sellin' goin' on den. Marse Ewing bought me frum him an' car'ied me to his plantation ner Aberdeen, Mississipi. Den I started to workin' in de fiel' wid de rest of de hands. De oberseer dat we had was right mean to us when we didn' work our rows as fas' as de others, an' sometime he whup us, wimmen an' all. When he did dat some of us most nigh allus tell de marster an' he would jump on de oberseer an' tell him to lay off de wimmen an' chullun. Dey was allus sort of thoughtful of us an' we loved old marster.”

“I heard tell one time, tho', of de hired man (he was a nigger) an' de oberseer whuppin' one of my cousins 'til she bled; she was jes' seibenteen years old an' was in de fambly way fer de fust time, an' couldn' work as hard as de rest. Nex' mawnin' afte' dat she died. De hired man tol' de rest if dey said anything 'bout it to de marster, he'd beat dem to death too so every'body kep' quiet an' de marster neber knowed.”

“We worked hard in de fiel' all day, but when dark come we would all go to de quarters an' afte' supper we would set 'roun' an' sing an' talk. Mos' of de time we had good food to eat 'cause mos' of us had our gardens, an' de Quarters cook would fix what we wanted if we brung it to her. Durin' de last years 'fo de surrender, we didn't have much to eat tho' an' made out de best we could.”

“De mos' fun we had was at our meetin's. We had dem mos' ever' Sunday an' dey lasted way into de night. De preacher I laked de bes' was name Mathew Ewing. He was a comely nigger, black as night, an' he sho' could read out of his han'. He neber larned no real readin' an' writin' but he sho' knowed his Bible an' would hol' his han' out an' mak lak he was readin' an' preach de purtiest preachin' you ever heered. De meetin's last frum early in de mawnin' 'til late at night. When dark come, de men folks would hang up a wash pot, bottom up'ards, in de little brush church-house us had, so's it would catch de noise an' de oberseer wouldn' hear us singin' an' shoutin'. Dey didn' min' us meetin' in de day time, but

dey thought iffen we stayed up ha'f de night we wouldn' work as hard de nex' day – and dat was de truf."

"You should'a seen some of de niggers get 'ligion. De best way was to carry 'em to de cemetery an' let 'em stand ober a grave. Dey would start singin' an' shoutin' 'bout seein' fire an' brimstone; den dey would sing some mo' an' look plum sanctified."

"When us had our big meetin's dere would allus be some darkies frum de plantations aroun' to come. Dey would have to slip off 'cause dey marsters was afraid dey would git hitched up wid some other black boy or gal on de other plantation an' den dey would either have to buy or sell a nigger 'fo you could git any work out of him."

"We neber knowed much 'bout de War, 'cept dat we didn' have as much to eat or wear, an' de white men folks was all gone. Den, too, Old Miss cried a lot of de time."

"De Yankees come 'roun' afte' de War an' tol' us we's free an' we shouted an' sang, an' had a big celebration fer a few days. Den we got to wonderin' 'bout what good it did us. It didn't feel no diffrent; we all loved our marster an' missus an' stayed on wid 'em jes' lak nothin' had happened. De Yankees tried to git some of de men to vote, too, but not many did 'cause dey was scared of de Ku Kluxers. Dey would come at night all dressed up lak ghosts an' scare us all. We didn' lak de Yankees anyway. Dey we'nt good to us' when dey lef' we would allus sing dat leetle song what go lak dis:"

'Old Mister Yankee, think he is so grand,

Wid his blue coat tail a draggin' on de ground!

"I stayed on wid Old Marster afte' de surrender, wid de res', 'til I met Joshua. Joshua Young was his name an' he b'longed to de Youngs what lived out at Waverly. I moved out dar wid him afte' we married. We didn't have no big weddin' 'cause dare wa'nt much money den. We had a preacher tho', an' den went along jes' lak we had allus been mar'ied."

"Josh, he's been daid fer a long time now but we had a good life out at Waverly an' many a night stood outside de parlor do' an' watch de white folks at dey hig dances an' parties. De folks was pow'ful nice to us an' we raised a passeler chullun out dar. All of 'em 'ceptin' three be daid now. George is de oldes' of those lef'. He's a bricklayer, carpenter, preacher, an' mos anything else he 'cides to call hisse'f. He's got

19 or 20 chullun, I dis' members which. Edith ain't got so many. She live up North. I lives wid my other darter an' her gal. I named her afte' my sisters. Her name is Anna Luvenia Hulda Larissa Jane Bell Young McMillan. Dere may be more'n dat now, but anyways dere is five generations livin'."

"What I think 'bout slav'ry? Well, leetle Miss, I tell you, I wish it was back. Us was a lot better off in dem days dan we is now. If dem Yankees had lef' us 'lone we'd been a lot happier. We wouldn' been on 'lief an' old age pension fer de las' three years. An' Janie May, here, I b'lieve, sure as goodness, would'a been de Missus' very smartes' gal, an' would'a stayed wid her in de Big House lak I did."

Note: This autobiography is exactly as related by the Negro to the field work with exception of a few changes in spelling. Phraseology is the same.