

## Documents #1 (d), (e), and (f): Remembering Slavery

In the 1930s, the Federal Writer's project of the Works Progress Administration sent people throughout the South to interview former slaves. These interviews, written in the dialect of the ex-slaves, are invaluable sources of information about slavery as remembered by those who experienced slavery firsthand.

Document #1 (d) is an interview with Herndon Bogan, who grew up on a plantation in Union County, SC, about 40 miles southwest of Charlotte. Bogan later moved to Charlotte and recalls "witchin'" among the Mecklenburg slaves. Document 1 (e) is an interview of B. E. Rogers of Raleigh, NC, which points out some of the horrors of the slave system. Document 1 (f) is an excerpt from a book by Dr. John Brevard Alexander. Alexander was a Mecklenburg County slaveholder, whose world fell apart after the Civil War. Alexander's memories of slavery are quite different than the memories of Bogan and Rogers.

### *Suggestions for the classroom:*

These documents will show students that history is often written from sources that contradict each other. The historian needs to interpret sources and try to reconstruct the past. These documents will allow students to act as historians and draw their own conclusions about slavery based on these reminiscences. The following questions can be discussed:

1. According to Rogers, what were some of the abuses of slavery?
2. Sum up Bogan's memories of slavery.
3. According to Alexander, how did blacks benefit from slavery?
4. Is one of these documents more accurate than another? Can they be reconciled? Do you believe one person more than another? If so, why?
5. Are there any dangers in writing history based on people's memories? What are the advantages of using memories in helping historians to write history?

### Document #1(d)

#### *Ex -Slave Story*

*An interview with Herndon Bogan, 76, of State Prison, Raleigh, NC.*

"I wus bawnded in Union County, South Carolina on de plantation o' Doctor Bogan, who owned both my mammy Issia, an' my pap Edwin. Dar wus six o' us chilluns, Clara, Lula, Joe, Tux, Mack an' me.

"I doan 'member much 'bout slavery days 'cept dat my white folkses was good ter us. Dar wus a heap o' slaves, maybe a hundert an' fifty. I 'members dat we wucked hard, but we had plenty ter eat an' w'ar, eben iffen we did w'ar wood shoes.

"I kin barely recollect 'fore de war dat I'se seed a heap o' cocks fightin' in pits an' a heap o' horse racin'. When de marster winned be wud give us niggers a big dinner or a dance, but if he lost, oh!

"My daddy wus gived ter de doctor when de doctor wus married an' day shore loved each other. One day marstar, he comes in an' he sez dat de Yankees am aimin' ter try ter take his niggers way from him, but dat day am gwine ter ketch hell while dey does hit. When he sez dat he starts ter walkin' de flo'. 'I'se gwine ter leave yore missus in yore keer, Edwin,' he sez.

"But pa 'lows, 'Wid all respect fer yore wife sar, she am a Yankee too, an' I'd rutlier go wid you ter de war. Please sar, massa, let me go wid you ter fight dem Yanks.'

"At fust massa 'fuses, den he sez, 'All right' So off de goes ter de war, massa on a big hoss, an' my pap on a strong mule 'long wid de blankets an' things.

"Dey tells me dat ole massa got shot one night, an' dat pap grabs de gun 'fore hit hits de earth an' lots de Yanks have hit.

"I 'members dat dem wus bad days fer South Carolina, we gived all ol' de food ter de soldiers, an' missus, eben do' she has got some Yankee folks in de war, l'arns ter eat cabbages an' kush an' berries.

"I 'members dat on de day of de surrender, least-ways de day dat we hyard 'bout hit, up comes a Yankee an' axes ter see my missus. I is shakin', I is dat skeerd, but I bucks up ant I tells him dat my missus doan want ter see no blue coat.

"He grins, an' tells me ter skedaddle, an' 'bout den my missus comes out an' so help me iffen she doan hug dat dratted Yank. Atter awhile I gathers dat he's her brothers but at fust I aint seed no sense in her cryin' an' sayin' 'thank God' over an' over.

"Well sar, de massa an' pap what had gone off mad an' healthy an' ridin' fine beastes comes back walkin' an' dey looked sick. Massa am white as cotton an' so help me, iffen my pap, who wus black as sin, ain't pale too.

'Atter a few years I goes ter wuck in Spartanburg as a houseboy, den I gits a job wid de Southern Railroad an' I goes ter Charlotte ter nightwatch de tracks.

"I stays dar eighteen years, but one night I kills a white hobo who am tryin' ter rob me ol my gol' watch an' chains an' dey gives me eighteen months. I'se been hyar six already. He wus a white man, an' jist a boy, an' I is sorry, but I comes hyar anyhow. "I hyard a ole 'oman in Charlotte tell onct 'bout witchin' in slavery times, dar in Mecklenburg County. She wus roun' ninety, so I reckon she knows. She said dat iffen anybody wanted ter be a witch he would draw a circle on de grount jist at de aidge ol dark an' git in de circle an' squat down.

