MEMORIES OF ENSLAVEMENT AND THE NORTH CAROLINA WPA EX-SLAVE NARRATIVE COLLECTION

by

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ABSTRACT

MAVERICK HUNEYCUTT. Memories of Enslavement and the North Carolina WPA Ex-Slave Narrative Collection. (Under the direction of DR. JOHN DAVID SMITH)

Historians have devoted tireless attention to studying the institution of slavery in the United States. In the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration interviewed over 2,000 formerly enslaved people for a project designed to collect testimony from former slaves before they all passed away. Since the 2000s, historians have begun to utilize the information within the collection to study many different aspects of slavery in the U.S. However, no scholar has utilized the WPA narratives in a study specifically focused on slavery in North Carolina. The main argument throughout the thesis is that the information within the WPA collection is important and valid to the study of United States slavery. To convey the lives of enslaved people using the WPA narratives, the thesis starts with an introduction that outlines the topic and its arguments and then covers the relevant historiography of the history of enslaved children and the WPA narratives. This analysis of the memories of WPA interviewees illustrates that even though the time spent in slavery by the respondents was almost eighty years earlier, these formerly enslaved men and women's memories concerning slavery were primarily clear, concise, and, in most cases, extremely accurate. Examples from the entire collection portray the wide range of topics that interviewees from the North Carolina collection recalled to their interviewees.

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Dedication

To Norma Jean Kennedy

Thanks, Nana.

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Introduction

In 1936, John A. Lomax, the first director of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Ex-Slave Narrative Project (hereafter referred to as the WPA collection or North Carolina collection), issued Federal Writers' Project (FWP) workers a set of questions designed to "get the Negro thinking and talking about the days of slavery." Lomax designed these questions to cover nearly "every conceivable aspect of a slave's life." The narrative project only lasted from 1936 to 1938, but during this time, WPA employees from sixteen states completed over 2,000 interviews with formerly enslaved people. The WPA Ex-Slave Narrative Project is the most extensive collection of interviews with former enslaved people in the United States. In 2014, historian Sharon Ann Musher concluded these interviews "constitute the bulk of all recorded commentaries, autobiographies, narratives and interviews with former slaves." Despite the WPA collection's scale, scholars have scantily utilized the information within these narratives. Researchers must be aware of the problems with the narratives when using the WPA collection as a historical source. However, Musher stated that despite the inherent difficulties, the WPA interviews "are more representative [of slavery] than many other published slave narratives."[1]

The WPA collection provides a wealth of information about enslaved people's experiences during the final years of slavery. This thesis argues that through various themes, including social interactions, labor, living conditions, and abusive experiences, the North Carolina collection provides a glimpse into the lives of slaves. To be clear, this thesis does not attempt to determine the effectiveness of the WPA narratives as a source. Instead, the author believes that an analysis of the narratives provides a glimpse into the lives of North Carolina slaves and simultaneously validates the narratives themselves. Interviewee Louisa Adams

recalled how she and other children were sent “to work at the salt mines” and went to work “as soon as we could see how to make a lick wid a hoe.” Jane Arrington firmly stated that she “ort to be able to tell sumpin cause I wuz twelve years old” when the Civil War ended. Arrington spent twelve years in bondage, and her narrative provides indispensable memories of direct experiences during her bondage. During her narrative, Arrington even recalled some of the games she played on the plantation and how they would take “hold of hands an’ run around as we sang dis song.” The WPA narratives portray that bondspeople were equipped with agency during slavery and did not allow their enslavement to define the entirety of their lives.[2]

The main argument throughout this thesis is that the information throughout the WPA collection is important to the study of American slavery, and this information is valid. The secondary goal of this project is to show how the WPA collection contains deeply emotional memories of slavery missing in traditional archival sources. Historians have studied and provided data on the entire WPA collection; however, no one has produced a thorough analysis of just one of the sixteen states in the collection. By examining just one state, the information found in the coming pages represents the memories and emotions of the formerly enslaved people of North Carolina. The interviewees from the North Carolina collection provided information on many aspects of slavery, encompassing significant elements of the slave experience.

Since the WPA narratives were published in the 1940s, historians have debated whether historians should consider these narratives valid historical sources. One early supporter of the collection was historian Paul D. Escott. His book *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (1979) included a complete quantitative analysis of the WPA collection through a large sample of the 2,000-plus narratives. Escott utilized charts, graphs,

percentages, and examples from individual narratives to gauge how representative the interviewees were of the ex-slave population during the late 1930s. Historian John W. Blassingame argued that the racial climate of the Jim Crow era of the 1930s was not conducive to producing accurate interviews and that these interviews were heavily edited and "not verbatim accounts," which also takes away the validity of the narratives, according to Blassingame. C. Vann Woodward argued that all sources historians utilize have a set of biases that historians must work through. However, regarding the WPA narratives, Woodward stated that these biases "are not great enough to justify continued neglect of this valuable evidence." While many scholars continue to ignore the wealth of data held within the WPA collection, other historians, regardless of these reservations, have utilized the WPA narratives when studying on American slavery and continue to use information from these narratives to answer questions about the lives of enslaved people.[3]

The historiography of American slavery is enormous and focuses on many different aspects. Interviewees of the WPA project provided invaluable information on numerous topics on which historians have written monographs. An example of this throughout the North Carolina collection is an activity that Southerners called corn shucking. Nicholas P. Hardeman, in *Shucks, Shocks, and Hominy Blocks: Corn as a Way of Life in Pioneer America* (1981), devoted nearly three pages to explaining the importance of corn shuckings in the slave communities. Even though interviewees who mention corn shuckings are plentiful in the North Carolina collection, Hardeman excluded voices from enslaved people concerning the importance of these corn shucking events. Another monograph where the author could have utilized information from the interviews is Michael Tadman's *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (1989). Interviewees from the North Carolina collection

spoke in detail about the separation of their families due to the domestic slave trade. As time has progressed, historians have begun to utilize the WPA collection more frequently. However, considering how this collection contains most eyewitness testimony from formerly enslaved people, scholars nonetheless continue to underutilize the interviews to their full potential.

Certain historians have worked through the reservations and the inherent biases throughout the narratives to include information from the WPA narratives in their historical works. Anya Jabour's *Topsy-Turvy: How the Civil War Turned the World Upside Down for Southern Children* (2010) examines the role of play between white and Black children during slavery and the Civil War. Jabour also uses the narratives to provide a glimpse into the everyday lives of enslaved children both just before and during the war.[4] Janet D. Cornelius' *"When I Can Read My Title Clear": Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (1991) is another example of a historical work that applies the WPA narratives as a central source of information throughout the work.[5] Gregory D. Smithers relied heavily on the WPA collection while writing *Slave Breeding: Sex, Violence, and Memory in African American History* (2012). His book included an entire chapter devoted to uncovering information about slave breeding in the WPA collection. Nina Silber's analysis of the enduring legacy of the Civil War during the 1930s, *This War Ain't Over: Fighting the Civil War in New Deal America* (2018), utilizes voices from the WPA collection to portray African American's recollections about the Civil War during the Great Depression.

This thesis adds to the historiography of American slavery in various ways. It includes eyewitness information from former slaves in the well-known narrative of enslaved life in America. While certain works utilize the WPA collection as their primary source, compared to the total works focused on slavery, the few studies that employ the narratives to study slavery

constitute a very scant percentage of the entire historiography. A key question throughout this work focuses on how understandings of American slavery change when the narrative of American slavery includes memories of formerly enslaved people are included in. Information from the WPA collection challenges what is known about the lives of slaves, including parental relationships, interactions with white children and white adults, and the awareness enslaved people had of their situation. The initial goal of this thesis was to utilize the North Carolina collection to provide a glimpse into the lives of enslaved children in North Carolina. After an extensive analysis of the interviews, the evidence suggested that the WPA collection contains information that encapsulates the entire slave's life experience, not just childhood. The average age of North Carolina interviewees was under 12 years old, but that does not mean that interviewees only provided information about enslaved children. Instead, interviewees spoke about their parents' and grandparents' experiences and retold stories from family members, and some told interviewers about their lives as enslaved children. Using the 175 narratives in the North Carolina collection, this thesis examines the lives of enslaved people through their remembered experiences. Assessing the lives of enslaved people through their memories will fill a significant gap in the historiography of enslavement in North Carolina. Historians have yet to examine the experiences of enslaved people as they remembered them.

This thesis utilizes a quantitative research method to illustrate the lives of former slaves as reflected through the North Carolina collection. This quantitative method, while simple, effectively tracked the data from all the narratives. The research method includes utilizing a spreadsheet with several categories each narrative may or may not encompass. These categories include whether the interviewee recognized their young age during slavery, living conditions, food rations, clothing, and lodging. Whether they mentioned work, leisure time, nursing,

separation or selling, and abuse. The spreadsheet was utilized to track data such as the interviewee's age during the interview and their age in 1865, as well as the gender of both the interviewer and the interviewee. While this raw data informs a significant part of this thesis, this data will not be the only focus of the project.

Similar to other historical works that utilize the WPA narratives as a central source, this thesis utilizes other primary sources, including plantation records and other enslaved peoples' narratives, to corroborate the information extracted from the WPA narratives. Autobiographical narratives from Henry Bibb, Harriet Jacobs, and Frederick Douglass also provide additional information to validate the information gleaned from the WPA narratives. Narratives mention plantations with records held at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the John Hope Franklin Research Center at Duke University, and the North Carolina State Archives. This thesis employs plantation records and early slave narratives from the 1800s to provide more validity to some of the claims made in the WPA narratives. Engagement with these archival records includes combing through different plantation records, which contain birth records, lists of enslaved peoples, enslavers' and overseers' journals, and handwritten correspondence detailing the management and treatment of North Carolina enslaved peoples.

To convey the lives of enslaved people using the WPA narratives, the thesis starts with an introduction that outlines the topic and its arguments and then covers the relevant historiography of the history of enslaved children and the WPA narratives. Chapter one of this thesis focuses on the memories found within the narrative collection. This analysis of the memories of WPA interviewees illustrates that even though the time spent in slavery by the respondents was almost eighty years earlier, these formerly enslaved men and women's

memories concerning slavery were primarily clear, concise, and, in most cases, extremely accurate. Chapter two contains multiple tables that display data tracked from the narratives in the North Carolina collection. Chapter three incorporates the data from Chapter two into a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the North Carolina collection. This final chapter follows the same categories found in Chapter two. However, instead of raw data, it presents quotations from the entire collection; these examples exemplify what constituted a data point for the quantitative analysis and the wide range of topics that interviewees from the North Carolina collection recalled to their interviewees.

