

Slave Quarters

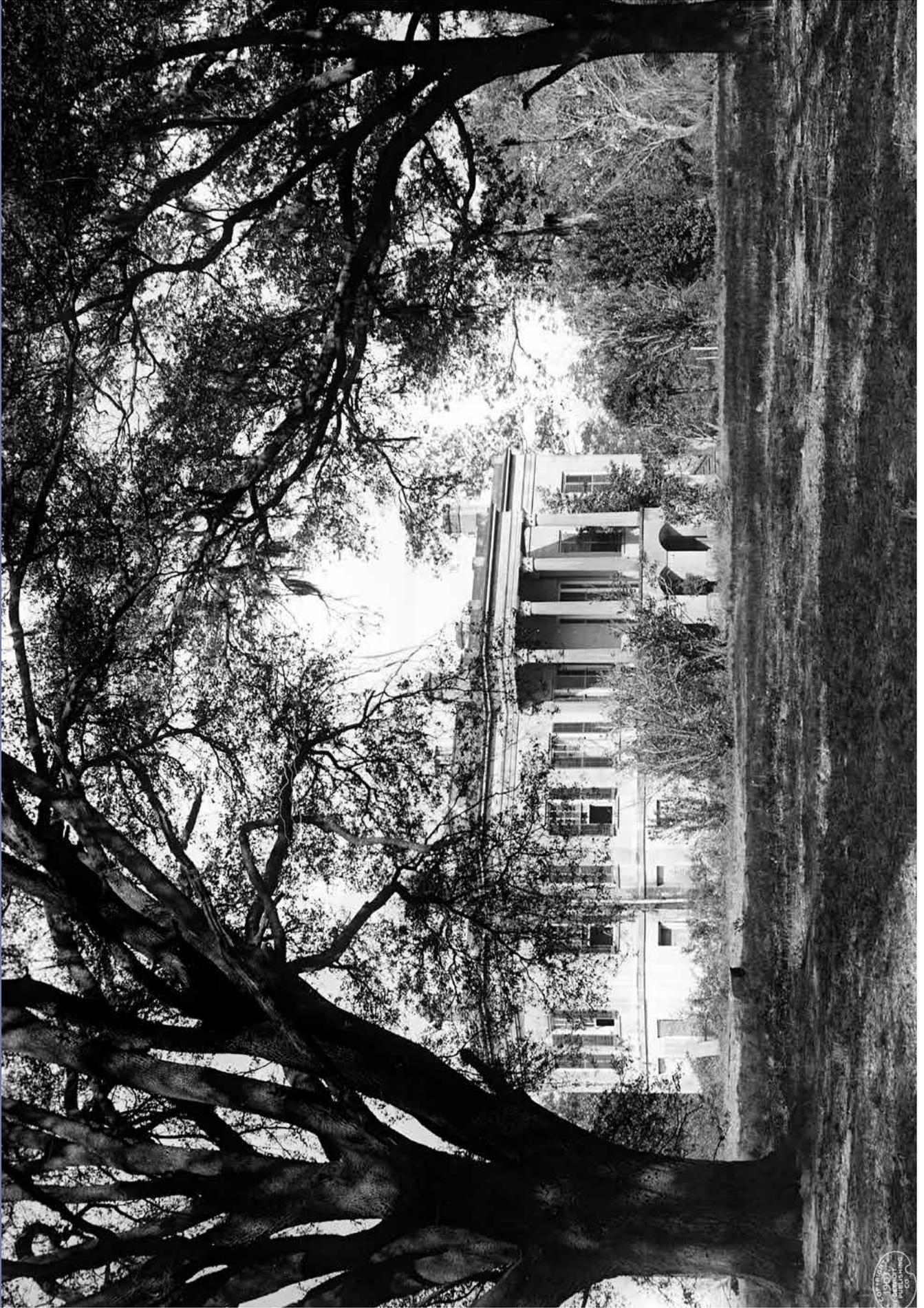
Relics of slavery days



Slave houses on "Hermitage" plantation, Savannah, Georgia

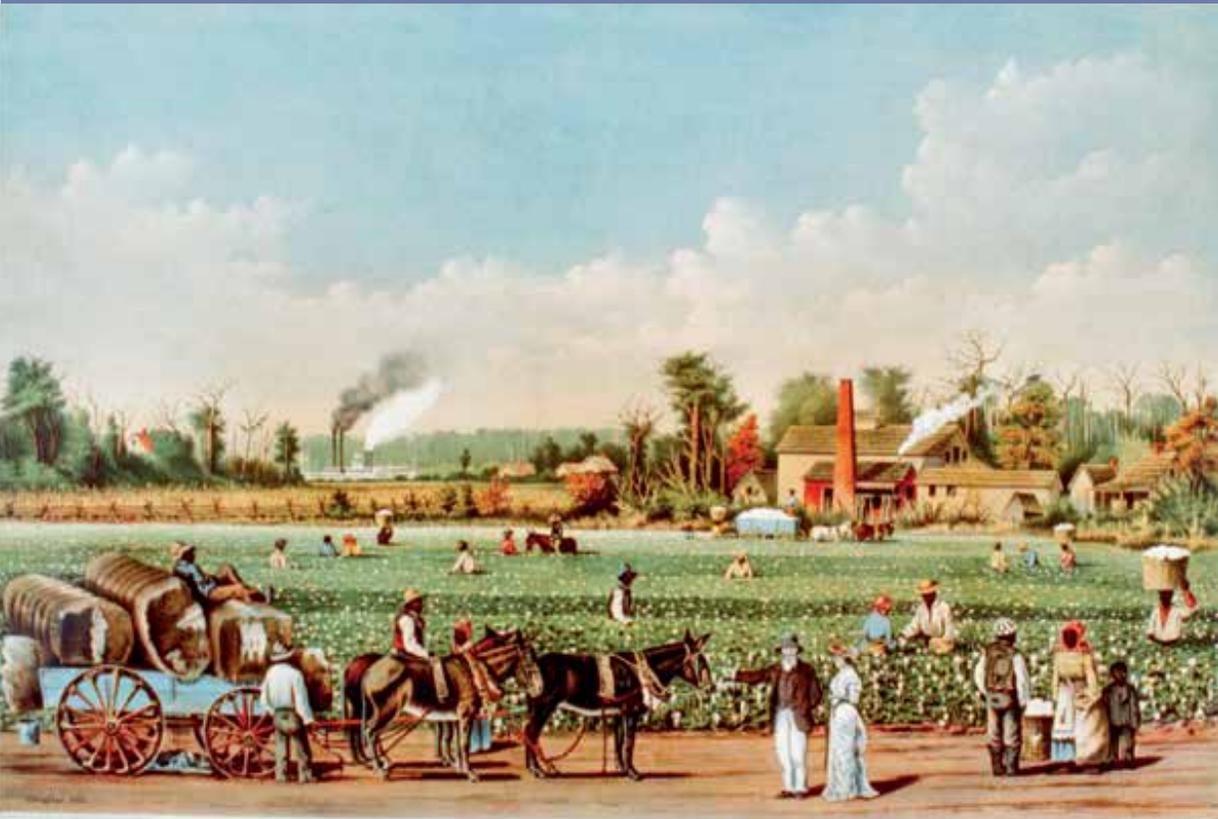


The Hermitage, Savannah, Ga.