"Dar he had ter set an' talk ter de debil, an' he say, 'I will have nothin' ter do wid "ligion, an' I wants you ter make me a witch.' Atter day he mus' bile a black cat, a bat an' a bunch of herbs an' drink de soup, den him wuz really a witch.

"When you wanted ter witch somebody, she said dat you could take dat stuff, jist a little bit of hit an' put hit under dat puson's doorsteps an' dey'd be sick.

"You could go thru' de key hole or down de chimney or through de chinks in a log house, an' ride a puson jist lak ridin' a hoss. Dat puson can keep you outen his house by layin' de broom 'fore de do' an' puttin' a pin cushion full of pins side of de bed do', iffen he's a mind to.

"Dat puson can kill you too, by drawin' yore picher &an' shootin' hit in de haid or de heart too.

"Dar's, a hwap o' ways ter tell fortunes dat she toll me but I'se done forgot now 'cept coffee groun's an' a little of de others. You can't tell hit - wid dem do', case hit takes konwin' how, hit shore does.

### Document #I(e)

*Story told by B. E. Rogers  
Raleigh, North Carolina*

*Worker: Mary E. Hicks  
Editor: Daisy Bailey Waitt  
April 20, 1937*

"Once, in the month of October, my father and I were gathering the shocks of corn from the low grounds on the river when I, looking over the big meadow, said, 'I bet it was short work for the Negroes to get a crop like this housed in slavery days.'

"Father stopped, sat down on a stump, and mopped his brow before answering.' Yes,' he said, 'it was short work, to be sure, but on some plantations any number of negroes would be beaten bloody before the crops were in.'

"Then you're glad it's over?' I asked.

"Yes, indeed,' he said indignantly, 'it was a shame to work the Negroes, that is, the way some folks worked them.'

"After a little persuasion he told me a number of his experiences as a slave. "Once, right here on this plantation I saw a Negro man who was sick beat until he dies because he couldn't chop cotton as fast as the others. Once on a neighboring plantation I saw two Negro boys hanged up on the smoke house by the thumbs and beat for leaving the plantation without permission. Their shirts were so bloody they had to be greased before they would come off. Negroes were treated like cows, the weakly ones ruthlessly destroyed. Yes, sir, I have known of a number of deformed Negro babies being killed shortly after they were born. There was very little marrying among the slaves, one big husky Negro being the father of most of the slave children. Another thing was pretty girls bearing children for the white masters, thus mixing white aristocrat blood with Negro blood.'

"What about the sales, did you ever attend one?'

"Yes, I saw one at Raleigh once. About half a dozen Negroes being sold, mostly to women. There was one Negro woman who clutched a child of two or three years in her arms and I will never forget the look of agony and terror on his face.

"Some one bid on the woman but didn't want the child, thereupon the master snatched the child from the Negroes arms and ordered her to step off the block. "The woman screamed and the other Negroes sobbed in sympathy. A young man pushed from the crowd, I later learned that he was William Holden, and he asked the new owner how much he would take for the mother. "The owner answered that he would not part from her, neither would he buy the child.

"The young man bought the child and with the owner's permission gave it to the Mother as a free child. "Years later the owner, who lived in Beaufort County, tried to sell the Negro boy, now nearly grown. I heard later when I was in Raleigh where Mr. Holden, an editor, afterwards governor of North Carolina, employed him."

#### Document #I(f)

This was the time there was effected a wonderful change in the general health of the negro race. All the restraint that was thrown around the race in slavery, was cast aside; a complete metamorphose was effected in him when freedom was thrust upon the race. They no longer had a master or mistress to look after their well-fare. As cold weather approached there was no one to have him supplied with comfortable quarters; wood to keep him warm at night, good clothes to keep him comfortable doing his necessary daily work, suitable food to supply the waste of the body and nourish the tissues that have become exhausted. In slavery they were fed on fat bacon, corn bread, cow peas, buttermilk and all the vegetables they could eat. They were prevented from all manner of dissipation, and required to be in their beds by nine o'clock. A system of patrolling kept them from running about after night, exposing themselves to all kinds of weather, losing sleep, rendering them unfit for work; this system was essential for the welfare of the Negro's health, and for the financial interest of the master.

Yes, the spiritual interests of the negroes were not overlooked. The masters who were godly men, would frequently collect their servants with the children of the household, around one common family altar at the evening hour of prayer. It was a common custom to assemble them on a Sunday afternoon and teach them the fundamental plan of salvation, as taught in the Bible. The laws of the State forbade teaching slaves to read and write, but quite a number were taught to read by their master's children, and nothing was said about it. I never knew but one who could not sing, and he was deaf and dumb; but he was a most devoted worshiper of the Supreme Being; and he often reproved members of his own race for misconduct, especially for deseccrating the Sabbath.

From *Reminiscences of the Past Sixty Years* by Dr. John Brevard Alexander (Charlotte: Ray Printing Co., 1908).