

The following excerpts, taken from the Oklahoma WPA Narratives, include recollections of formerly enslaved people who witnessed others being trafficked and sold or who experienced being sold themselves. Their recollections bear striking similarities—testifying to the ways in which children were separated from parents and siblings and spouses from each other, often never to see each other again. The auction advertisements, while not referring to any specific person’s experience, represent the universality of slave auctions.

Doc Daniel Dowdy, age 81

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (p. 76-80)

I was born June 6, 1856 in Madison County, Georgia, father was named Joe Dowdy and mother was named Mary Dowdy. There was 9 of us boys, George, Smith, Lewis, Henry, William, myself, Newt, James and Jeff. There was one girl and she was my twin, and her name was Sarah. My mother and father come from Richmond, Va., to Georgia. Father lived on one side of the river and my mother on the other side. My father would come over ever week to visit us. Noah Meadows bought my father and Elizabeth Davis, daughter of the old master took my mother. They married in Noah Meadows’ house.

...

I saw slaves sold. I can see that old block now. My cousin Eliza was a pretty girl, really good looking. Her master was her father. When the girls in the big house had beaux coming to see ‘em, they’d ask, “Who is that pretty gal?” So they decided to git rid of her right away. The day they sold her will allus be remembered. They stripped her to be bid off and looked at. I wasn’t allowed to stand in the crowd. I was laying down tinder a fig brush. The man that bought Eliza was from New York. The Negroes had made up nuff [sic] money to buy her off theyself, “but they wouldn’t let that happen. There was a man bidding for her who was a Swedeland. He allus bid for the good looking cullud gals and bought ‘em for his own use. He ask the man from New York, “Whut you gonna do with her when you git ‘er?” The man from New York said, “None of your damn business, but you ain’t got money nuff to buy ‘er.” When the man from New York had done bought her, he said, “Eliza, you are free from now on.” She left and went to New York with him. Mama and Eliza both cried when she was being showed off, and master told ‘em to shet up before he knocked they brains out.

Prince Bee, age 85

Red Bird, Oklahoma (p. 14-16)

I don’t know how old I was when I found myself standing on the toppen part of a high stump with a lot of white folks walking around looking at the little scared boy that was me. Pretty soon the old master, (that’s

<p>TO BE SOLD AT AUCTION WITHOUT RESERVE. BY McCERREN, LANDRY & CO., J. W. McCERREN, Auctioneer, Office and Salesroom, Masonic Hall, St. Charles street.</p>	
<p>SATURDAY, October 22, 1859, at 12 o'clock, at the St. Louis Hotel, at auction, will be sold— The slave woman FANNY, about 30 years of age—a good field hand, fair cook, washer and ironer. Title only guaranteed.</p>	
<p>TERMS—Cash. Act of sale before Jus. Graham, Notary Public, at the expense of purchaser. o18</p>	
<p>SLAVE AT AUCTION.</p>	<p>SLAVE AT AUCTION.</p>
<p>BY J. B. WALTON, Auctioneer, office 10 Bank Place.</p>	
<p>SATURDAY, October 22, 1859, at 12 o'clock P. M., at the St. Louis Exchange, St. Louis street, will be sold— The slave SIDNEY, a negro man, aged about 38 years, rough carpenter, good gardener, white washer, etc., etc., guaranteed against vices and maladies, except that he is subject to palpitation of the heart in a slight degree.</p>	
<p>TERMS—Cash. Act of sale before O. de Armas, Notary Public, at the expense of the purchaser. o17</p>	

The New Orleans Crescent (New Orleans, LA), October 18, 1859.