Plantation Life Images

A Cotton Plantation on the Mississippi

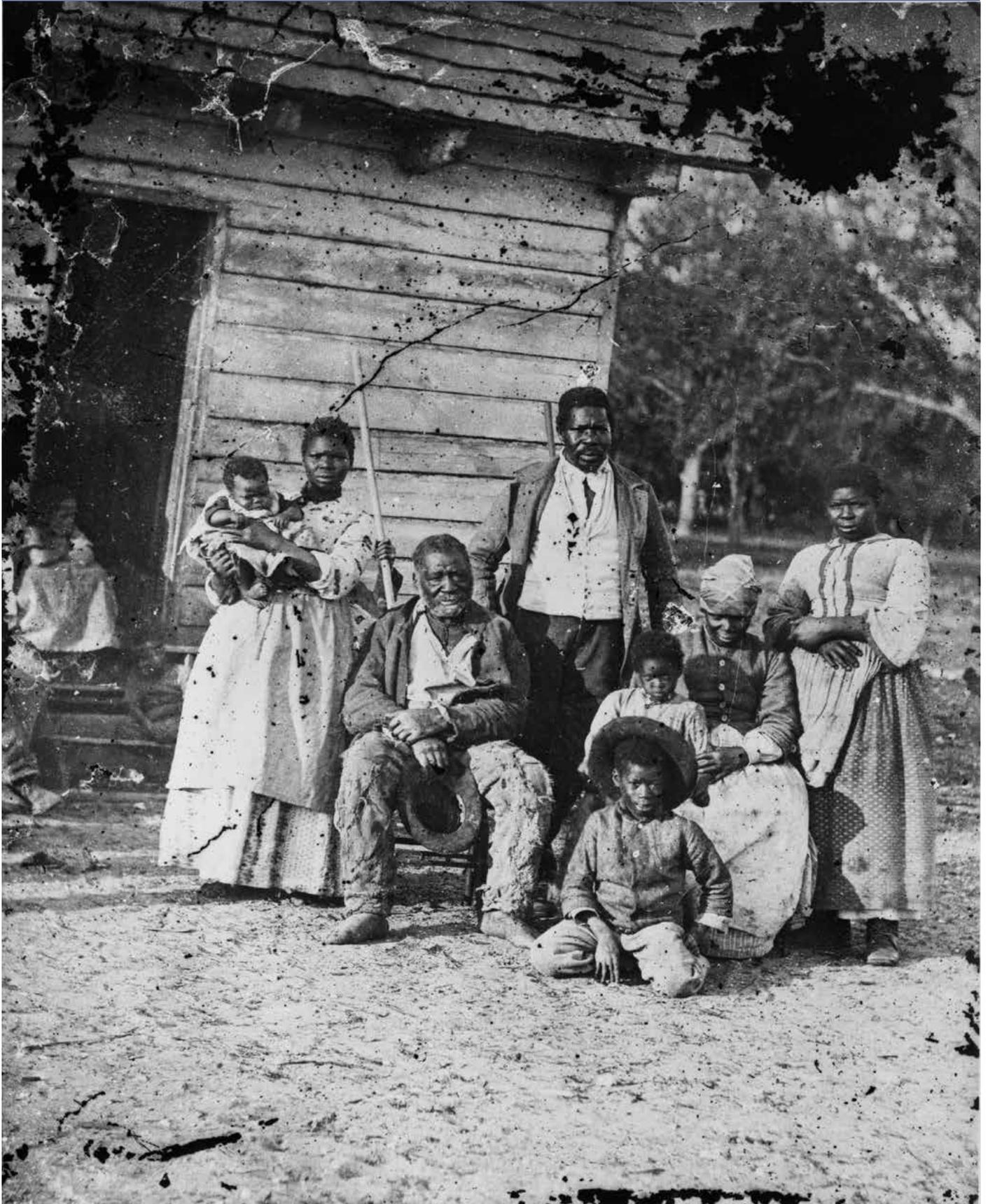


Parlange Plantation, New Roads, Louisiana



Plantation Life Images

Five Generations on Smith's Plantation, Beaufort, South Carolina



Life on a Plantation Excerpts (Group A)

Living Conditions on Plantations

Introduction: The plantation was a world in itself. It was composed of the slave owner's house, the "big house," as the slaves called it. There was "slave row," the line of little cabins, which the slaves called "home" for lack of a better term. Situated near "slave row" was the house of the overseer. Scattered about the plantation were various barns and sheds where animals, tools, and the harvested crops were stored. And surrounding everything were fields and woods, beyond which, somewhere, was freedom.

