

MINTIE MARIE MILLER lived at 1404 39th Street in Galveston, Texas when she was interviewed the Works Progress Administration. Minnie was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 1852, and sold from her first enslaver while a very young girl. Dr. Massie from Lynchburg, Texas bought Minnie and took her from Alabama to Texas. The journey to Texas took three months by oxcart. After the Civil War Minnie moved to Houston and then to Galveston. At the time of her interview, she had lived in Galveston and worked for the same family for twenty-four years.

“I was born in Alabama in 1852, in Tuscaloosa and my mammy’s name was Hannah, but I don’t know my pappy’s name. When I was still pretty little my brother and uncle and aunt and mother was sold and me with ‘em.

“Dr. Massie brung us to Texas in an oxcart but my sister had to stay with the old mistress and that the last I ever seen my sister. She was four year old then.

“After we reaches Texas we lives on a great big place, somewhere ‘round Lynchburg and Dr. Massie have two girls and I sleeps on the foot of they bed. They nice to me, they spoil me, in fac’. I plays with the white gals and they feeds me from they tables and in the evenin’ my mammy takes me down to de bayou and wash my face and put me on a clean dress.

“My mammy cook for the white folks and they treats us both fine, but one gal I knowed was ‘bout 8 or 9 and she run away from her master and swim de Trinity River and it was winter and her feets freezes. He cotches dis gal and puts her feets in the fire to thaw ‘em, and burnt ‘em. The law say you could take slaves ‘way from sich [such] a man, Dr. Frost takes her away from that man and gives her to Miss Nancy what was the de mistress at Dr. Massie’s place.

“Then they says they gwilne sell me, ‘cause Miss Nancy’s father- in-law dies and they got rid of some of us. She didn’t want to sell me so she tell me to be sassy and no one would buy me. They takes me to Houston and to the market and a man call George Fraser sells the slaves. The market was a open house, more like a shed. We all stands to one side till our turn comes. They wasn’t nothin’ else you could do.

“They stands me up on a block of wood and a man bid me in. I felt mad. You see I was young then, too young to know better. I don’t know what they sold me for, but the man what bought me made me open my mouth while he looks at my teeth. They done all us that-a-way, sells us like you sell a hoss [horse]. Then my old master bids me goodbye and tries to give me a dog, but I ‘members what Miss Nancy done say and I sassed him and slapped the dog out of his hand. So the man what bought me say, ‘When one o’clock come you got to sell her ‘gain, she’s sassy. If she done me that way I’d kill her.’ So they sells me twice the same day. They was two sellin’s that day.

SOURCE: *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 3, Lewis-Ryles. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material.*

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/>

“My new master, Tom Johnson, lives in Lynchburg and owns the river boat there, and has a little place, ‘bout one acre, on the bayou. Then the war comes and jes’ ‘fore war come to Galveston they took all the steamships in the Buffalo Bayou and took the cabins off and made ships. They put cotton bales ‘round them and builded ‘em up high with the cotton, to cotch the cannonballs. Two of ‘em was the Island City and the Neptune.

“Then freedom cries and the master say we all free and I goes to Houston with my mammy. We stays with a old colored woman what has a house her old master done give her and I finishes growin’ there and works some. But then I comes to Galveston and hired out here and I been workin’ for these white folks 24 year now.

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