

## Isaam Morgan

### Interview with Isaam Morgan

—*Mary A. Poole, Mobile, Alabama*

"Mistis, I was bawn in 1853, 'cordin' to ole Miss's Bible, near Lotts Landing on the Alabama River." It was Isaam Morgan who spoke from his porch at 1657 Sligo Street, Mobile, Alabama. "I made a special trip back dar a few months back to de ole place, an' Mistis' daughter looked it up for me 'caze I done had forgot.

"Mr. James Morgan was my Massa, an' his wife, Miss Delia, was my Mistis. My mammy's name was Ann Morgan, an' as for my pappy, I done forgot his'n. I was raised raght dar in de white folks house, an' I had my own special place to sleep. I was de house boy, an' when I growed older I driv' Mistis aroun' in de Ca'iage.

"Us niggers lived in sho-'nuff style. Us had our regular quarters whar us lived in white log cabins chinked wid mud, an' de slaves had built-in beds an' a big open fireplace whar dey cooked. Us had plenty somp'n t'eat. All us had to do was to ask for it an' de Massa done de res'. Our rations was gib out to us eve'y Saddy. Some of de bes' food us ever had was 'possum an' taters. Us'd go out at night wid a big sack, an' a pack of houn's an' twarn't long befo' we done treed a 'possum. Atter we done treed him, de dogs would stan' aroun' de tree an' bark. Iffen de tree was small, us could shake him out. Iffen it was big, one of de niggers hadda climb up it an' git ole Mr. 'Possum hisself.

"Funny things about 'possums, Miss; de bigger dey is seem lak de littler de tree dey picks to go up. It is sho-'nuff fun, dough, to go a trailin' th'ough de woods atter a 'possum or coon. De coon'll give you de bes' chase, but he ain't no good eatin' lak de 'possum. I seen a coon one time when he was cornered bite de tip of a houn's nose off.

"Massa Morgan sol' wood to de steam boats, an' us slaves hadda cut de wood, an' split it up into smaller pieces. Any time a slave worked over time or cut mo' wood dan he s'pose' to, Massa pay him money for it, caze whenever one of us slaves seen somp'n we lak, we did jus' lak de white folks does now. Us bought it.

"Massa never whupped none of his slaves; he jus' tole us whut to do an' iffen we didn't do it, he'd call us to him an' he would say in his sorta way: 'Nigger! How many mo' times is I gotta tell you to do lak you tole?' Dat's all he would say, an' believe me Mistis, he hada a way of lookin' at you dat made you jump. When he bought a new slave dat wasn't use to doin' what he was tol', 'twarn't long befo' massa had him in line.

"No'm none of our slaves ever tried to run away. Dey all knowed dey was well off. We didn't have no oberseer but once. He was a mean un too. He tried to fight an' whup us slaves, an' one night six big nigger men jumped on him an' scairt him mos' to death. Atter dat de massa wouldn't never have no mo' oberseers. He tended to dat business hisself.

"Whut we do atter we finished work? Go to bed! Dat was de on'les' place we was fittin' for. Us was so tired us wouldn't lie down two minutes 'fo us was 'sleep. On some moonlight nights us was 'lowed to pick de cotton. Den us'd git a little res' de nex' day.

"Massa an' his fambly used brass lamps an' candles for light, an' a few of us slaves had brass lamps too, but most of de niggers used torch lights.

"Some of de plantations had a calaboose whar dey putt de slaves dat wouldn't behave. Dis calaboose was built of logs fastened together wid stout ropes an' sunk into de groun', but Massa didn't need no calaboose to make his niggers behave.



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"Yassum, us had remedies for ailments. We used wild hoarhound tea for de chills an' fever, an' sweet gum turpentine, an' mutton suet. Dey wan all good uns too. But shucks! Warn't nothin' much ever de matter wid us niggers.

"Yassum, we used rock an' cotton to start de fires on de plantation, an' Massa had a flint lock rifle, too.

"De slaves had dere own special graveyard an' us'd make de coffins raght on de place dar. When someone die, he was taken in a ox cart to de grave, wid all de slaves a-walkin' 'long behine de cart singin' de spirituals.

"Our clothes was made mostly outen osnaburg wove on de plantation. We had wool clothes for de winter time dat was carded on de place. We had shoes made by our own cobbler an' tanned on de plantation. We called dese brogans.

"Atter de surrender, de Yankees camped near our place, an' bought aigs f'um us. Dey offered me a hoss iffen I would go nawth wid dem, but I jus' couldn't leave de Massa even dough I did wanted dat hoss mighty bad. I was twenty-one years old when Massa came to me one day an' say: 'Isaam, you is a grown man now. You is got to boss your own business. It's up to you to fin' work. I can't keep you no longer. Good luck Isaam. You has been a good nigger, an' you is gonna make somebody a good worker.'

"Atter I lef' Massa I worked at diff'ent jobs, sich as: loader, roustabout on different steamboats an' cotton picker. I worked on de *May Boyd*, *Lula D.* an' de *Gardner*. One of de ole songs sang on de boats went somp'n lak dis:

De John T. Moore

De Lula D.

An' all dem boats is mine

If you can't ship on de Lula D.

You ain't no man o' mine.

"I been ma'ied three times, Mistis, an' Lawd chile I done forgot de name of my fust wife. I guess she still livin' somewhere caze she was too mean to die. My secon' wife was named Dora, an' she is daid. I got a wife now name Lily. She purty good.

"Yes maam you can take my picture, but lemme git my hat, caze I ain't got no hair on my haid, an' I looks better wid a hat. I'se got to be fixed up stylish."