– *To Be a Slave*, Julius Lester

Excerpt #1:

The softest couches in the world are not to be found in the log mansion of the slaves. The one whereon I reclined year after year was a plank twelve inches wide and ten feet long. My pillow was a stick of wood. The bedding was a coarse blanket and not a rag or shred beside. Moss might be used, were it not that it directly breeds a swarm of fleas. The cabin is constructed of logs, without floor or window. The latter is altogether unnecessary, the crevices between the logs admitting sufficient light. In stormy weather the rain drives through them, rendering it comfortless and extremely disagreeable. The rude door hangs on wooden hinges. In one end is constructed an awkward fireplace.

– *Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup

Excerpt #2:

We lodged in log huts and on the bare ground. Wooden floors were an unknown luxury. In a single room were huddled, like cattle, ten or a dozen persons, men, women and children. All ideas of refinement and decency were, of course, out of the question. There were neither bedsteads, nor furniture of any description. Our beds were collections of straw and old rags, thrown down in the corners and boxed in with boards, a single blanket the only covering. Our favorite way of sleeping, however, was on a plank, our heads raised on an old jacket and our feet toasting before the smouldering fire. The wind whistled and the rain and snow blew in through the cracks, and the damp earth soaked in the moisture till the floor was miry as a pigsty. Such were our houses.

The principal food of those upon my master's plantation consisted of cornmeal and salt herrings, to which was added in summer a little buttermilk and the few vegetables which each might raise for himself and his family on the little piece of ground which was assigned to him for the purpose, called a trunk patch.

In ordinary times we had two regular meals in a day: breakfast at twelve o'clock after laboring from daylight and supper when the work of the remainder of the day was over. In harvest season we had three. Our dress was of tow cloth; for the children nothing but a shirt; for the older ones a pair of pantaloons or a gown in addition, according to the sex. Besides these, in the winter a round jacket or overcoat, a wool hat once in two or three years, for the males, and a pair of coarse shoes once a year.

– *Uncle Tom's Story of His Life*, An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson

Life on a Plantation Excerpts (Group B)

Working Conditions on Plantations

Introduction: The plantation. It was like a country unto itself, and within its confines, large or small, life was generally the same for the slave. His principal occupation was work, and the work with which he was principally occupied was cotton. It was a crop that needed much care and long hours of tedious work. One could tell the month of the year by what work was being done on the cotton. Some crops can be planted, hoed, and left to grow until time for harvest. Not cotton.

– *To Be a Slave*, Julius Lester

Excerpt #1:

When there are no cold rains, the cotton usually makes its appearance in a week. In the course of eight or ten days afterwards the first hoeing is commenced. This is performed in part, also by the aid of the plough and mule. The plough passes as near as possible to the cotton on both sides, throwing the furrow from it. Slaves follow with their hoes, cutting up the grass and cotton, leaving hills two feet and a half apart. This is called scraping cotton. In two weeks more commences the second hoeing. This time the furrow is thrown towards the cotton. Only one stalk, the largest is now left standing in each hill. In another fortnight it is hoed the third time, throwing the furrow towards the cotton in the same manner as before and killing all the grass between the rows. About the first of July, when it is a foot high or thereabouts, it is hoed the fourth and last time. Now the whole space between the rows is ploughed, leaving a deep water furrow in the center. During all these hoeings . . . the fastest hoer takes the lead row. He is usually about a rod in advance of his companions. If one of them passes him, he is whipped. If one falls behind or is a moment idle, he is whipped. In fact, the lash is flying from morning until night, the whole day long. The hoeing season thus continues from April until July, a field having no sooner been finished once than it is commenced again.

– *Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup

Excerpt #2:

Yet once the slaves left the field, their work was far from finished.

Each one must then attend to his respective chores. One feeds the mules, another the swine—another cuts the wood, and so forth. Finally, at a late hour, they reach the quarters, sleepy and overcome with the long day's toil. Then a fire must be kindled in the cabin, the corn ground in the small hand-mill, and supper and dinner for the next day in the field prepared. All that is allowed them is corn and bacon, which is given out at the corncrib and smokehouse every Sunday morning. Each one receives, as his weekly allowance, three and a half pounds of bacon, and corn enough to make a peck of meal. That is all—no tea, coffee, sugar, and with the exception of a very scanty sprinkling now and then, no salt...