Chapter One

Remembering Slavery: Autobiographical Memories and the North Carolina WPA Narrative Collection

Seventy-two years after the end of the American Civil War, a Works Progress Administration (WPA) employee interviewed Louisa Adams, a formerly enslaved woman at her home in Durham, North Carolina. At eighty years old, Adams was able to "'[re]member" nine specific memories during her interview. A few of these memories included her grandmother, Lovie Wall. When a white preacher, Jimmie Covington, married her and her husband on the Covington plantation, and how on that day, she "had a nice blue wedding dress" while her husband "wuz dressed in kinder lighter clothes." Finally, she recalled a woman dying, Carolina Covington, and a field song, "Oh! Come Let Us Go Where Pleasure Never Dies." These memories occurred more than seventy years ago during the years Adams spent in bondage. Many formerly enslaved people had similar memories, such as deaths on plantations, extended family members, or getting married. However, as Adams' interview shows, the memories expressed within the WPA collection were often highly personalized, and the personal nature of these memories provided a significant factor as to why these memories were still accessible seven decades later.[6]

Since the project's conception in the 1930s, many scholars have questioned the validity of the WPA interviewees' memory. In the 1970s, historians John W. Blassingame and C. Vann Woodward identified the "long time between the actual slave experience and the interview," along with the "failing memory" of the interviewees, as significant factors that "led to the distortion" of the WPA interviews. Similarly, David T. Bailey argued that "on most issues, most interviewees were not trustworthy witnesses." Despite all the criticisms surrounding the WPA interviews, historians have only recently begun to provide a framework that answers the

questions surrounding the validity of the interviewees' memories. It was not until 1992 that historian Donna J. Spindel published an article that identified the criticisms surrounding the interviewee's memories and concluded that the "assessments of the interviews… much more effectively state the problems than solve them." This chapter attempts to answer the challenge Spindel presented three decades ago and argues that recent evidence from psychological memory studies supports the validity of older adults' autobiographical memories and, in turn, affirms the memories expressed within the WPA Ex-Slave Narrative Collection.[7]

In 1972, when historian Paul Escott stated, "aging does not impair the recollection of the elderly," memory studies had recently gained traction among psychologists. Despite Escott's conclusion, there was minimal consensus between psychologists concerning the reliability of human memory. For this reason, it is understandable that classic historians such as Escott, Woodward, and Blassingame only included scant evidence from psychological sources when questioning the interviewee's memories. However, since the 1970s, historians have continued to utilize the WPA interviews in various ways that have bolstered the historiography of antebellum slavery studies without questioning the consensus of historians in this decade concerning the memories of WPA interviewees. While these works provide a discussion of the problems inherent in the interviews, most historians only discuss questions surrounding the racial climate of the 1930s. The implications those tumultuous times had on interviews conducted primarily by white interviewers with formerly enslaved people in the South is an aspect that historians must recognize when working with the interviews. However, unlike the criticisms of memory and the interviews, numerous historians have eloquently addressed the questions concerning racial issues and the WPA collection.[8]

Spindel's call for further interdisciplinary work to validate the memories of the WPA

interviews remained unanswered for over a decade until the 2014 publication of *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative.* Two chapters in this volume attempt to tackle the challenging problems concerning memory and the interviews: historian Marie Schwartz's "The WPA Narratives as Historical Sources" and historian Sharon Ann Musher's "The Other Slave Narratives." Nearly a decade would pass again until, in 2022, Susan-Mary Grant reignited the torch that had long been extinguished surrounding the burning issues of memory and the interviews. Her article explores "the complex place that Civil War memory holds in the WPA interviews." Using examples from the North Carolina WPA collection, this chapter provides an interdisciplinary approach to studying the WPA interviews through the lens of psychological autobiographical memory theory. The entire North Carolina collection contains over 170 interviews. However, after personally conducting rigorous analysis and data collection, examples from a random sample of nearly thirty interviews were used to present instances of autobiographical memory for this chapter. This chapter also discusses two specific types of autobiographical memories: vital memories, which focus on traumatic experiences, and flashbulb memories, which involve memories from the Civil War. Combining psychological research with individual examples from the interviews, the goal is to quiet doubts surrounding the validity of the interviewee's memories.[9]

For the past five decades, psychologists have theorized and tested a new form of memory that psychologists have labeled autobiographical memory (AM). Psychologists have defined AM as "the capacity of people to recollect their lives." Psychologists first began to explore the theory of autobiographical memory in the late 1980s, and it grew steadily throughout the '90s as memory studies continued to grow. The early debates on AM were centered around what exactly constituted an AM. Some, such as psychologist W. F. Brewer,

theorized that AMs included "all forms of self-related information," others argued for more restrictive definitions and "stressed the importance of key memories for the life story." Psychologists have given many names to these "key memories," including: "momentous events," "turning points," and "nuclear episodes." This study uses the labels vital and flashbulb memories to describe important "key memories" essential to AMs. Similar to many newer concepts or theories, scholars have yet to accept one concrete definition for AM. This study utilizes psychologist Robyn Fivush's definition: "autobiographical memory is that uniquely human form of memory that moves beyond recall of experienced events to integrate perspective, interpretation, and evaluation across self, other, and time to create a personal history."[10]

In the 1990s, psychologist Ulrich Neisser argued that to study AM, psychologists would need to "step outside the comfort zone of the laboratory to study memory in 'natural contexts.'" The WPA interviews offer an example of studying memory in this "natural context" that Neisser proposed. Reading the interviews through a psychological lens proves that many of the interviewee's memories were autobiographical. Since the original theories of the 1980s, neuroscientists have produced new findings in memory studies due largely to technological advances, "particularly in the area of neuroimaging." Regarding the ability to create AMs, psychologist Mark Howe explained how "encoding, storage, and retrieval are functioning early in life," which means that "memories can be and are formed early in life." Howe's conclusions surrounding childhood memories are evident in the interviews since the majority of interviewees were under the age of twelve when they were emancipated. WPA employee Mrs. W. N. Harriss provided a rare example of a worker who managed to have "several conversations" with their interviewee. Tillie was a formerly enslaved woman who still lived

and worked in the same home her mother was enslaved at in Wilmington, North Carolina. After multiple conversations, Harriss noted that Tillie's "memory was coaxed to the time when as a very young child." Tillie's interview is not the most fruitful in the collection. However, considering that many interviewees were not over ten years old during their enslavement, it is significant that Harriss recognized she needed Tillie to recall her childhood memories.[11]

People often share memories significant enough to constitute what psychologists consider AM multiple times, much like the memories in the WPA interviews. It is improbable to assume that the WPA interviews were the first time interviewees recalled memories of their enslavement. Psychologist Douwe Draaisma explained how the process of recall works in a way that validates memories from the distant past: "By recalling something, you lay down a new neural pathway, and the next time you apparently remember the same thing, it is actually the most recent pathway that becomes active. Memories, even the oldest, travel in time along with your brain tissue, joined by more and more new impressions." Mark Howe echoes Draaisma's view, explaining that "memory is viewed as a dynamic, not a static, storage system in which memories can be updated and recorded." Draaisma and Howe's conclusions demonstrate that the time gap between enslavement and the interviews should not constitute such a glaring methodological concern.[12]

The debates around the memories of WPA interviewees focus on the advanced age of the interviewees and the chronological gap between enslavement and the interviews. However, Howe explained that AM allows "memories for events [to] become personalized and can be potentially remembered over more extended periods." An example of the ability to remember events over extended periods is when Mary Barbour shared her memory of the night her family escaped bondage. She told her interviewer how her father woke her up "in de middle o' de

night… all de time tellin' me ter keep quiet." Barbour's deep fear and the memories of the physical conditions of the escape allowed this memory to remain easily accessible in her mind. Barbour said, "I will never forget dat walk, wid de bushes slappin my laigs, de win' sighin' in de trees, an' de hoot owls an' whipporwhils hollerin' at each other frum de big trees." The nuanced details Barbour provided show how these memories went beyond a simple episodic memory; instead, they qualify as autobiographical memories connected to her sense of self.[13]

Other interviewees expressed their attempts to detach themselves from their memories of enslavement. Sarah Derbo, ninety years old, was one of the older interviewees who told her interviewer how her parents did not like her to talk about the times when they were enslaved. However, Derbo's memories matter because she spent nearly eighteen years in bondage and was well into the stage of her life where she could understand the politics of slavery more than many of the other interviewees. Even so, she echoed many formerly enslaved interviewees who insisted on the impossibility of escaping the memories of those times; "*I ain't never forgot dem slavery days*." Various interviewees began their lives as "chattel" and lived, in numerous cases, up to a decade before they experienced freedom. The interviewees' memories from times of enslavement starkly contrasted with the rest of their lives in freedom. This is another reason why ex-slave interviews contain such vivid memories of events seventy years passed.[14]

Not every memory found within the interviews is vital to the interviewee's life narrative. Sometimes, general memories were easily accessible to the interviewee or perhaps what best fit the interviewer's questions that the national WPA office provided to each state office. However, even within these general memories hold deeply personal connections to the interviewees, a crucial component of an autobiographical memory. Solomon Debnam's memory of hunting birds at night offers an important example of a highly personalized general memory. Debnam,

who spent over a decade in bondage, could "remember killin' birds at night with thorn bush." He not only remembered these hunts, but he was also able to recall the process to his interviewer: "[we] went to grass patches, briars, and vines along the creeks an' low groun's where they roosted, an' blinded 'em an' killed 'em when they come out. I remember making a stew and having dumplings cooked with 'em." Throughout Debnam's interview, he frequently mentioned food in conjunction with specific events from his life. When Debnam's interviewer questioned about leisure time, Debnam stated that he could "remember the corn shuckin's, but not the Christmas and the fourth of July holidays. They had a lot of whiskey at corn shuckin's and goot things to eat." Many interviewees gave similar recollections as Debnam's. However, the following examples show how each interviewee personalized even the most general episodes.[15]

At eighty-seven years old, Henry Bobbit recalled his time on the Bobbit Plantation in Warren County, North Carolina, including the specific crops grown and the labor schedule on the plantation. "We farmed, makin' tobacco, cotton, co'n, wheat, an' taters… we wucked seben days a week, from sunup till sundown six days, an' from seben till three or four on a Sunday." Bobbitt lived fifteen years in bondage which meant that for five to seven years, he worked seven days a week "sunup till sundown. Considering the intensity of such a grueling job at a young age, it makes sense why Bobbitt could easily recall these memories after so many years and so late in life. Bobbit likely performed no other work than the labor's intensity during his enslavement. Cathrine Williams remembered how she was one of the many enslaved women put to work "nursing the children in the home." Williams asserted this was the first work her enslaver tasked her with and, similar to Bobbit, Williams possibly never experienced another time when she was nursing multiple children that were not her own. These examples of labor

performed on North Carolina plantations suggest how not every autobiographical memory must include a significant event from the person's life. The vividness of these general memories also raises the question of whether the entire time spent in bondage was what psychologists would consider as one continuous vital, momentous, or critical moment in formerly enslaved people's lives.[16]

Readers will find more than general memories of labor in the North Carolina Ex-Slave Narrative collection. Many interviewees vividly recalled the homes of their former enslavers, what was eaten on the plantations, and their leisure time. Although only having spent a few years in bondage, seventy years later, Alex Woods recalled to his interviewer specific details about the house on Jim Woods' plantation, such as how his enslavers called "de porch de piazza." Woods also informed his interviewer how he and his family "were fed from de kitchen o' his house during de week," but that they "cooked and et at our homes Saturday and Sunday nights." Like much of the enslaved population, Woods remembered when he wore homemade clothes and "went barefooted, an' in our shirt tails; we youngins' did." Herndon Bogan differed from Woods' memories about his lack of footwear when he was younger; Bogan asserted that on the Bogan Plantation in Union County, South Carolina, the enslaved population "did w'ar wood shoes." These highly personalized memories exhibit how individualized the memories of even the most routine life events run throughout the WPA collection. This individuality further proves that the memories found within the WPA interviews deserve more validity than historians have heretofore shown them.[17]

