

*The following excerpts, taken from the Texas 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. As part of the Federal Writer’s Project, some formerly enslaved people were photographed at the time of their interview.*



*Green Cumby, Age 86.*

*Green Cumby, 86, was born enslaved by Robert H. Cumby’s family in Henderson, Texas. He was about 14 years old when the Civil War ended. After emancipation, he stayed with his former enslavers for four years before he married and settled in Tyler, Texas, where he worked for the compress 30 years. At the time of the interview, he lived with his daughter at 749 Mesquite Street in Abilene, Texas.*

“Spec’lators on hosses drove big bunches of slaves past our place from one place to another, to auction ‘em at de market places. De women would be carryin’ l’il ones in dere arms and at night dey bed ‘em down jus’ like cattle right on de ground ‘side of de road, lots of l’il ehillun was sold ‘way from de mammy when dey seven or eight, or even smaller. Dat’s why us cullud folks don’t know our kinfolks to dis day.

*Nelsen Denson, 90, was born in Hamburg, Arkansas. He was enslaved by Jim Nelson, who sold Denson and his family to Felix Grundy. Although the interviewer noted that Denson’s memory is poor, he managed to recall a few incidents. At the time of the interview Denson lived in Waco, Texas.*

“I’ll be ninety years old this December. (1937). I was born in Arkansas, up in Ashley County, and it was the twenty-second day of December in 1847. My mammy was from Virginny and pappy was from old Kentucky, and I was one of they eight Chilian. Our owner, Marse Jim Densen, brung us to Texas and settled near Marlin, but got in debt and sold as all to Marse Felix Grundy, and he kep’ us till freedom, and most of us worked for him after that.”

SOURCE: *Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 1, Adams-Duhon*. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn161/>; Part 2, Easter-King. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn162/>; Part 3, Lewis-Ryles. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn163/>; Part 4, Sanco-Young. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn164/>. Images: *Green Cumby, Age 86*. United States Texas, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp161260/>; *Sarah Ashley, Age 93*. United States Texas, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp161034/>; *Mose Hursey, ex-slave, Dallas*. United States Texas Dallas, 1937. Dec. 1. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/99615309/>; *Carter J. Jackson Possibly Carter J. Johnson, Age 85*. United States Texas, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp162180/>;

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*Sarah Ashley was born in Mississippi and remembers her experiences when she was sold on the auction block in New Orleans and was forced to labor on a cotton plantation in Texas. At the time of her interview, she lived in Goodrich, Texas.*

"I was born in Missi'ippi and Massa Henry Thomas buy us and bring us here. He a spec'lator and buys up lots of n----- and sells 'em. Us family was separated. My two sisters and my papa was sold to a man in Georgia. Den dey put me on a block and bid me off. Dat in New Orleans and I scairt and cry, but dey put me up dere anyway. First dey takes me to Georgia and dey didn't sell me for a long spell. Massa Thomas he travel round and buy and sell n-----. Us stay in de spec'lators drove de long time.

After 'while Massa Mose Davis come from Cold Spring, in Texas, and buys us. He was buyin' up little chillen for he chillen. Dat 'bout four year befo' de first war. I was 19 year old when de burst of freedom come in June and I git turn loose.



*Sarah Ashley, Age 93.*

*Tom Holland was born in Walker County, Texas. At the time of his interview, he thought he was about 97 years old and lived in Madisonville, Texas. He was formerly enslaved by Frank Holland before being traded to William Green just before the Civil War. After emancipation, Tom farmed both for himself and for others in the vicinity of his old home.*

"My owner was Massa Frank Holland, and I's born on his place in Walker County. I had one sister named Gena and three brothers, named George and Will and Joe, but they's all dead now. Mammy's name was Gena and my father's named Abraham Holland and they's brung from North Carolina to Texas by Massa Holland when they's real young.

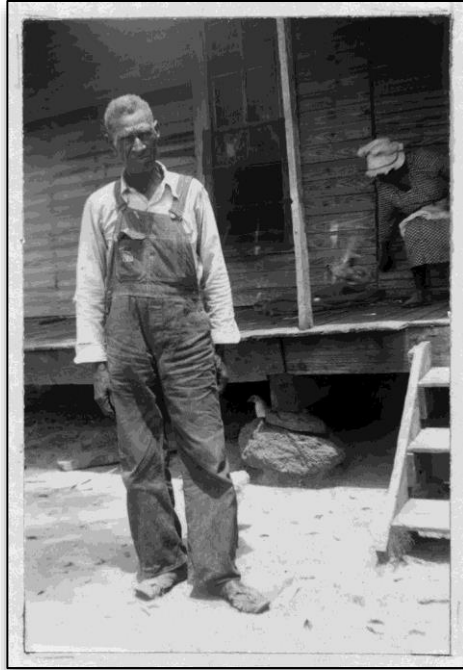
I seed slaves sold and auctioned off, 'cause I's put up to the highest bidder myself. Massa traded me to William Green jus' 'fore the war, for a hundred acres land at \$1.00 a acre. He thought I'd never be much 'count, 'cause I had the glass eye, but I'm still livin' and a purty fair Negro to my age. All the hollerin' and bawlin' took place and when he sold me it took me most a year to git over it, but there I was, 'longin' to 'nother man.