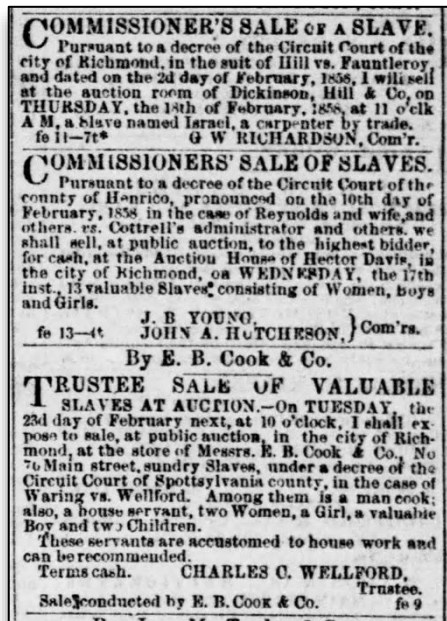
SOURCE: *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 13, Oklahoma, Adams-Young.* 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn130/>

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my first master) Saul Nudville, he say to me that I'm now belonging to Major Bee and for me to get down off the auction block.



Richmond Dispatch (Richmond, VA), February 16, 1858.

**Nancy Gardner, age 79
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (p. 108-110)**

Well, to tell you de truth I don't know my age, but I was born in 1858, in Franklin, Tennessee. Now, you can figger for yourself and tell how old I is. I is de daughter of Prophet and Callie Isaiah, and dey was natives of Tennessee. Dere was three of us children, two boys and myself. I'm de only girl. My brothers names was Prophet and Billie Isaiah. I don't 'member much about dem as we was separated when I was seven years old. I'll never forget when me, my ma and my auntie had to leave my pa and brothers. It is jest as clear in my mind now as it was den, and dat's been about seventy years ago.

Oh God! I tell you it was awful dat day when old Jeff Davis had a bunch of us sent to Memphis to be sold. I can see old Major Clifton now. He was a big n----- trader you know. Well, dey took us on up dere to Memphis and we was sold jest like cattle. Dey sold me and ma together and dey sold pa and de boys together. Dey was sent to Mississippi and we was sent to Alabama. My pa, O how my ma was grieved to death about him! She didn't live long after dat. She didn't live long enough to be set free. Poor ma, she died a slave, but she is saved though. I know she is, and I'll be wid her some day.

It was thirty years before my pa knew if we was still living. Finally in some way he heard dat I was still alive, and he began writing me. Course I was grown and married den and me and my husband had moved to Missouri. Well, my pa started out to see me and on his way he was drowned in de Missouri River, and I never saw him alive after we was sold in Memphis.

**Daniel William Lucas, age 94
Red Bird, Oklahoma (p. 201-202)**

"Now I sees them getting ready for the slave auction. Many of 'em there was. The Master Doctor done owned about two hundred slaves and some—times he sell some for to heat the had crops.

There they'd stand on the wooden blocks, their faces greased and shiny, their arms and bodies pretty well greased too; seemed like they looked better and stronger that way, maybe some other reason, I dunno. And when the auction was over lots of the slaves would try to figger out when would the next one be and worry some afraid they'd be standing up there waiting for the buyers to punch and slap to see is they sound of limb and able to do the days work without loafing down the rows.

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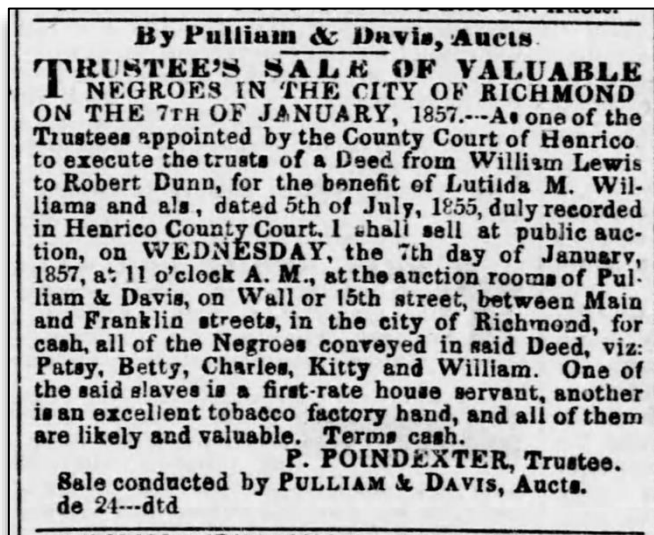
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William Hutson, age 98
Tulsa, Oklahoma (p. 148-149)

They was about twenty slaves on the plantation but I was the one old Master called for when he wanted something special for himself. I was the one he took with him on the trips to town, I was the one who fetch him the cooling drink after he look about the fields and sometimes I carry the little black bag when he goes a-doctoring folks with the misery away off some other farm.

