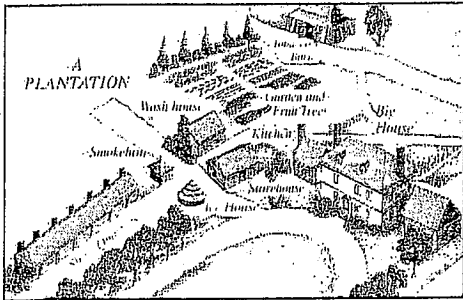


SLAVE NARRATIVE #5:

DAVID (1)

SLAVERY

You are David. For forty years you worked as a slave on tobacco plantations in Maryland, South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia. Born into slavery in 1801, you never knew freedom. You saw great cruelties take place. Not so much by the masters, but more so by the overseers. The overseers you had contact with were men who were themselves slaves, but had more power. Their job was to keep things in order around the plantations.



Slavery was very much the same throughout the south, but working on a tobacco plantation seemed easier than working cotton or rice fields year round. On a tobacco plantation there was no rest from the first planting in May until it was cut, processed, and shipped, in January. You cut tobacco before the first frost, hung it up, and allowed it to dry. The tobacco was then stripped and prepared for the hogshead (barrel) in leaf, or twisted and packaged. In the winter months, you cut wood for the house, made rails or repaired fences, and cleared new land to raise the tobacco plants the next year. And in the spring, you set the plants in the new field.

On the plantation in Maryland where you spent your first 12 years, the slaves were hardly ever whipped unless they were very lazy. The women and children were even allowed to stay inside their quarters in the very cold, snowy, or rainy weather.

In South Carolina, conditions were far worse. Sold at twelve, you worked on a plantation where your quarters were log huts. The tops were partly open, which let the rain and cold in. You shared your hut with several other single men. Your bed was only a board, wide enough to lay on. For a pillow you had to use your jacket. You covered yourself with whatever you could find. This was the way single men slept.

In the spring of your nineteenth year, you were sold to a slave trader, who then sold you to a Georgia plantation owner. Tobacco plantations are run more or less the same way, so it was work as usual. Spring meant planting and weeding in the fields. At 23, you married Eliza. Together you had two sons.

One day, an overseer saw you resting in the shade and he delivered a most cruel punishment. He rubbed tar all over your head and face. He then set fire to it. Your head was dowsed with water before it could kill you, but you were left with no hair and horrible scars on your face. The pain was unbearable. You were unable to work for two weeks. You remained on the same plantation until the time of your master's bankruptcy when he was forced to sell all of his slaves. You and your family were lucky to be sold together. At the time you were 32 years old.

You were bought and moved to a tobacco plantation in Virginia. Being a very large man, mature, and very ugly from your scars, your new owner thought that you would make a great overseer. You had a family, so he could control you. You were so big and so ugly that everyone would be afraid of you. You never had a choice.

SLAVE NARRATIVE #5: DAVID (2)



SLAVERY

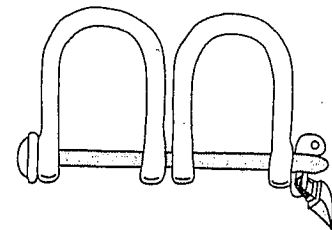
Being the overseer on this new plantation was better in some ways. You issued out the weekly allowance to all the other slaves—a peck of corn meal (eight quarts), a dozen and a half herrings, and two and a half pounds of pork. In the summer you gave out one pair of linen trousers, and in the fall, a pair of woolen pantaloons, one woolen jacket, and two cotton shirts. And you always made sure that there was enough for your family first.

Despite these few benefits of being an overseer, life was very difficult. One of the master's sons was the **driver**. He always came to the field to make sure you were working the others hard enough. Many times he hid in the fields and watched you. If he thought you were not working the field hands hard enough, he would call you over to him and tell you to beat one of them. If you refused, he would threaten to beat one of your children or your wife. Daily, you were forced to whip and torture your fellow slaves. One slave who had been caught stealing was sent to you for punishment. The master ordered you to pull each of his finger nails off.

One day a slave trader had come to the plantation. You were ordered to make ready three older slave men. You were told to take them in the back and pluck out any gray hairs, rub their faces with grease-soaked towels, and then bring them forward as three *young* men. It was either do this or your children would be sold instead.



After the fall harvest one year, a young slave man tried to run away. When he was caught, he was given a good dinner. In the morning you were told to tie his hands to a rail, and bind his feet. The master came and gave the runaway fifty lashes across the back, his son the driver issued fifty lashes, and you were ordered to deliver fifty lashes. When the man asked for water, you were told to pour the water down his back (the location of his wounds). That same day, you took him to the blacksmith shop and had two large bars of iron bent around his feet. Each bar weighed twenty pounds. You also had a chain fastened around his neck. These remained on the man for months.



For eight years you remained the overseer. You had no friends. Your wife and children had none either, because you were hated as much, if not more, than the master. During a slave revolt, you and your family were killed. You were 40.

Questions

Together with your small group, prepare the answers to the following questions, using the information provided within this narrative. These questions will be used during the talk show.

1. How did you become a slave?
2. Where did you work and what was it like?
3. Were you ever sold?
4. What were the living conditions in South Carolina?
5. Tell us about your time in Georgia.
6. How did you become an overseer?
7. What was life like as an overseer?
8. How did you die?