Shortly into Mary Hick's interview with seventy-two-year-old Anna Wright, the conversation turned to Wright's memories of cuisine during enslavement. Wright claimed that "from the first I 'member" most of her family's food was "vege'ables, squirrels, rabbits, possums

an' coons." Wright's interview includes nearly three pages of memories, focused on how the enslaved population on the Ellis Plantation in Scotland County, North Carolina, prepared and cooked different foods, including chicken, pork, vegetables, pies, and cakes. After reminiscing about all these different foods, Wright admitted that she "ain't eat dat good in awhile." Historian Mark M. Smith's *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege* (2014) analyzed the Civil War through the senses to provide "more than an eyewitness account" of the war experience. Wright and other interviewees who mentioned their cuisine under enslavement were not recalling sensory memories from a pivotal experience such as a war. But they expressed memories of the foods they ate, and according to Smith, senses such as taste can create memories "so powerful it can be relived, over and over again."[18]

Not every interviewee was fortunate enough to have memories of leisure time during their enslavement. However, children frequently experienced a less intense form of enslavement than their parents did. Considering most interviewees were less than ten years old in 1865, it is unsurprising that many recalled more lenient times during enslavement. Even Emma Blalock, who spent sixteen years in bondage, remembered the Christmases she spent on John Griffith's plantation in Wake County. Blalock told her interviewer how they "got Christmas Holidays an' a stockin' full of candy an' peanuts" and that during the break, the men "hunted and caught plenty of game." Charlie Barbour remembered the "little ones had some time ter go swimming." Other interviewees, including Hannah Crasson, recognized that her interview was full of traumatic memories from the time she spent in bondage. This might explain why Crasson included memories from the few "good times" they had on the Walton Plantation, including "co'n shuckin's, candy pullin's an' sich like."[19]

Due to the structure of the interviews, most of the questions began with more

generalized memories, including the interviewee's age, the location of the plantation, family, and conditions on their plantation. However, after general memories were established, interviewees began to recall their more traumatic times under enslavement, frequently memories of abuse of all types, including physical, sexual, and mental, selling of family members, illnesses, escapes, and resistance. The next section presents examples of these "vital memories" from the interviews. Vital memory, psychologists Steven Brown and Paula Reavey argued, "cannot be simply ignored or made irrelevant" and that these experiences are "central to how a personal past is narrated." The following examples will present quotes from "key moments" of the interviewee's lives, which some psychologists argue are essential to what creates an autobiographical memory.[20]

Psychologists Steven Brown and Paula Reavey recently have introduced a substantial aspect of autobiographical memory with their theory of "vital memories," often encoded with vivid detail and, in many cases, easily accessible. While AM and vital memory may seem similar, there is a distinct difference between the two and an important reason behind labeling particularly difficult memories as "vital." Brown and Reavey argue that vital memories are a specific subtype of autobiographical memories that often refer to traumatic life events that "have significant affective intensity and vividness and refer to matters of long-term concern." The WPA interviews are rife with recollections of vital memories that express slavery's lingering psychological scars from the physical abuse, often to the point of death, and mental abuse, particularly from fear of being sold and separated from their families.[21]

Scholars from various fields have written about vital memories using different names. In *Black Judas: William Hannibal Thomas and the American Negro* (2000), historian John David Smith explains how three events in William Hannibal Thomas's life were "signpost events" that

left “deep emotional scars” on Thomas. Smith describes how these three “signposts” or vital memories influenced the highly criticized opinions that Thomas wrote in his 1901 negrophobic work *The American Negro.* Holocaust literature is also rich with discussions concerning the recollection and effect that difficult memories can have on people. One example is English professor Lawrence Langer’s work *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (1991), that analyzed what he labeled “deep memory” and how these memories influence oral testimony. Everyone at some point in their life has a traumatic experience, whether it be the death of a loved one or an accident that caused a bodily or mental injury. Psychologists have long studied how humans remember these difficult and often traumatic events. Psychologists have produced two theories surrounding traumatic memories.[22]

The first is the “traumatic memory argument,” that claims that difficult experiences “lead to memory impairment… that render them difficult to retrieve.” The second, or “traumatic equivalency argument,” is the opposite, arguing that “traumatic stress does not impair and can even enhance the quality of memory.” Stephen Porter and Angela Birt conducted experiments with 306 people that asked them to recall in as much detail as possible their most traumatic life experiences along with their most positive life experiences. They concluded that “traumatic memories are unique” because they are often thought about and discussed, and the striking amount of detail and “emotional information” that these memories contain.[23]

Historians have also thoroughly documented the abuse enslaved people endured at the hands of their enslavers in the antebellum South. Historian Nell Irvin Painter utilized an interdisciplinary approach between psychology and history to describe the correlation between the abuse of enslaved people and what psychologists have termed “soul murder.” Many WPA

interviewees vividly recalled memories of abuse during their time in enslavement. John C. Betcom remembered that his former enslaver would "beat his slaves with a stick" and that he could "remember seeing him do this as well as I can see that house over there." Another striking example comes from Ben Johnson's interview, where he told his interviewer that he had a brother named Jim but that he was sold when Johnson was very young. Johnson noted that the tree where he "set under an' watch 'em sell Jim" remained standing when the interview took place in 1937 and made Johnson think how he had "neber felt so lonesome" in his entire life. Memories of physical abuse and mental abuse from fear of being sold and separated from family members remain the two most common throughout the interviews.[24]

One argument that historians frequently discuss regarding the WPA interviews is that due to the rocky racial climate of the American South during the 1930s, interviewees may not have been truthful when talking to white interviewers in the 1930s. However, after carefully reading the entire North Carolina WPA EX-Slave collection, personally collected data indicates that over seventy percent of the interviews specifically mention witnessing or enduring abuse during their time under enslavement. In the small sample size used for this chapter, seventy-six percent (twenty-one out of thirty) of the interviews mention memories of abuse during the time under enslavement, and out of the twenty-six for this chapter, thirteen mention memories of the selling of enslaved people. W. L. Bost's interview is full of traumatic memories, that is why it provides an excellent example demonstrating the frequency of vital memories throughout the WPA collection. One particular event was when Bost could not forget "how they kill one…whippin' him with the bullwhip." Bost then provided his interviewer with vivid details of the abuse on the Jonas Bost Plantation in Newton, North Carolina, showing that even after seventy years later, Bost was unable to escape the horrific memories:

> They take him to the whippin' post, and then they strip his clothes off and then the man stan' off and cut him with the whip. His back was cut all to pieces. Then after they whip him they tie him down and put salt on him… I remember how the driver, he was the man who did most of the whippin', use to whip some of the niggers. He would tie their hands together and then put their hands down over their knees, then take a stick a stick it 'tween they hands and knees. Then when he take hold of them and beat 'em first on one side then on the other.[25]

The horrific abuses witnessed during enslavement echo Porter and Brit's argument that "high levels of real-life stress may facilitate rather than impair the quality of memory." Louisa Adam's interview provides an excellent example of someone who recalled the abuse of another person rather than herself. Adams only spent eight years in bondage but, during that time, she had the extremely unpleasant experiences of "greasing" her "daddy's back after he had been whupped until his back was cut to pieces." To ensure that her interviewer understood the inhumanity of her father's abuse, she added that even after his back was cut to pieces, "he had to work jis the same." John Betcom recalled when his enslaver, Robert Wooten attached a ball and chain to an enslaved man, Mat Holmes, as a punishment for attempted escapes. This memory likely stayed with Betcom because he shared a bed with Holmes while he wore the ball and chain. Betcom told his interviewer he remembered how "the cuff had imbedded in his leg" and that "it was so swollen." Interviewees often stated to their interviewer that they were unable to forget some of the more traumatic experiences from their time in bondage. Seventy-nine-year- old Fanny Cannady spoke on her experiences on the Jordan Moss plantation in Durham County, North Carolina. During her interview Cannady stated that she was not able to forget a killing she witnessed on the plantation, "Marse Jordan Moss shot Lenoard Allen, one

of his slaves. I ain't never forgot dat."[26]

While some interviewees found were more comfortable recalling violent episodes that others experienced, many interviewees had no problem sharing their personal traumatic experiences. Such as Viney Baker, who recalled how her enslaver S. L. Allen beat her "till de blood run down my back" and how she could not remember what she had done, only that she "'members de whuppin's." Charlie Barbour, who was enslaved in Smithfield, North Carolina, also told his interviewer that even though he "wuz small" he could remember "seberal [beatings] dat [he] got," and much like Baker, he "wuz beat den till de hide wuz busted hyar an' dar." Physical abuse was an inescapable aspect of slavery that left scars not only on the bodies but also on the minds of formerly enslaved people. Sadly, physical abuse was not the only way that enslavement inflicted damage on innocent men, women, and children trapped in the closed society of antebellum slavery.

Historian Michael Tadman's *Speculators and Slaves* (1989) is the foremost work on the "interregional slave trade" that operated throughout the antebellum South. On separation due to selling, Tadman stated that "the agonies of separation… never ceased to echo… through the slave state." The loss of a family member through selling was a torturous event that many enslaved people endured during their years in bondage. Many interviewees shared their memories of losing loved ones to the slave trade, including Sam Stewart, who lost his mother, sister, and brother. As if Stewart's enslaver, James Arch Stewart of Wake County, North Carolina, sending his family to Mississippi was not traumatic enough, Stewart then told the interviewer that he "never heard from his mother anymore." Annie Tate's recollection of her mother's memory exhibited the extreme emotions that often accompanied losing a loved one through the domestic slave trade. Tate's mother told her that when she was

only eight or nine, her mother "killed herself 'cause dey sold her husband."[27]

W. L. Bost's interview again provides an example of a vital memory that stayed with him throughout his life. The traumatic abuse that Bost witnessed is not the focus here; rather his memories of the selling of enslaved people he encountered during his sixteen years in bondage. Bost's memories were incredibly vivid and included details such as quotes from a speculator at a slave auction. Thorough details such as these are unexpected for events that happened over seventy years before the interview took place:

> I remember when I was a little boy, 'bout ten years, the speculators come through Newton with droves of slaves… I remember when they put 'em on the block to sell 'em. The ones 'tween 18 and 30 always bring the most money, The auctioneer he stand off at a distance and cry 'em off as they stand on the block. I can hear his voice as long as I live. If the one they going to sell was a young Negro man this is what he says "Now gentlemen and fellow-citizens here is a big black buck Negro. He's stout as a mule. Good for any kin' o'work an' he never giver any trouble."[28]

