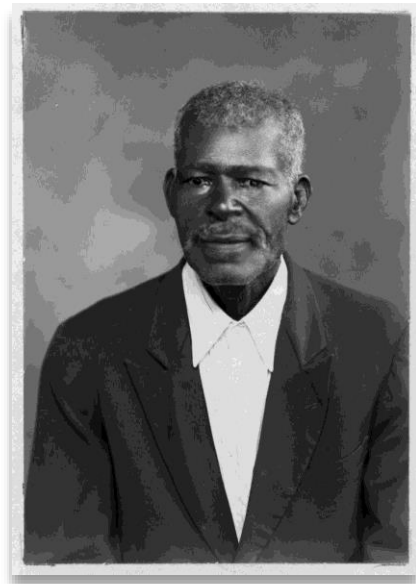


Spence Johnson was born free, a member of the Choctaw Nation, in the Indian Territory, in the 1850. He does not know his exact age. He and his mother were stolen and sold at auction in Shreveport to Riley Surratt, who lived near Shreveport, on the Texas-Louisiana line. He moved to Waco, Texas in 1874, where he still lived at the time of his interview.

“De n----- stealers done stole me and my mammy out’n de Choctaw Nation, up in de Indian Territory, when I was ‘bout three years old. Brudder Knox, Sis Hannah, and my mammy and her two step-chillun was down on de river washin’. De n----- stealers drive up in a big carriage and mammy jus’ thought nothin’, cause the ford was near dere and people goin’ on de road stopped to water de horses and res’ awhile in de shade. By’n by, a man coaxes de two bigges’ chillun to de carriage and give dem some kind-a candy. Other chillun sees dis and goes, too. Two other men was walkin’ ‘round smokin’ and gettin’ closer to mammy all de time. When he kin, de man in de carriage got de two big step-chillun in wihn him and me and sis clumb in too, to see how come. Den de man holler, ‘Git de ole one and let’s git from here.’ With dat de two big men grab mammy and she fought and screeched and bit and cry, but dey hit her on de head with something and drug her in, and throwed her on de floor. De big chilluns begin to fight for mammy, but one of de men hit ‘em hard and off dey driv, with de horses under whip.



Spence Johnson, Age over 87.

“Dis was near a place called Boggy Depot. Dey went down de Red Ribber, ‘cross de ribber and on down in Louisian to Shreveport.

Down in Louisan us was put on what dey call de ‘block and sol’ to de highes’ bidder. My mammy and her three chillun brung \$3,000 flat. De step chillun was sol’ to somebody else, but us was bought by Marse Riley Surratt. He was de daddy of Judge Marshall Surratt, him who got to be judge here in Waco.

“Marse Riley Surratt had a big plantation; don’t know how many acres, but dere was a factory and gins and big houses and lots of n----- quarters, De house was right on de Tex-Louisian line. Mammy cooked for ‘em. When Marse Riley bought her, she couldn1 speak nothin’ but de Choctaw words. I was a baby when us lef’ de Choctaw country. My sister looked like a full blood Choctaw Indian and she could pass for a real full blood Indian. Mammy’s folks was all Choctaw Indians. Her sisters was Polly Hogan, and Sookey Hogan and she had a brudder, Nolan Tubby. Dey was all known in de Territory in de ole days.

SOURCE: *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 2, Easter-King*. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material, p. 323-330. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn162/>. Image: *Spence Johnson, Age over 87*. United States Texas, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp162228/>.

A Note on Language of the WPA Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938

These oral histories reflect both the experiences of formerly enslaved people and the historical moment in which the interviews were recorded. Interviewers often tried to record the interviewee’s spoken language as they heard it. But this process was not as straightforward as it seems. Historians recognize that “what most interviewers assumed to be ‘the usual’ patterns of speech of their informants’ speech was unavoidably influenced by preconceptions and stereotypes.”

For more information: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/note-on-the-language-of-the-narratives/>