

**Mississippi Narratives**  
**Prepared by**  
**The Federal Writer's Project of**  
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**For the State of Mississippi**  
**Jeff Johnson - Age 75**

"I aint talkin' no big talk, Mistis. My Papy name me Jeff Johnson for his Marster. I was born in Cartersville - dat was where we lived. Dat's in Georgia, Mistis; yes'm, dat's in Georgia. But I didn' grow up dere. 'Bout time I kin start to 'member, Marster sont de wagon for us an' tuck us out to de plantation. Dey was sev'ral fam'lies livin' dere. Us little fellers went to school some over to Finley's Quarters; dat was about three mile. Dey was a colored man school teacher. I 'spec' he was a preacher.

"But, tell you de trufe, Mistis, I was so little, I don' recollect' nothin' much about hit. My Mamy and Papy, dey worked in de fiel', an' when dey come in at dark, we be's sleepy an' didn' pay 'em no mind. I 'spec' dey talked about de so-jers an' de Yankees but I aint never see no Yankee. De white gent'mun mus'er run all dat trash outen de country by time I kin start to recollect'.

"Georgia was where I live 'til I was 'bout fifteen. We danced some in dem days. My Papy was a sorter what you call a ginger-cake colored nigger an' he had a brother jus' lak him what got lef' a place up in Chattanooga. He was my uncle an' when I was 'bout fifteen, I 'cided to foller him to Chattanooga an' after while I git dere sho' nuff. I work a while an' den I moves on - jus' driftin' 'roun' - an' after while I gits ter Mer-ree-dian. I works de furnace at de brick-yard an' I works at Mr. Sturges Company feed-house an' I worked de streets some. I aint never work in prison though.

"I mar'ied in, well, some say it's Kemper. Me an' her separated. Yes'm, we had chullun, Mistis. I don't zactly - well, you count 'em, Mistis, while I calls 'em off. Dey was Jeff an' Liza - dat's two, aint it? - an' Sarafin an' ... an' Carter. How many is dat, Mistis? Fo', yes'm. My wife was name Sally an' she was ... An Queen Esther! Did I call off Queen Esther's name, Mistis? Well, dey was her, too. Five chullun, yes'm, dat's right. Dey don' none of 'em live in Mer-ree-dian.

"I stays out here in dat old two-story house on thiry-fourth Avenue with old Mis' Jane Scott. She aint dere though; she stay in Memphis. I can' walk aroun' now 'count of my rheumatis'. I supe-un-tends 'round dere at de He'p-Mer-Se'f Sto' on de corner where you sees me a-settin' by de side do'. I picks up slops an' trash an' dey pays me a little somp'in' an' I buys me my little somp'in'-teat.

"I'se a Missionary Baptis'. I was baptise up in Alabama out a piece frum York. I was baptise in de creek, yes'm. Sometimes, if dey's a meetin' close 'roun', I goes, but I can' get far now 'count of my rheumatis'.

"Dey is too much change now days. I used to be a mighty cotton-picker. I seen de time when I could pick six hund'ed pounds a day, plenty days; an' I could cut five cords of fo'foot wood a day an' put hit up too. Mr. John Lutz - you knows him - he turns me off onct 'cause he say I cut too much in one day. He say hit ud break de Fus National Bank to pay me. Course, he 'tended that for a joke but he aint never took me back.

"But I got white folks. Mr. Big Boss Williams an' Mr. Casper Phillips, dey is de two bes' white men ever lived. Big Boss he gimme two bits mos' ever' mornin' an' Mr. Casper he gimme dis here fer my rheumatis' - yes'm, Sal'patica, he call hit - somp'in' like dat.

"Niggers now days can't compare nowadays. They aint got no sense, tries ter ac' like dey's white, but hit aint no use; a nigger's a nigger. Dat aint no disgrace. If they stays in they place, they make somebody think they got some raisin', but they aint got sense 'nough ter know dat."

"We played marbles an' spinnin' tops. De little white chullun give us what playthings we had. Once I tuck some of they marbles an' runned back ter de house an' started playin' with 'em befo' de fire where my mama was churnin'. She say: 'Son, where did you git dem marbles?' I say I foun' 'em. She say, 'All right, come on;' an' she tuck me back over ter de big house an' de little white chullun was still out in de yard jes er-hollerin'. An' my mama whup me right there befo' 'em, an' that was my first an' last stealin'-'

"Yes'm! Thank you, Mistis, thank you! Good mornin', Mistis!"

Interviewer's notes:

The mention of Abraham Lincoln awakened no response in Jeff's mind. Jefferson Davis, ditto.

Jeff was much embarrassed at not being able to answer worker's questions. He said: "Mistis, if I knowed, I show tell you, but taint no use tellin' you nothin' but de trufe." Jeff Johnson lives at 13th St. & 34th Ave., Meridian, Miss., Age, 75 years, Height, 5 feet, 4-1/2 inches, Weight, 150 pounds, color, dark brown, Hair, kinky gray.