These challenging and often traumatic memories found throughout nearly half of the North Carolina WPA interviews align with what Brown and Reavey define as "vital memories." Whether recalling memories of abuse or fear of losing a loved one, the interviewees expressed memories that had "significant affective intensity and vividness and refer to matters of long-term concern." The problem for those who recalled losing loved ones to the intraregional slave trade was that, in many cases, families were never connected again. This chapter has applied the term *vital memories* to label traumatic memories within the WPA interviews. However, along with vital memories and the memories of general conditions during enslavement, additional categories of autobiographical memory in the WPA interviews remain. An

alternative category of AM found within the narratives aligns with what psychologists define as "flashbulb memories."[29]

Near the end of each WPA interview, the interviewers questioned the subjects about their recollections of the American Civil War. Memories of wars, assassinations, and other "dramatic public events" remain at the heart of what psychologists have termed *flashbulb memories.* However, rather than recalling the actual event, flashbulb memories focus on what psychologists term the "reception event." Psychologists define a *reception event* as the "circumstances in which the person first received the news of the event and usually include information about the place, the people present at the time, what activities were taking place, and the source of the information." For formerly enslaved peoples, the Civil War is often linked with notions of freedom and in turn, was a "dramatic public event," that created lasting memories that the WPA interviews recorded seventy years later. Henry Bobbit recalled personal memories of the war through the anger of Bobbit's former enslaver and his curiosity concerning his freedom. Bobbit told his interviewer that he "'members de day might well when de Yankees come." His enslaver "walked de floor an' cussed Sherman fer takin' his nigger away." Once he discovered why his enslaver was so angry, Bobbit realized his situation and decided to walk "clean ter Raleigh ter find out if I wuz really free." The interviews, as historian Susan-Mary Grant argued, can show how the "Civil War is located within the autobiographical memory of the interviewee." Categorizing memories of the Civil War as *flashbulb memories,* a specific subtype of AM, furthers the argument for the validity of the memories of the WPA interviewees.[30]

Eastern North Carolina endured heavy fighting between Union and Confederate troops. After Union General William T. Sherman's march through Georgia, Sherman's forces then proceeded to move northward, driving Confederate forces out of South and then North Carolina.

As Sherman's forces continued their northward push, Confederate General Joseph A. Wheeler's troops were caught in the retreat. Formerly enslaved peoples in the Eastern North Carolina region frequently recalled "the vastness of the Union army" as they marched northward into Fayetteville, Smithfield, and Raleigh. In a memory that must have come from the early months of 1865, John Betcom informed his interviewer that he "remember[ed] seeing the Yankees near Fayetteville." Betcom also recalled Wheeler's cavalry burning bridges around the Fayetteville area following the loss of Averasboro. Mark A. Smith and Wade Sokolosky's work *No Such Army Since the Days of Julius Ceasar* (2005) details the Battle of Averasboro and discusses Wheeler's men frequently burning bridges during retreats to hinder the Union's progress.[31]

Charlie Barbour's memory was likely also connected to the aftermath of the Battle of Averasboro when he told his interviewer, "[y]es mam, I knows when de Yankees comed ter Smithfield." General Wheeler's Calvary is frequently mentioned throughout the interviews, likely because their enslavers often discussed Wheeler's cavalry. Patsy Mitchner, enslaved in Wake County, remembered when Wheeler's cavalry "jest grabbed everything an' went on." She provided context, telling her interviewer that the Confederate soldiers "had a reason for leavin'" because the "Yankees wus at dere heels." She then recalled that so many Union soldiers camped on their plantation that they "looked jest like ants." For John Coggin, the memory of first seeing Union troops stayed with him through the years because he had never seen so many people. Coggin recalled that he looked "up de road, an' de air am dark wid Yankees. I never seed so many mens, hosses an' mules in my life." Coggin, enslaved in Orange County, North Carolina, could have also witnessed one of the large columns of refugees marching from Raleigh to Wilmington.[32]

Not every memory of the Civil War required the shock and awe of large columns of

soldiers to become lasting memories. Instead, for many interviewees, the emotional experience of both fear and excitement that the war caused created their *flashbulb memory* of the Civil War. Elias Thomas recalled the fear he attributed to the war because his enslavers had told him that Union soldiers would "kill me and carry me off." Thomas expressed the significance of his fear during the Civil War, telling his interviewer that he "will remember seein' them till I die. I will never forgit it." Herndon Bogan greeted the first Union soldier he encountered with fear and courage. Like many other formerly enslaved people, Bogan vividly remembered what this soldier was wearing, likely because this man was one of Bogan's first connections to freedom, and it just so happened that the soldier Bogan confronted was related to his enslaver. Bogan's recollection also shows how Sherman's brand of "total war" impacted everyone involved. This extract also illustrated how confusing the Civil War was to the enslaved population, as seen when Bogan discovered that the first Union soldier he witnessed was his enslaver's brother:

> I 'members dat dem wus bad days fer South Carolina, we gived all o' 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, leastways 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 an' 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 Yankee.[33]

Fear was a widespread reaction for enslaved people to the sight of Union soldiers because many enslavers told their enslaved people that the Union Army would kill any enslaved person they could. This is apparent in Ida Atkins's interview when she told her interviewer that she "was skeered near 'bout to death." However, her fear gave her misguided

courage; Atkins recalled running to get a knife to "cut de rope an' set Marse Frank free." This misguided act of courage indicates that Atkins was more fearful of Union soldiers than her enslaver. This was a time of confusion for many enslaved people, such as Mandy Coverson, who had to decide which side to would help at a very young age. Coverson recalled how her enslaver tasked her and her mother with hiding "de family… valuables 'fore de Yankees come." Hiding household valuables, including silver, was not uncommon when Union troops arrived, and in isolated instances, enslaved children were tasked with hiding valuables from Union troops. Not every memory from the war was negative, however, some interviewees recalled events that distracted them from the negative experiences during the war or their first brush with freedom.[34]

Mary Wallace Bowe's interview presents an example of an event that distracted Bowe from the negative experiences of the war. Bowe claimed the dramatic actions of her former enslaver had helped keep her memory from the start of the war easily accessible; Bowe claimed that she "remember[ed] it kaze Mis' Fanny stood on de po'ch smilin' an' wavin' at Marse Fountain 'til he wen 'round de curve in de road, den she fell to de floor like she was dead."[35] Emma Stone remembered a game she and the other children had played on the Bell plantation in Chatham County, North Carolina. Stone recalled that during the Civil War, the children on the plantation would march and prance and beat on tin pans while they sang:

Wheeler's Wheeler's Cav—al—ry,

Marchin'on de battlefield

Wheeler's Wheeler's Cav—al—ry

Marchin' on de battlefield. [36]

The inclusion of memories from the Civil War shows how foundational an event the

war was formerly enslaved interviewees of the WPA Ex-Slave Narrative project. While these interviews were supposed to focus on the interviewee's experience during slavery, including memories of the Civil War allowed interviewees to “remove themselves from enslavement” once again. Similar to the general and traumatic memories discussed earlier, the flashbulb memories found throughout the WPA interviews align with the psychologist’s definition of the term. There are still debates surrounding the validity of flashbulb memories in older adults, but psychologists have reached a consensus on a few things. Most important to this chapter is that children aged seven and up can create flashbulb memories of “dramatic public events.” Considering the average age of the North Carolina interviewees in 1865 was 11 years old, this consensus from psychologists validates the argument that the WPA interviews are full of flashbulb memories.[37]

Chapter Two

Counting Slavery: Quantitative Results from the North Carolina WPA Narrative Collection

Mary Anderson was born in Franklinton, North Carolina, on May 10, 1851. Nearly eighty years later, she recalled to Works Progress Administration employee T. Pat Matthews that "about one hundred and sixty-two enslaved people were on the plantation." Anderson was not the only formerly enslaved interviewee willing to share what numerical data they remembered. This chapter presents the quantitative results from an analysis of the North Carolina narrative collection. The following pages contain seven charts representing the quantitative findings for the North Carolina collection. These tables range from the genders of the interviewers and interviewees, word count and page length, average ages from different periods, and nine qualitative categories. The data collection occurred while reading the 175 narratives in the North Carolina collection. As the author read each narrative, an Excel spreadsheet provided a home for all collected data. *Appendix A* contains a detailed explanation of the collection process for the data represented in the forthcoming pages. This analysis is imperfect; not even a computer could analyze such an overwhelming data source without a single error. After reading the collection numerous times, this author considers the data collection as perfect as humanly possible.

After reading just the seventh narrative in the collection, the narrative of Cornelia Andrews, it was clear that the gender of both the interviewer and interviewee was a crucial data point. During Andrews' interview with WPA employee Mary A. Hicks asked Andrews if her enslaver had ever abused her. Andrews replied, "Wuz, I eber beat bad? No, mam, I wuzn't." Then, something remarkable happened; Hicks noted that Andrews' daughter, who must have been present in the room, spoke up and told her mother to "open your shirt, mammy, and let the

lady judge for herself." Once Andrews exposed her back, the female WPA employee added to the narrative that "the back and shoulders . . . were marked as though branded with a plaited cowhide whip. There was no doubt of that at all." One must question: had the interviewee not been a woman, would an elderly Black woman have felt comfortable exposing herself to a white male in the 1930s? The answer is most likely not, and therefore, this encounter displaying the sheer brutality of slavery would have been lost to the historical record forever. [38]

Table 1.0 List of Interviewers

Name	Gender	Number of Interviews	Regional Location
T. Pat Matthews	Male	74 (42%)	Eastern North Carolina
Travis Jordan	Male	9	Central/Eastern North Carolina
Mary A. Hicks	Female	71 (40%)	Eastern North Carolina
Edith S. Hibbs	Female	3	Coastal North Carolina
Marjorie Jones	Female	4	Western North Carolina
Esther S. Pinnix	Female	1	Central North Carolina
Nancy Woodburn Watkins	Female	4	Central/Western North Carolina
Daisy Whaley	Female	4	Eastern North Carolina
W. N. Harriss	Female	2	Western North Carolina

The most surprising results of *Table 1.0* are that two WPA employees, Mary A. Hicks, and T. Pat Matthews, conducted 145 or 82% of the interviews in the North Carolina collection. One primary reason for these results is that these two WPA employees lived in eastern North Carolina, likely in the Raleigh/Durham area. The bulk of the interviews took place in this area, along with smaller towns on the outskirts of Wake County; some frequently mentioned towns in the collection include Smithfield, Lillington, New Bern, Goldsboro, Garner, Cary, and Wilson, all of which lie within an hour from Raleigh in any given direction. Another reason Hicks and Matthews produced so many narratives was that their narratives contained clear and concise writing styles, while other WPA employees submitted narratives that contained lackluster writing and sometimes embellished narratives.

Evidence of the quality of each narrative is buried deep in the archives at the Library of Congress, within the Federal Writers Project files. In these files are the North Carolina administrative files that include articles concerning the history of slavery and African Americans in North Carolina and files concerning the interview process. Inside these folders are hard copies of nearly every narrative in the North Carolina collection and an "Appraisal Sheet" for each narrative. These "Appraisal Sheets" contain fifteen points of analysis for each narrative. The categories include Title, Place and date of origin, Readability and value of material, Style, Suggested use or development, Recommended (Yes or No), Reasons, and the signature of appraised with the date. The first page of the "Appraisal Sheet" for John Beckwith's narrative, labeled as *Figure 2*, appears on page 32.