The Master hear about there going be an auction one day and he figgered maybe he needed some more slaves if they was good ones, so he took me and started out early in the morning. It wasn't very far and we got there early before the auction started. Rockon that was the first time I ever see any slaves sold.

They was a long platform made of heavy planks and all the slaves was lined up on the platform, and they was stripped to the waist, men, women, and children. One or two of the women folks was bare naked. They wasn't young women neither, just middle age ones, hut they was built good. Some of them was well greased and that grease covered up many a scar they'd earned for some foolishment [sic] or other.



Richmond Dispatch (Richmond, VA), January 3, 1857.

The Master don't buy none and pretty soon we starts home. The Master was riding horseback, he didn't ever use no buggy 'cause he said that was the way for folks to travel who was too feeble to sit in the saddle—and I rode back of him on another horse, but that horse I rides is just horse while the Master's was a real thoroughbred like maybe you see on race tracks down in the South.

That auction kept bothering me all the way back to the plantation. I kept seeing them little children standing on the platform (platform), their mammy and pappy crying hard 'cause their young'uns is being sold. They was a lot of heartaches even they was slaves and it gets me worried.

I asked the Master is he going to have an auction and he jest laugh. I ain't never sold no slaves yet and I ain't going to, he says. And I gets easier right then. I kind of hates to think about standing up on one of them platforms, kinder sorry to leave my old mammy and the Master, so I was easy in the heart when he talked like that.

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NEGROES FOR SALE.
WE HAVE EIGHT VERY LIKELY NEGROES for sale. They are acclimated, and have been on a cotton plantation for several years, and are sold for no fault whatever.
dec23-†11jan1 WM. McCUTCHEN & CO.

NEGROES FOR SALE.
TO SELL, FOR CASH OR ITS EQUIVALENT, a most valuable Negro Carpenter, about 27 years old, warranted to be what he is represented. Also, his Wife, about 22 years of age, a good Cook, Washer and Ironer, &c. For particulars, purchasers are referred to Smith & Tharp. [nov27†11f] C. S. McCLOUD.

80 NEGROES FOR SALE.
I HAVE JUST ARRIVED IN VICKSBURG, with EIGHTY NEGROES for sale. Amongst them, two extra fine Blacksmiths, 2 fine Engineers. These Negroes are for sale. They are young and likely, selected expressly for this market; and, if you will give a call before buying, if I do not trade it will certainly be the fault of the purchaser. I can furnish you with any description of a Negro that you may wish, as low as you can buy in the market. I will be receiving fresh supplies every fifteen or twenty days, until the 15th of July, 1857.
JOHN S. MERRILL,
dec17-3m* Next door to L. C. Moore & Co.'s.

Vicksburg Daily Whig (Vicksburg, MS), December 30, 1856.

Annie Young, age 86

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (p. 359-362)

I was born in 1851, makes me 86 years old. I was born in Middle Tennessee, Summers County. My mother was put on a block and sold from me when I was a child. I don't remember my father real good. Sister Martha, Sister Sallie, nor Sister Jane wasn't sold. But my brother John was. My mother's name is Rachel Donnahue. We lived in a log hut. The white folks lived in a frame white building sitting in a big grove yard. Old master owned a big farm.

Octavia George, age 85

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (p. 111-114)

I was born in Mansieur, Louisiana, 1852, Avoir Parish. I am the daughter of Alfred and Clementine Joseph.

We had to work plenty hard, because our Master had a large plantation. Don't know just how many acres it was, but we had to be up at 5 o'clock in the morning and would work until dark then we would have to go home and do our night work, that is cook, milk, and feed the stock.

The slaves were punished for stealing, running off, not doing what their master told them and for talking back to their master. If any of these rules were disobeyed their feet and hands were chained together and they were put across a log or a barrel and whipped until the blood came from them. There were no jails; the white man was the slaves' jail. If whipping didn't settle the crime the Negro committed - the next thing would be to hang him or burn him at stake.

