

Mississippi Narratives
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Edward Jones
Born 1855

I can remember heaps more about war days than folks thinks I can 'cause I don't discuss it with them. I made up my mind long ago not to get in no argument with folks what ain't got no logic in their conversation 'cause it don't get you no where, and there ain't no argument against ignorance. I was born in Alabama, Montgomery County. My mother's name was Sophia Jones. I never knew my father. He didn't belong to the same master that owned my mother.

The young Miss in my mother's family married Mr. Tom Dickerson and moved to his home in Hinds County, Mississippi. She brought with her nine slaves, among them my mother and her five children, three boys and two girls. Course my father couldn't come because he belonged to another family. I can never remember seeing him, but after the war was over we all went back to my father's name---Jones. My Auntie was among the ones who came too. She did the cooking for everybody, both black and white. The white folks had white flour and we ate corn bread. There wasn't no complaint to be made about what we had. It was good and plentiful. There were not many to cook for. The place was a small rented one. My new Master was a school teacher and merchant. He ran the place in connection with his business. There were only thirteen slaves, one man, four women, and eight children.

Conditions were different from big places. We didn't have no overseer, or driver, but we all had to work. I was not old enough to do much 'cept pick a little cotton, and gather up brush wood for the fires. Sometimes I could make a little money holding a horse for a white gentleman or taking a message for him. The money was mine, and I could do with it what I pleased. Master was good to us. He very seldom whipped anybody, but when he got mad, he surely could cuss. Once my mother ran off. She didn't get

punished for it 'cause it was just a family to do. She got contrary and left. The rules in them days was if you left the place you had to have a pass. Then you could go anywhere. If you were caught without your pass, you would be taken up by the patrol and brought home, and the patrol men would be paid for catching you. My mother came back before she was caught. There was a man on the place next to us what wasn't allowed to go nowhere. One day he slipped off any way. When they caught him, they shaved one side of his head. He had to go back to his master like that. He sure did look like he was crazy with his hair all off one side.

Life was mostly very pleasant for us. Our houses were comfortable, and we had plenty of warm cover at night. The white folks house was just about the same as most white folks lives in now. It warn't so good, and it warn't so bad that it made any special memory in my mind. It must have been tall off the ground 'cause we would get under it to hear what the white folks was talking about. The white folks would come to our house to eaves drop too. It was a habit for us to talk about white horses when we meant white folks, so if they heard us they wouldn't know we was talking about them. That's the reason you can't 'pend on nothing colored folks tells you to this good day. They learned to be so deceivable when they was young. We didn't have no churches of our own. We went to the white folks church. We held prayer meeting at our homes. Most of the people was Methodists so we didn't have no big baptizings. Sometime when a person died, they would hold a Christian burial and sometime they would just have songs sung at the grave. On Christmas and the 4th of July we would get the old fiddle man to play for us to dance. If we danced any other time, the only music we had was the patting of the hands. Most of the amusements was quilting parties, and they were only for the women. There warn't never no work went on after dinner on Saturdays, even after the war when they was paid to work. The folks said right out that Old Master didn't make them work, and they knew it wasn't right to do so.

The country all around us was filled with Indians. There were more Indians than whites and blacks put together. They were very peaceful like, and none of us were scared of them. They made all kinds of baskets to sell to get money to buy whiskey. What we were scared of was ghosts. You couldn't get us children out of doors after dark. My brother saw ghosts and he would tell us about them. The only thing I ever saw was a light, no feet, no body, just a light. It crossed the road and went back into the woods. We didn't hear nothing about voodoo and charms. All that came up since the War. There is folks today what thinks everytime they gets sick that some one has put the jinks upon them, and when a woman's husband leaves her she thinks another woman has conjured him into leaving.

After the war was over my family stayed on the place they was on for a year. The others stayed on until they died. Some white folks told us later that after Old Master died, Old Miss married a Yankee man. That looks like the colored is more loyal than the whites. Even now there ain't no good colored man what will go against his boss, lessen he has been corrupted by some story that ain't got no substance to it, just like the stories they used to tell about Abraham Lincoln. The darkies all had it he was a black man, and the son of a queen. They didn't tell no such stories on Jefferson Davis, 'cause both the white and black knowed he was a grand man. I have been on his plantation near Vicksburg a many a time. He had all the people on his place learn to read and write. Mr. Davis had a old colored man named Ben

Montgomery what took care of everything on that place. He could run it just the same as if his master had been home. I have known the old man to go to New Orleans with as much as ninety thousand dollars to put in the Bank. Just before Vicksburg was taken, Mr. Davis deeded the place to old Man Montgomery. When the Yankees tried to take that property, Old Man Montgomery said it was his. 'Course they didn't believe no such story as that so they took it to the Court, and sure enough the old Man produced the deed and the property was saved. Yes Ma'm! that really happened. Lots of the colored folks had false ideas concerning freedom. They thought they were going to be on top and govern the country, and the Yankees would conform that idea. It was natural for them to say that 'cause they were fighting against the South. It was a many a long day before they got it all straightened out. It didn't bother me none. I just went on farming same as if nothing had happened. After I quit farming I taught school, and later became a Baptist preacher. I married and had six children. My wife an all of the children is dead, except one son who is living in Jackson. I haven't seen him for a long time, and I don't know any of my grand children. I am now a healer. That is I have power to cure any kind of sickness and stop any pain by looking at the person afflicted. I don't use any voo doo or charm. Don't believe in nothing like that. I have power to change water into medicine, the only medicine I ever use. I could do so much more for humanity if people didn't have such false ideas. Before people got so poor, I made a good living healing. When the depression came on and folks had no money to pay to be healed, I would cure them just the same for nothing, as I did for pay. I was sorry for them, and I got too much humane in my nature to see suffering. Now that folks is prosperous again, they still expect me to cure them for nothing, so I make very little money. My wants are few and the government helps me through the old age assistance. I have nothing to complain of as long as I can get about to lead a useful and helpful life.