J.C. Rogers was working at the Washington, D.C., office of the WPA when he appraised John Beckwith's narrative on January 27, 1941. The material stated that Mary A. Hicks had "somewhat overdone" the dialect throughout the narrative. However, he listed the

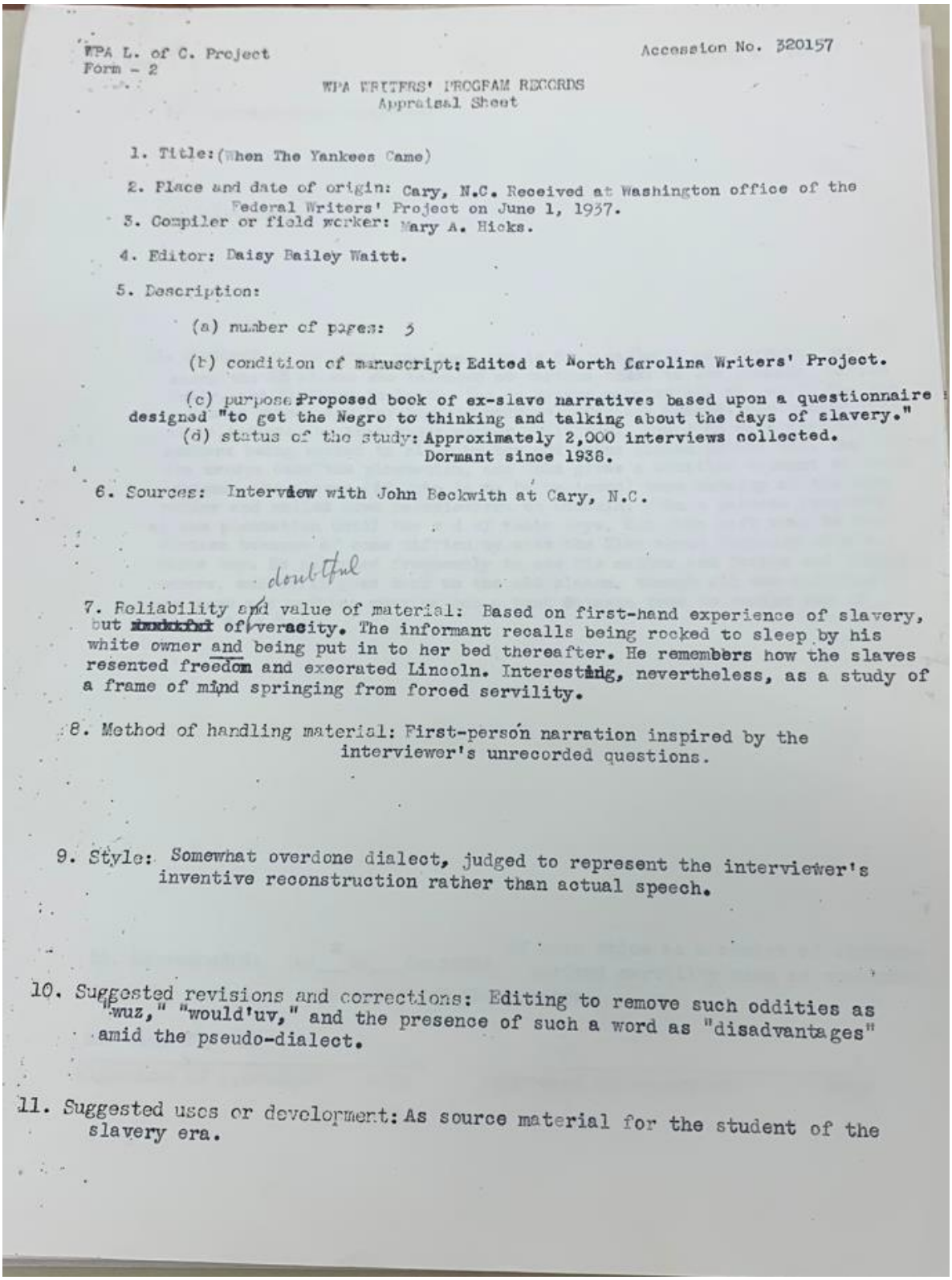
"suggested uses or development" as "source material for the student of the slavery era." An example from an interview performed by Travis Jordan, who only contributed nine narratives to the collection despite living in eastern North Carolina, near Hicks and Matthews. H. Bennet appraised Jordan's narrative of Dave Lawson in 1941 and concluded that the narrative was "couched in mock- dialect" and that Jordan's style was "*pretentious*, and *fake*." Perhaps the most damming review of Jordan was that his narrative had "no value as a contribution to slavery testimony." Not surprisingly, Bennet listed the reason for rejection as "not a slave narrative, but a *made-up story*."[39] These examples illustrate why at the very least, Hicks had so many narratives suggested for publication, and WPA appraisers denied many narratives from other writers, such as Jordan, had.[40]

Table 1.1 Gender of Interviewers and Interviewees

Total = 175	Male	Female
Gender of interviewer	85 (48%)	90 (52%)
Gender of interviewee	74 (42%)	101 (58%)
When the interviewer/interviewee were the same gender	86 (49%)	
When the interviewer/interviewee was of opposite genders	89 (51%)	

Table 1.1 displays the data concerning gender throughout the narrative collection. Seven female WPA employees conducted 48% of the North Carolina collection, and two male employees conducted the other 42%. However, the previous table, *Table 1.0*, showed that one female and one male WPA employee conducted 82% of the interviews. For the interviewees, there was a slight increase in the number of females interviewed over the males. One possibility could be that there were just more females still alive who WPA employees could locate and interview. Another potential reason could have been that formerly enslaved males in the 1930s

were less willing to talk about their experiences during slavery to a white interviewer. The last two categories in *Table 1.1* reveal the number of interviews where both parties were of the same or opposite genders. The data illustrates that for 49% of the interviews, both parties were the same gender, and for 51%, both were opposite genders. This data was not tracked against the qualitative categories displayed in the ensuing pages. A potential avenue to further this study could include tracking this data against other categories to see if more information was shared when the two parties were of the same gender.



WPA L. of C. Project
Form - 2

Accession No. 320157

WPA WRITERS' PROGRAM RECORDS
Appraisal Sheet

1. Title: (When The Yankees Came)

2. Place and date of origin: Cary, N.C. Received at Washington office of the Federal Writers' Project on June 1, 1937.

3. Compiler or field worker: Mary A. Hicks.

4. Editor: Daisy Bailey Waitt.

5. Description:

(a) number of pages: 5

(b) condition of manuscript: Edited at North Carolina Writers' Project.

(c) purpose: Proposed book of ex-slave narratives based upon a questionnaire designed "to get the Negro to thinking and talking about the days of slavery."

(d) status of the study: Approximately 2,000 interviews collected. Dormant since 1938.

6. Sources: Interview with John Beckwith at Cary, N.C.

doubtful

7. Reliability and value of material: Based on first-hand experience of slavery, but ~~doubtful~~ of veracity. The informant recalls being rocked to sleep by his white owner and being put in to her bed thereafter. He remembers how the slaves resented freedom and execrated Lincoln. Interesting, nevertheless, as a study of a frame of mind springing from forced servility.

8. Method of handling material: First-person narration inspired by the interviewer's unrecorded questions.

9. Style: Somewhat overdone dialect, judged to represent the interviewer's inventive reconstruction rather than actual speech.

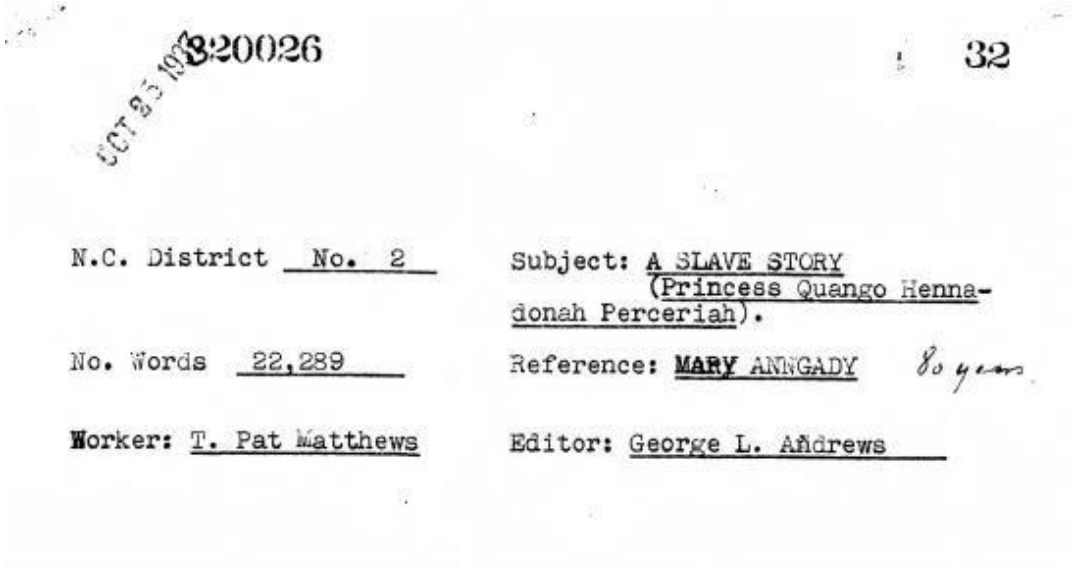
10. Suggested revisions and corrections: Editing to remove such oddities as "wuz," "would'uv," and the presence of such a word as "disadvantages" amid the pseudo-dialect.

11. Suggested uses or development: As source material for the student of the slavery era.

Figure 1 Photo of "Appraisal Sheet" for the Narrative of John Beckwith from Author's Personal Collection.

Table 1.2 Average Word Count and Page Length of Interviews		
	Word Count	Page Length
Total Average	975	4.6
When Same Gender	845	4.4
When Opposite Gender	1101 (Mary Anngady's Narrative: 22,289)	4.8

Table 1.2 also focuses on the gender dynamics during the interviews. This table shows the average length of the narrative, both word count and page count when the interview was between the same or opposite genders. The results of this table were surprising because when the interviews occurred between the opposite genders, they were nearly two hundred words and averaged over half a page longer than interviews conducted between the same gender. The interview between 80-year-old Mary Anngady and WPA employee T. Pat Matthews totaled 22,289 words and was eleven pages long. This narrative was an anomaly and pushed the average word count over one thousand when the parties in the interview were the opposite gender. The page length for each narrative was counted for the data collection process but not the words for each narrative. *Figure 1* provides an example of the cover page each narrative in the North Carolina collection included. The cover pages consist of six categories, a few of which are the subject or title, usually a word count, and the interviewer's name. These cover pages proved priceless during the data collection by providing quick access to data such as the word count and the author's and interviewees' names. It should also be noted that not every state included a cover page with each narrative.