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Carter J. Jackson, Age 85

*Carter J. Jackson, 85, was born enslaved by Parson Dick Rogers in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1863, the Rogers family brought Jackson to Texas where he was forced to work for them as a slave until four years after emancipation. Jackson married and moved to Tatum, Texas in 1871.*

“If you’s wants to know ‘bout slavery time, it was Hell. I’s born in Montgomery, over yonder in Alabama. My pappy named Charles and come from Florida and mammy named Charlotte and her from Tennessee. They was sold to Parson Rogers and brung to Alabama by him. I had seven brothers call Frank and Benjamin and Richardson and Anderson and Miles, Emanuel and Gill, and three sisters call Milanda, Evaline and Sallie, but I don’t know if any of ‘em are livin’ now.

“Parson Rogers come to Texas in ‘63 and brung ‘bout 42 slaves and my first work was to tote water in the field. Parson lived in a good, big frame house, and the n----- lived in log houses what had dirt floors and chimneys, and our bunks had rope slats and grass mattress. I sho’ wish I could have cotch myself sleepin’ on a feather bed dem days.

... “Me and four of her chillen standin’ by when mammy’s sold for \$500.00. Cryin’ didn’t stop ‘em from sellin’ our mammy ‘way from us.

*Pierce Harper was 86 years old at the time of his interview. He was born on the Subbs’s plantation near Snow Hill, North Carolina. In 1877, he moved to Galveston, Texas. As an adult, Pierce attended a “Negro school” where he learned to read and write.*

“Then when I was eight years old they sold me. The market place was in Snow Hill [North Carolina] on the public square near the jailhouse. It was jus’ a little stand built out in the open with no top on it, that the slaves stood on to get sold while the white folks auctioned ‘em off. I was too little to get on the stand, so they had to hold me up and Mr. Harper bought me for \$1,100. That was cheap for a boy.”

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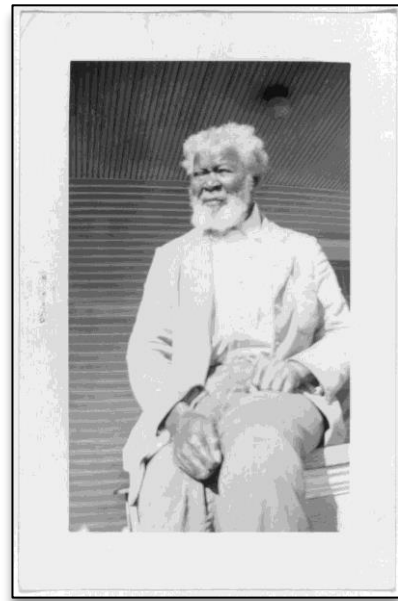
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*Mose Hursey believes he is about eighty-two old at the time he was interviewed and lived at 1120 Tenth Street in Dallas, Texas with his daughter. He was born enslaved on a plantation in Louisiana and was later trafficked to Texas along with his parents. Mose served as a preacher most of his life.*

“I was born somewhere in Louisiana, but can’t rec’lect the place exact, ‘cause I was such a little chap when we left there. But I heard my mother and father say they belonged to Marse Morris, a fine gentleman, with everything fine. He sold them to Marse Jim Boling, of Red River County, in Texas. So they changes their name from Morris to Boling, Liza Boling and Charlie Boling, they was. Marse Boling didn’t buy my brother and sister, so that made me the eldest child and the onliest one.”



*Mose Hursey, ex-slave, Dallas.*

*Sarah Allen was born enslaved by John and Sally Goodren, in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Before the Civil War, the Goodrens moved to Texas and settled near a small town then called Freedom. At the time of her interview, she lived at 3322 Frutas Street in El Paso, Texas.*

“...some I knew were put on the block and sold. I ‘member when they’d come to John Goodren’s place to buy, but he not sell any. They’d have certain days when they’d sell off the block and they took chillen ‘way from mothers, screamin’ for dere chillen.

I was birthed in ole Virginia in de Blue Ridge Mountains. When de white people come to Texas, de cullud people come with them. Dat’s been a long time.

My maw was named Charlotte, my paw Parks Adams. He’s a white man. I guess I’m about eighty some years ole.

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