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Morris Hillyer, age 84

Alderson, Oklahoma (p. 138-141)

My father was Gabe Hillyer and my mother was Clarissy Hillyer, and our home was in Rome, Georgia. Our owner was Judge Hillyer. He was de last United States senator to Washington, D. C., before de War.

Every first Tuesday slaves were brought in from Virginia and sold on de block. De auctioneer was Cap'n Dorsey. E. M. Cobb was de slave bringer. They would stand de slaves up on de block and talk about what a fine looking specimen of black manhood or womanhood dey was, tell how healthy dey was, look in their mouth and examine their teeth just like they was a horse, and talk about de kind of work they would be fit for and could do. Young healthy boys and girls brought the best prices. I guess they figured dat they would grow to be valuable. I used to stand around and watch de sales take place but it never entered my mind to be afraid for I knowed old Judge wasn't going to sell me. I thought I was an important member of his family.

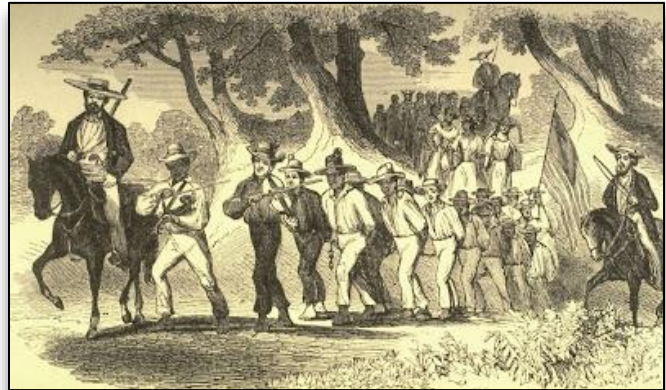
I've seen them sell slaves. The whites would auction them off just as we do cattle and horses today. The big fine healthy slaves were worth more than those that were not quite so good. I have seen men sold from their wives and I thought that was such a crime. I knew that God would settle thing someday.

Sallie Carder, age 83

Burwin, Oklahoma (p. 27-28)

I was born in Jackson, Tennessee, and I'm going on 83 years. My mother was Harriett Neel and father Jeff Bills, both of them named after their masters. I has one brother, J.B. Bills but all de rest of my brothers and sisters is dead.

I never saw any slaves auctioned off but I seen dem pass our house chained together on de way to be sold, including both men and women wid babies all chained to each other. Dere was no churches for slaves, but at nights dey would slip off and git in ditches and sing and pray, and when dey would sometimes be caught at it dey would be whipped. Some of de slaves would turn down big pots and put dere heads in dem and pray. My Mistress would tell me to be a good obedient slave and I would go to heaven. When slaves would attempt to run off dey would catch dem and chain dem and fetch 'em hack and whip dem before dey was turned loose again.



Slave Coffle, Near Paris, Kentucky, 1850s.

De patrollers would go about in de quarters at nights to see if any of de slaves was out or slipped off. As we sleep on de dirt floors on pallets, de patrollers would walk all over and on us and if we even grunt dey would whip us. De only trouble between de whites and blacks on our plantation was when de overseer tied my mother to whip her and ay father untied her and de overseer shot and killed him.

Lou Smith, age 83

Platter, Oklahoma (p. 300-305)

Sho' I remembers de slavery days! I was a little gal but I can tell you lots of things about dem days. My job was nussing [nursing] de younguns. I took keer of them from daylight to dark.

My father was Jackson Longacre and he was born in Mississippi. My mother, Caroline, was born in South Carolina. Both of them was born slaves. My father belonged to Huriyah Longacre. He had a big plantation and lots of niggers. He put up a lot of his slaves as security on a debt and he took sick and died so they put them all on de block and sold them. My father and his mother (my grandma) was sold together. My old Mistress bought my grandmother and old Mistress sister bought my grandma's sister. These white women agreed that they would never go off so far that the two slave women couldn't see each other. They allus kept this promise. A Mr. Covington offered old Master \$700 for me when I was about ten years old, but he wouldn't sell me. He didn't need to for he was rich as cream and my, how good he was to us.

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