3320026

32

N.C. District No. 2

Subject: A SLAVE STORY (Princess Quango Henna-donah Perceriah).

No. Words 22,289

Reference: MARY ANNGADY 80 years

Worker: T. Pat Matthews

Editor: George L. Andrews

Figure 2. Huneycutt, Maverick, "Screenshot of Cover Page for Mary Anngady's WPA Narrative," Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mesn.111, 32.

Table 1.3. Age of Interviewees

	Average Age in 1855 *(N = 82)*	Average Age in 1865 *(N = 155)*	Average Age During Interview (1937) *(N = 166)*
Total	6.7 years	11.4 years	82.5 years
Female Averages	7.4 years	10.7 years	81.3 years
Male Averages	6.0 years	12.4 years	84.1 years

Age provided another quantitative category to trace throughout the WPA interviews. *Table 1.3* shows that the average age of the interviewees in 1865 was over eleven years old. This means that, on average, the interviewees spent more than a decade of their lives enslaved. Male interviewees suffered nearly thirteen years in bondage, right around the age when many interviewees stated that enslavers began to expect strenuous labor from slaves. Some historians have contended that the interviewee's age during enslavement softened interviewees' memories of the horrors of slavery and also argued that in the 1930s, the interviewee's old age made their

memories less reliable.[41] The average age of the interviewees in 1937, when all of the interviews in North Carolina occurred, was eighty-two and a half years old. Since the 1990s, historians have given increasing attention to the WPA collection as a first-hand source on antebellum slavery in the South. Sixteen states are included in the WPA collection, and historians such as Paul D. Escott and Stephen Crawford have proven how valuable the data found within the WPA collection is for the history of southern slavery.[42]

Table 1.4. Reported Awareness of Youth During Enslavement

Acknowledged Youth During Enslavement	Acknowledged Youth Impacted Memories of Enslavement	Acknowledged Having no Memories of Slavery Due to Age
120 (68%)	97 (55%)	32 (18%)

Table 1.4 also concerns age and focuses on the interviewees' awareness of their youth while enslaved. Nearly 70% of the interviewees mentioned that they realized they were young children during slavery. Another 55% of interviewees understood that their young age influenced their memories of slavery. Only a slim 18% of interviewees recounted that because of their young age and the number of years that had passed, they had no recollection of their time spent in bondage. Significantly, twelve of the thirty-two who reported that due to their youth, they had no memory of slavery were only in their early seventies. This meant that if, in 1937, an interviewee was 75 years old, they would have only spent three years in bondage. This indicates that any knowledge interviewees in their seventies shared about slavery was likely not first-hand knowledge but were stories passed down from elderly family members or people in their surrounding communities.

Tables 1.5 – 1.8 focus on the qualitative categories this study tracked throughout the

North Carolina collection. The first table presents the data on the categories of work and leisure time. This analysis admittedly lacks detail and leaves room for further analysis.

Table 1.5 Qualitative Categories – Work and Leisure Time (N= 175)	
Mentions Work	Mentions Leisure Time
118 (68%)	74 (42%)

Nevertheless, the data reveals interesting results. The first category concerning work tracked whether the interviewees mentioned any labor performed on their respective plantations. It is widely known that enslavers did not require the performance of strenuous tasks such as field work until their slaves were twelve to fifteen years old. Nearly 70% of the interviews contain information about specific tasks enslavers forced enslaved people to complete during their youth. Another data point tracked found that 74 interviews, or 42%, mentioned leisure time that their enslaver afforded them on their respective plantations. Much of this so-called leisure time consisted of events such as "corn shuckings." At these shuckings, enslavers would provide their enslaved people with good food and often liquor, while the enslaved people just shucked large amounts of corn.[43] However, while the enslaved populations were having a good time eating and drinking, they were still working for their enslavers. After having a good time shucking all this corn, enslavers would often take this shucked corn to the market, feed it to farm animals or turn around and give it to their bondspeople as a part of their food rations.

Table 1.6 Qualitative Categories – Abuse, Nursing and Separation (N= 175)		
Mentions Abuse	Mentions Nursing	Mentions Separation
115 (65%)	22 (12%)	86 (49%)

The 1930s South was a place where racism frequently turned physically violent and created a harsh racial dynamic between African Americans and whites. During the 1930s, white males were still performing brutal events such as lynchings, often without consequence. It should not surprise anyone that elderly African Americans were often not willing to talk negatively about their former white enslavers to a white interviewer while living in this environment. Only after a close reading of the North Carolina collection does the severity of slavery in North Carolina become clear. Three out of every five interviewees were willing to reveal memories of the sheer brutality of American slavery. Exactly 115 interviews, or 65% of the North Carolina collection, provided details concerning the abuses the interviewees either personally endured or witnessed during their time in bondage. Examples of these abuses include whippings, beatings, verbal and sexual abuse, and withholding of food. In extreme cases, enslavers would not provide medical care to an enslaved person after a malicious whipping, and all too often, an innocent enslaved person died because of this neglect.

The next category concerning the wet nursing or breastfeeding of children had some of the lowest responses. Nursing seemed like a critical category to track when considering the physical and psychological impact of such a terrible form of forced labor. Elderly enslaved women who were not efficient in the fields were often put to work watching the enslaved youth on the plantation. In some cases, enslavers tasked elderly women with nursing enslaved children while their mothers worked in the fields. In other instances, enslavers even entrusted

their elderly enslaved women with nursing their white children. Only twenty-two narratives, or 12%, mentioned either knowing a woman who worked as a babysitter/nursing woman or working as one themselves. Several interviewees claimed to work as wet nurses stated they continued in this line of work well after gaining their freedom. The final category in *Table 1.6* concerns the separation of family members through the domestic slave trade. In the North Carolina collection, 86 or 49% of the narratives mention the interregional slave trade. The interviews in the WPA collection unveil how devastating the local slave trade was to Black families caught in the shackles of bondage. All eighty-six interviewees either witnessed the loss of a loved one through the domestic slave trade first-hand or through information passed down through the formerly enslaved person's family. Nearly half of the interviews in the North Carolina collection expressed sorrow when talking about the mothers, fathers, grandparents, and siblings sold away and, in many cases, never seen again. Tracking how many families reunited and how many people that were sold were never seen again would provide important information concerning the ability of Black families to reunify after slavery tore them apart.

Table 1.7 Qualitative Categories – Clothing, Diet and Civil War (N= 175)

Mentions Clothing	Mentions Diet	Mentions Civil War
118 (68%)	110 (62%)	149 (89%)

The first data category in *Table 1.7* concerns the clothing enslavers provided their bondspeople, showing that 68% of the narratives, nearly three-quarters of the respondents, mentioned the clothing they wore during slavery. It is well known that enslavers often afforded their slaves very little clothing, and many went barefoot in the summer months, and some went barefoot even during the winter seasons as well. The North Carolina collection contains 118

valuable examples that prove further the sparse and low-quality clothing that enslavers supplied their enslaved children and adults. The second data set in Table 1.7 focuses on the food enslavers provided to enslaved populations. Some enslavers fed bondspeople quality food with adequate rations, while others barely provided their enslaved populations enough food to survive. This discrepancy in food quantities becomes clear while reading the North Carolina collection. The formerly enslaved interviewees recalled memories that ranged from children eating from troughs to only receiving scant amounts of food rations once a week. However, several interviewees claimed that their enslavers fed them well, and they never went without. Of the 110 individual narratives, or 62% of the collection, that mentioned food during their interviews, only a handful claimed their enslavers fed them well. A data point not tracked, but one that would likely produce worthwhile results is tracking the percentage of the narratives that mention hunting or working a garden or "truck patch." Enslaved parents had very few opportunities to provide for their children. Hunting for meat and growing vegetables to provide supplemental food was one way that enslaved parents improved the quality of their children's lives.

The third and final data set presented in *Table 1.7* quantifies the frequency interviewees mentioned the Civil War. While reading the narratives, it became clear that the white WPA interviewers in North Carolina were asking these formerly enslaved people what they could remember about "the Yankees." In nearly all 149 narratives mentioning the Civil War, the interviewee mentioned "the Yankees" rather than the Union Army or the North. Especially to white residents of the 1930s South, the Union Army consisted of Yankees. Labeling Union soldiers as "Yankees" was likely a cause of the racial climate in the South during the 1930s. Whites still considered themselves superior to African Americans and often resorted to violent

measures to keep Blacks "in their place." When taking this attitude of racial superiority into account, it is easy to see why an elderly Black man or woman might second-guess speaking positively about the Union or speaking negatively about the Confederacy. Tracking how many interviewees claimed to have joined the Union Army and what jobs the Union Army provided these ex-slaves is a possible data point for further analysis.[44]

Table 1.8 Qualitative Categories – Sleeping Quarters and Slave Breeding (N= 175)

Mentions Sleeping Quarters	Mentions Slave Breeding
85 (48%)	22 (12%)

As far as the North Carolina collection goes, *Table 1.8* shows that 48% or 85 of the narratives mention their sleeping arrangements at some point during their interviews. Sleeping quarters or slave cabins, as they are often referred to throughout the narratives, were one of the only places enslaved people had any freedom. Enslaved sleeping quarters were normally simple structures built from logs, often with one door and no windows. These cabins had dirt floors and little light, but these small living quarters were home to enslaved people. Parents raised their children the best they could in these homes, meals were prepared for the family in the fireplaces, and prayer meetings were held in these cabins late at night to avoid detection from their omnipresent enslavers. The final data set in *Table 1.8* focuses on the terrible practice of slave breeding. This practice was so taboo that only twenty-two narrators, or a slim 12%, spoke comfortably about this practice with their white interviewers. One reason this number is so limited could be because victims whose enslavers forced sexual relations with chosen enslaved males or females did not want to relive that scenario to a white interviewer.

The last analysis includes an explanation of the results of *Table 1.8 Location of*

Interviewee During Enslavement and Interviews (found in *Appendix B).* This table traces the data of the interviewee's location while enslaved and the location of the interview itself, illustrating the level of agency that newly freed African Americans had when it came to leaving their plantations post-emancipation. This data set shows that several formerly enslaved people were not born in North Carolina. Instead, enslavers sold these interviewees to a different enslaver in North Carolina or moved to North Carolina with their enslavers. Sadly, due to the poor conditions African Americans endured after the Civil War, many of these formerly enslaved people had few options but to stay in North Carolina and, in many cases, even remain on the plantation where they were enslaved and continued working for their former enslaver turned boss who was now “forced” to “pay” for these people’s labor.

