

CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS: LESSON 3: HANDOUT 2A

SLAVE GIRL RECOLLECTIONS FROM VIRGINIA¹

This account is from a formerly enslaved person who recalls her experiences on a plantation in Virginia.

My grandmother showed she was actuated on every occasion by truly Christian principles. She wished very much to teach me the Prayers and Liturgy which she had learnt.

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Her grandmother was a Christian and wanted to teach her prayers and the parts of a church service.

The plantation owner made the girl feel like she could not pray because he told her that enslaved people had no souls. He compared them to the animals on the plantation.

He claimed only White people had souls.

But the conduct of my master caused great **perplexity** to me, and made me indifferent about any such thing. My master was in the habit of sending for all the slave children from the cabins, then standing on the verandah, he would say, "Look! Do you see those horses?" "Yes, Sir," all replied together. "Do you see the cows?" "Yes, Sir." "Do you see the sheep?" "Yes, Sir." "Do you see the mules?" "Yes, Sir." "Look, you n*****! you have no souls, you are just like those cattle, when you die there is an end of you; there is nothing more for you to think about than living. White people only have souls."

My mother....had no notion of what religion is, and to my good grandmother alone I am indebted for any instruction I at this time received. She was ever, as I have said before, anxious to acquire religious knowledge and to attend prayer-meetings as often as she possibly could; for doing so on one occasion, I witnessed the first flogging I ever saw in my life. But before I describe the flogging, I will explain about the overseers.

The girl's mother was not religious. Her grandmother taught her about religion and prayer. Her grandmother wanted to go to prayer services, and for that she was flogged, or beaten.

The girl explains that many owners had so much land and enslaved people to manage that they hired white men called overseers to look after everything.

She describes these men as being less likely to abuse them.

Many masters possessing large plantations, and some hundreds of slaves, being desirous to divest themselves as much as possible of the cares of managing the estate, hire white men, at a salary of from 1,200 to 1,400 dollars per annum, to look after the whole property. These are the best and most **humane** overseers. But other slave **proprietors**, in order to save the cost of an overseer, but chiefly to exact as much work as possible out of the n*****, make a n***** an overseer, who if he does not cruelly work the slaves is threatened with a flogging, which the master cannot give to a white man. In order to save his own back, the slave overseer very often behaves in

However, some owners did not want to spend money on an overseer so they put other enslaved people in charge. These people in charge would be threatened with violence if they do not "cruelly work" the others.

¹ Excerpt from Francis Fedric, "Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky, Or Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America," pp. 5-7. Electronic edition. Source: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/fedric/fedric.html>

This owner actually made the girl's grandmother's son the overseer. This meant he was in charge of making his mother work.

Because the grandmother had attended a prayer meeting, her son was ordered to beat her while the owner stood and watched.

the most brutal manner to the n***** under him. My grandmother's master was one of the hard kind. He had made her son an overseer.

Consequently, my grandmother having committed the crime of attending a prayer-meeting, was ordered to be flogged by her own son. This was done by tying her hands before her with a rope, and then fastening the rope to a peach tree, and laying bare the back. Her own son was then made to give her forty lashes with a thong of a raw cow's-hide, her master standing over her the whole time blaspheming and threatening what he would do if her son did not lay it on.

My master had about 100 slaves, engaged chiefly in the **cultivation** of tobacco, this and wheat being the staple produce of Virginia at that time. The slaves had to work very hard in digging the ground with what is termed a grub hoe. The slaves leave their huts quite early in the morning, and work until late at night, especially in the spring and fall. I have known them very often, when my master has been away drinking, work all night long, husking Indian corn to put into cribs.

The owner had many enslaved people that farmed tobacco and wheat, which were the major crops in Virginia's plantation economy.

Enslaved people worked hard and worked all day until late at night.