When the corn is ground and fire is made, the bacon is taken down from the nail on which it hangs, a slice cut off and thrown upon the coals to broil. The majority of slaves have no knife, much less a fork. They cut their bacon with the axe at the woodpile. The corn meal is mixed with a little water, placed in the fire, and baked. When it is "done brown," the ashes are scraped off, and being placed upon a chip which answers for a table, the tenant of the slave hut is ready to sit down upon the ground to supper. By this time it is usually midnight. The same fear of punishment with which they approach the ginhouse, possesses them again on lying down to get a snatch of rest. It is the fear of oversleeping in the morning. Such an offense would certainly be attended with not less than twenty lashes. With a prayer that he may be on his feet and wide awake at the first sound of the horn, he sinks to his slumbers nightly.

– *Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup

Life on a Plantation Excerpts (Group C)

Treatment on Plantations

Introduction: There are two ways in which a man can be enslaved. One is through force. He can be penned behind fences, guarded constantly, punished severely for breaking the slightest rule, and made to live in constant fear. The second is to teach him to think that his own best interests will be served by doing what his master wishes him to do. He can be taught that he is inferior and that only through slavery will he eventually rise to the “level” of his master. The Southern slave owner used both. The first was the way of the whip, the threat of the auction block, and murder. Its aim was to make the slave live in constant fear. The second way was more subtle. Its aim was to brainwash the slave to destroy his mind and replace it with the mind of the master. In that way the slave would enslave himself and there would be no need to police him. A slave should have no sense of himself that was separate from the self the master wanted him to have. Thus it was that no black had a name of his own. He was given the surname of his owner, no matter how many owners he might have during his life.

– *To Be a Slave*, Julius Lester

Excerpt #1:

The day's work over in the field, the baskets are “toted,” or in other words, carried to the ginhouse where the cotton is weighed. No matter how fatigued and weary he may be—no matter how much he longs for sleep and rest—a slave never approaches the ginhouse with his basket of cotton but with fear. If it falls short in weight—if he has not performed the full task appointed him—he knows that he must suffer. And if he has exceeded it by ten or twenty pounds, in all probability his master will measure the next day's task accordingly...

It was rarely that a day passed by without one or more whippings. This occurred at the time the cotton was weighed. The delinquent, whose weight had fallen short, was taken out, stripped, made to lie upon the ground, face downwards, when he received a punishment proportioned to his offense. It is the literal, unvarnished truth that the crack of the lash and the shrieking of the slaves can be heard from dark till bedtime on Epps' plantation, any day almost during the entire period of the cotton-picking season.

The number of lashes is graduated according to the nature of the case. Twenty-five are deemed a mere brush, inflicted, for instance, when a dry leaf or a piece of boll is found in the cotton, or when a branch is broken in the field. Fifty is ordinary penalty following all delinquencies of the next higher grade. One hundred is called severe; it is the punishment inflicted for the serious offense of standing idle in the field.

– *Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup

Excerpt #2:

...the slave owner either did the preaching himself or hired a white preacher, or let a trusted slave preach. The only preaching a slave owner approved of was that which would make the slave happy to be a slave.

Poor creatures! You little consider, when you are idle and neglectful of your masters' business, when you steal, and waste, and hurt any of their substance, when you are saucy and impudent, when you are telling them lies and deceiving them, or when you prove stubborn and sullen, and will not do the work you are set about without stripes and vexation,—you do not consider, I say, that what faults you are guilty of towards your masters and mistresses are faults done against God Himself, who hath set your masters and mistresses over you in his own stead, and expects that you would do for them just as you would do for Him your masters and mistresses are God's overseers, and that, if you are faulty towards them, God Himself will punish you severely for it in the next world, unless you repent of it, and strive to make amends by your faithfulness and diligence for the time to come.

— *The Church as it is: Or, The Forlorn Hope of Slavery*, Rev. Parker Pillsbury