Chapter Three

Representing Slavery: A Qualitative Analysis of the North Carolina WPA Narrative Collection

In 1937, former bondsman Andrew Boone spoke with WPA employee T. Pat Matthews outside of Raleigh, North Carolina, in a small tobacco barn where Boone claimed to have lived for the past fifteen years. Boone explained that he belonged to Billy Boone and illustrated the "thick an' thin" that Boone endured "in slavery time." The "thin" included "rough rations," having just enough "clothes to make out wid'" and houses "built of logs . . . an' clay mud." The "thick" that Boone mentioned likely included working from "sun to sun," eating "frozen meat and bread" during the winter, and being "whupped . . . wid de cat o' nine tales," which "had nine lashes on it." Unlike Boone, not every interviewee in the North Carolina WPA narrative collection provided information on nearly all aspects of slavery. Still, most narratives contain important recollections on at least one aspect of slavery.[45]

The following qualitative analysis corresponds with the twelve categories in the subsequent chapter, including work, leisure time, abuse, selling, breeding, and the Civil War. By providing quotations from the entire North Carolina collection supporting the previous chapter's data points, the first objective of this chapter is to provide insight into the process behind the data collection. Each narrative in this chapter constitutes a data point in chapter two, "Counting Slavery." For instance, a quotation in this chapter concerning the clothing of a former slave is from one of the 118 narratives that contain information on clothing throughout the North Carolina collection. Along with testimony from the WPA narratives, a first-person slave narrative assists in introducing each category throughout this chapter. By showing the continuity between these first-person narratives and the WPA narratives, the second goal of this analysis is to provide more justification for scholars to utilize these narratives that many

researchers have overlooked.

In Austin Steward's autobiography, *Twenty-Two Years A Slave and Forty Years A Freeman* (1857), he explained that as a seven-year-old, he "found himself a slave on the plantation of Captain William Helm." Until this point in Steward's life, he had not understood that Helm viewed him as a property and not a normal child. Many of the interviewees from the North Carolina collection project were too young to remember the horrors of their time spent in bondage. Throughout the collection, interviewees stated that they were unaware that their enslavers viewed them as property. Also throughout the collection are interviewees who spent over twenty years in bondage and were over 100 years old during their interviews. The range of ages and experiences found throughout the WPA narratives is the main reason the collection encompasses the complete experience of slavery in North Carolina.[46]

Early in his interview, John Daniels was forthcoming with his interviewer and stated that he did not know anything about the war because he "weren't born yet." Interviewees who spent five years or less in bondage constitute roughly twenty-five of the North Carolina narrative collection. Georgianna Foster was also honest with her interviewer and stated that most of what she knew about slavery, Foster's parents had "tole" her. Millie Markham, born in 1855, stated she was "never a slave." Markham continued explaining to her interviewer that while she was not born in slavery, her father was a slave and that her story would be "more about my father and mother than it will be about myself." While second-hand narratives such as these examples appear throughout the North Carolina collection, the collection also contains narratives from formerly enslaved people who spent up to three decades of their lives enslaved.[47]

By the time of the WPA project in the 1930s, several interviewees had reached 100

years old. These include Clay Bobbit, who stated he had just turned 100, Ann Parker, 103, and John Smith, 108. Bobbitt stated that it had been many years since he was enslaved but told his interviewer that he nonetheless would tell her what he could remember. Bobbitt recalled not having any time to go "swimmin' ner huntin'" and that his master afforded his slaves no pleasures, but also asserted that slaves would "run away to" have free time away from their owner's prying eye. John Smith's age did not seem to cloud his memory. During his interview, Smith recalled his owner's name, "Master Haywood Smith," and how he was "carried to Alabama" just before the Civil War. Smith also stated that when "the Yankees" told him of his freedom, he was so overwhelmed that he "did not know what to do." Ann Parker similarly had no problem remembering that her enslaver "Abner Parker" owned "maybe a hundret slaves an' a whole heap of land." Once the introductions were over and interviewees answered age-related questions, the next questions from the interviewers were: where were you enslaved, and who was your enslaver?[48]

Historian John B. Boles established in his book *Black Southerners: 1619-1869* (1983) that the majority of slave owners throughout the South owned fewer than five slaves and operated smaller farms rather than plantations. While scholars have distinguished between plantations and farms, it seems that during slavery, enslaved people did not make this distinction. Throughout Moses Roper's 1838 autobiography, he mentioned working on different "cotton plantations" throughout the South. Multiple enslavers bought and sold Roper during his time in bondage, yet only once in his autobiography did Roper mention the number of enslaved people who worked alongside him on a specific plantation. Roper explained that he, along with two slaves, worked the cotton fields during the time he spent under the ownership of Mr. Gooch in Cashaw County, South Carolina. Three enslaved people aligns with the number that

researchers have concluded the majority of southern slave owners possessed. However, when WPA employees asked formerly enslaved people in North Carolina about the size of the farms or plantations and the number of slaves their enslavers owned, nearly all respondents claimed they lived on a big plantation with many slaves.[49]

While they may not have been typical, there is no doubt that there were plantations with large numbers of enslaved people throughout North Carolina. Historians have also proven that eastern North Carolina, where the majority of interviews took place, was a hotspot for plantations and enslaved labor during the 1800s. Three interviewees stated that "Paul Cameron" was their enslaver, and scholars have uncovered records showing that the Cameron family owned considerable numbers of slaves on several plantations. Abner Jordan, who stated that he "belonged to Marse Paul Cameron," is listed on the Cameron's 1844 list of enslaved peoples as a house worker. The list does not show Doc Edwards, who claimed to have belonged to Paul Cameron. However, the list shows his mother, Judy, whom Doc mentioned early in his interview. Cy Hart recalled that Paul Cameron purchased his father, "Ephram," and reported that his father married his mother, "Nellie," on the Cameron plantation. According to a list of the Cameron's enslaved peoples from 1844, of the one-thousand slaves the Camerons owned, there was an Ephriam, a Nelly, and a Cyrus. These three narratives show that some of the interviewees from the North Carolina collection did live and work on large plantations alongside a considerable number of other enslaved people.[50]

Not every interviewee asserted that they lived on a plantation with hundreds of slaves. Cornelia Andrews recalled that even though "Doctor Vaden owned a good-sized plantation," he had only eight slaves to work it. Charlie Crump informed his interviewer that his enslavers, the Abernathys, were "pore white trash tryin' ter get rich," and did not own many slaves, "'cept

seven or eight." William Hinton stated that when the "Yankees come" only two enslaved people resided on the James Thompson farm. While some interviewees asserted that their enslavers owned "two hundred" or "near three hundred" enslaved peoples, there was an equal number, like Andrews, Crump, and Hinton, who reported that their former masters owned numbers of slaves that correlate with historical records. One reason some interviewees overstated these numbers could have been because, as a child, it is very hard to gauge the size of a crowd. An enslaved child could have easily misrepresented a dozen or more people, including their family members, heading to the fields before sunrise into a number that was far higher than the true number. This does not mean that the narratives are invalid or that interviewees were giving false information; instead, it shows the influence that age can have on an oral history project. The next logical direction that WPA employees began to steer their conversations in was to uncover what type of work these interviewees could recall performing for their enslavers.[51]

In his autobiography, *Fifty Years in Chains* (1859), Charles Ball described his experiences during slavery. The events of slavery were still fresh on Ball's mind when he explained that his enslaver "compelled me to work very hard on his plantation." Interviewee Robert Glenn recalled, like Ball, that his "marster. . . worked [his enslaved people] from sun to sun in the fields." Many narratives contain information about the intensity of the work enslaved people performed in bondage. In Sarah Gudger's interview, she recalled events from her "hard life," and stated that all she did was "wok, an' wok, an' wok." When asked about the types of labor performed, Gudger listed several jobs she was responsible for, including working in the field, chopping wood, and hoeing corn, and Gudger stated that sometimes she felt like her back would "shortly break." Another interviewee who explained their work responsibilities was found during an interview with Jacob Thomas, a ninety-one-year-old formerly enslaved man

living in Raleigh. Thomas stated that from his earliest memories, he had "worked on the farm." Specific duties Thomas recalled included planting "cane, cotton, corn, an' rice in de low groun's."[52]

Robert Hinton was born in 1856 on the Lawrence Hinton plantation outside Raleigh. During his nine years in bondage, Hinton explained that he "picked up sticks in the yard" and worked around the "big house." However, Hinton also claimed that whenever his enslavers or overseers would turn their backs instead of working, he was "playing." Hilliard Yellerday stated that on Dr. Jonathan Yellerday's plantation, overseers "made it hard for them" because her enslaver allowed the overseers to "whip a slave at will." Unique from other interviews, Catherine Williams asserted that the first work she performed while enslaved was "nursing the children in the home." Williams did not specify, but one can assume that because Williams said she nursed children "in the *home*," she was referring to nursing her enslaver's white children in what was commonly referred to as the "big house." Mattie Curtis worked in the home of Fannie Long, who owned and operated a "backer [tobacco] factory." Some of Curtis's work at the Long home included picking fruit, fanning flies off the table, and nursing "de little slave chilluns." Curtis then explained that enslaved people "stemmed, rolled an' packed" tobacco at the factory on the Long property.[53]

Elias Thomas spoke on a topic that few other interviewees mentioned during their interviews. This was working alongside their "poor white neighbors." Thomas reported that on the Baxter Thomas plantation in Chatham County, North Carolina, the enslaved people and "poor white[s]" worked together and "had a good time . . . laughing, working, and singing." Throughout the narratives, interviewees had two main answers when interviewers asked about labor. The first was that due to their young age, their enslavers did not task them with heavy

labor or interviewees recalled something akin to Robert Glenn's statement that slaves worked in the fields "from sun to sun." Not every narrative described mundane jobs enslaved children performed around plantations. Lindsey Faucette recalled that she worked as the "cow-tender" on the Occoneechee Plantation in Hillsborough. Faucette explained that her responsibilities included helping calves drink milk, milking adult cows, tending horses, and "anything else" her enslaver forced her to do. After reading the North Carolina collection, it seems that once the interviewees answered questions concerning labor, the interviewers began to steer interviewees in different directions. Some interviewees insisted on recalling memories of enslavers selling their parents and the separation that came with that. Others brought up remembrances of the abuses their enslavers inflicted upon them. However, some formerly enslaved people recalled some of the activities enslaved people participated in during the minute amount of leisure time they could find.[54]

Due to the youth of many interviewees while enslaved, many narratives contain recollections about the leisure or play time enslavers afforded their enslaved people. An equal number of interviewees reported they never had any leisure or play time on their plantation. Enslaved in Virginia during the 1830s, Louis Hughes published his autobiography, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom*, in 1897. Hughes described early on in his autobiography that he "like any child, wanted to play" but could not remember that his "madam" afforded him "that privilege." WPA interviewee Jacob Thomas, on the other hand, asserted that his former enslaver, Tom Bell, allotted the enslaved population on his plantation in Georgia "a heap of pleasure." Susan High likewise mentioned that her parents had told her about the many alcoholic beverages her master made available to drink on the plantation, including "cider, made from apples, whiskey, an' brandy."[55]

Ninety-two-year-old Henry James Trentham, who had spent two decades in bondage, explained to his interviewer that the "corn shucking's was a great time" and that his enslaver would "give good licker to everybody den." Corn shuckings were among the more frequent forms of leisure time interviewees mentioned. Masters were likely willing to make an event such as corn shucking fun because slaves were still working, even while "having a good time." Parker Pool was enslaved in Johnston County, North Carolina, and spoke almost reminiscently about the Christmas holidays on the Pool plantation. Pool reported to her interviewer that during the holidays, there were multiple "big dinners" where "big tables [were] set in de yard, de rations wuz spread on [the tables], an' everybody et." Pool also recalled that enslavers provided brandy to their slaves to drink. Aside from corn shuckings and big dinners, the North Carolina collection contains other activities slaves participated in to ease the severity of enslavement. Isaac Johnson recalled that the slaves on Jack Johnson's plantation had about two weeks of "lay by time" around the Fourth of July. Johnson claimed that he remembered the "great times" he had at "log rollin's and cotton pickin's . . . dances." Later in his interview, Johnson also listed several games enslaved children would play with white children on the plantation, including "base, cat, rolly hole, and a kind of baseball called 'round town."[56]

The many interviewees who were young children while in bondage recalled having more "fun" during slavery than those who spent closer to two decades enslaved. Jane Arrington, who was only twelve years old in 1865, remembered that during childhood, she played "three handed reel" games such as "Old Gray Goose, All Little Gal, and Old Dan Tucker." Arrington asserted the girls would hold hands and move in a circle as they sang these different songs. Other interviewees reported that they played with their master's children during their youth while their parents were working in the fields. Abner Jordan's enslaver allowed him

to play with his son, "Young Marse Beneham." Jordan recalled that he and his "young master" were the same age and he not only "played wid him," but that he was also tasked with being a "body guard" for "Young Marse Beneham." No matter if the interviewee recalled memories of leisure time or claimed that their enslavers afforded little to no leisure time, the North Carolina collection contains valuable information concerning how enslaved people spent what little free time they had. These memories of the "better times" that enslaved people enjoyed only represent a small portion of the interviews. The next section features quotes from interviewees recalling painful memories about abuses they personally endured or witnessed.[57]

Considering the youth of the interviewees while enslaved, many instances of abuses endured during slavery mentioned during interviews occurred at the hands of enslaver's children. James W. C. Pennington was enslaved in eastern Maryland in the early 1800s. In 1849, Pennington published *The Fugitive Blacksmith* to advance the abolitionist cause with an account of the atrocities he witnessed before he escaped the shackles of bondage. While describing the numerous floggings and beatings he witnessed, Pennington began explaining "another source of evil to slave children." This source of evil was "the tyranny of the master's children." The sadistic nature enslaver's children often displayed is a recurring theme throughout the WPA narratives. Charles W. Dickens explained when his "young master got after [his] father." To avoid the wrath of his enslavers' son, Dickens' father "went under de house to keep him from whuppin' him." This behavior was not reserved for enslaver's sons. Hannah Crasson recalled that one of her enslaver's "daughters wuz cruel . . . she would go out and rare [beat] on us." Other interviewees were old enough to remember enslavers or overseers abusing themselves or other slaves.[58]

Thomas Hall explained it simply: "Conditions and rules were bad, and the punishments

were *severe and barbarous*." Dave Lawson's narrative contains an illustration of an extreme case of violence at the hands of an enslaver. During his interview, Lawson explained that he did not personally witness these acts; instead, Lawson's family members had told him about the frequent abuse on the Drew Norwood plantation throughout his life. Providing further examples of abuse, Lawson described the case of Cindy Norwood, whose enslaver, Drew Norwood, had allegedly beaten to death "kaze she had run off." Lawson claimed that Drew Norwood "cut places on [Cindy's] back" and that she had "fits [for] three days" before she passed away. After Cindy Norwood died due to her wounds, Lawson claimed that Norwood laughed and said that "he didn' keer" because she wasn't "no 'count nohow." Viney Baker recalled that her enslaver used to tie her to a tree and beat her "till de blood run down [her] back." Baker claimed that she could not remember "nothin' dat [she] done." Enslavers were not the only threat to enslaved people in antebellum North Carolina. At all times of the day, white men patrolled the roads looking for enslaved people who were either in public without a pass from their enslavers or were attempting to escape.[59]

Interviewees mention interactions with "paddyrollers," "patterollers," or patrollers throughout the North Carolina collection. Parker Pool claimed that she witnessed "many patterollers durin' slavery" and explained that if they "caught you out at night without a pass dey would whup you." Sam Steward also recalled having interactions with these patterollers and stated that they were all "poor white men." Steward described an act of resistance enslaved people engaged in, explaining that they would "set traps to catch the patterollers." Enslaved people would stretch grape vines across roads, that would knock patterollers "off their horses" and allow slaves to run away. This simple act likely allowed many enslaved people to escape encounters with patrollers and possibly visit their wives and children on abroad plantations. W.

L. Bost recalled sneaking away from his enslaver to have prayer meetings, and he remembered that "sometimes the paddyrollers catch us and beat us good." Much like Sam Steward, in an act of defiance, Bost claimed that having the paddyrollers catch him "didn't keep [him] from trying." The North Carolina collection makes clear that enslaved people in the state were never safe and were constantly on high alert for lurking threats. Beatings were not the only way enslavers abused their slaves; some interviewees recounted episodes of sexual abuse and forced sexual encounters between enslaved peoples.[60]

Formerly enslaved abolitionist Harriet Jacob's autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), includes an example of the sexual abuse enslavers often subjected their female bondspeople to that is similar to the claims found throughout the North Carolina collection. Jacobs claimed that her master, to her knowledge, was "the father of eleven slaves." WPA interviewee Martha Allen also explained that there were "white mens that had babies by nigger wimmens" and people labeled these men as "'Carpet Gitters." Harriet Ann Daves claimed that her "mother's master was [her] father" and further claimed that Milton Waddell "never denied" to claim Harriet as his own. Hattie Rogers was another North Carolina slave who claimed that her father was "a white man." Rogers explained to her interviewer that enslavers didn't care who fathered the children on their plantations, "jest so long the women had children." While the narratives that mentioned slave breeding are few in number, the interviewees who did speak up about this practice provided rich information on the topic. None of the interviewees asserted that their masters subjected them to forced breeding practices. Instead, the interviewees often displayed an awareness of the importance of reproduction throughout the southern slave society.[61]

During his interview in 1937, W. L. Bost described how the selling of enslaved people

took place, shedding light on some of the terms enslavers used to describe a "breeding slave." Bost claimed an "auctioneer" would stand in front of crowds and say such things as "now gentleman and fellow citizens here is a big black *buck* Negro. He's stout as a mule." Bost explained if an enslaver put a "young nigger woman" up for sale, that the "auctioneer" would "cry out: here's a young nigger *wench*, how much am I offered for her?" Rather than expressing memories of forced breeding, interviewees often remembered their awareness that enslavers wanted and, at times, pushed their enslaved peoples to reproduce to increase their number of slaves. Marthe Adeline Hinton stated to her interviewer that enslavers wanted to buy enslaved women because the women "could have a lot of slave chilluns." During Fannie Moore's interview, she recalled that the auctioneer would put "all her chillun around" a female slave to prove "how fast she could have children. Moore reported that auctioneers would do this because a "breed woman" always brought more money. Alex Woods likewise stated that if a woman was "a good breeder she sold high." Willie McCullough explained bluntly to his interviewer that enslavers considered some enslaved women "very valuable" if they were able to reproduce quickly."[62]

Hilliard Yellerday claimed that her enslaver did not buy many slaves in the years leading up to the Civil War. Rather, Yellerday stated that her enslaver "resorted to raising his own slaves." Yellerday explained that "when a girl became a woman" she was required to "become a mother." According to Yellerday's interview, enslavers expected enslaved women to begin having children "as soon as [they] became a woman . . . at twelve or thirteen years old." Viney Baker informed her interviewer that she did not know her father and believed that he was "just the plantation stock nigger." Many enslaved women whose enslavers pressured and sometimes forced to have children were stripped of their ability to care for these children.

Enslavers often participated in the domestic slave trade, tearing apart Black families just to bolster their profits.[63]

William J. Edwards was born in 1869, graduated from Tuskegee Institute in 1893, founded the Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama in 1904, and published his autobiography, Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt, in 1918. The following quote from Edwards' memoir emphatically displays that Black elders took measures to ensure that children born after the Civil War knew the facts about the severity of slavery.

> One of the saddest things about slavery was the separation of families. Very often I come across men who tell me that they were sold from Virginia, South Carolina or North Carolina, and that they had large families in those states . . . while some have succeeded in finding them, there are those who have not been able to find any trace of their families and have come back again to die . . . slavery at its best was hard and cruel . . . men and women found themselves alone at the close of the war, having been sold away from their families while they were slaves.[64]

The North Carolina collection reveals the devastation the domestic slave trade bore on Black families in the South. Many of the accounts regarding the selling of enslaved people found in the WPA narratives fall directly in line with what other formerly enslaved people, such as Edwards, have written concerning the interregional slave trade.

According to North Carolina interviewees, the small town of Smithfield, which lies a few miles south of Raleigh, was one of the main hubs for the selling of enslaved peoples in the eastern part of the state. John Smith claimed that "slaves were sold at Smithfield on a auction block." Jacob Thomas, who was ninety-seven in 1937, informed his interviewer that his mother was "sold in Smithfield on de slave block an' carried off, chain 'hind a wagin." Mary Barbour

claimed that her mother had "sixteen chilluns" while she was enslaved. Barbour continued explaining that as soon as the children reached "three years old de master sol' 'em" until she was left with only four children, Mary, Henry, Liza, and Charlie. At the time of his interview in 1937, Ben Johnson of Durham was eighty-five years old. Johnson informed his interviewer that he had a brother who was "who wuz sold . . . De tree am still standin' whar I set under an' watch 'em sell Jim." What Johnson revealed to Hicks shows the extreme emotions that frequently followed the loss of a loved one through the domestic slave trade. Johnson stated that when his brother was chained up and taken away, he sat under the tree and cried and cried. Johnson said he never "felt so lonesome in my whole life."[65]

Mary Anderson explained plainly that "slaves were carried off on two horse wagons to be sold" and that she had seen "several loads leave." Perhaps to appease her white male interviewer, Anderson added that her enslaver would only take the "unruly ones" to sell. Robert Glenn claimed he was "bought and sold three times in one day." Glenn presents a fascinating example of the selling of enslaved people because Glenn recalled that his father attempted to purchase him. However, Glenn then stated that "no slave could own a slave." Glenn continued illustrating the brutality of the practice of selling slaves, explaining that he was not allowed to say goodbye to his parents and that his mother was "told under threat of a whupping not to make any outcry when I was carried away." Selling and separation were not the only devices enslavers utilized to keep enslaved families apart. Many times, enslavers would not allow mothers of newborn children to care for their babies. Instead, there were specific women on the plantations who cared for young children so mothers could continue to work in the fields.[66]

In Harriet Jacobs' autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, she fondly recalled memories of her maternal grandmother, who made herself an "indispensable personage

in the household." Jacobs wrote that her grandmother undertook many responsibilities, including cooking for the house, being a seamstress, and serving as the "wet nurse" to white children on the plantation. After escaping enslavement and living life on the run as a fugitive slave, Jacobs explained that her master, Mrs. Bruce, employed her as a "nurse for her babe." While Jacobs mentioned nursing a few times throughout her autobiography, in the North Carolina collection, only 22 interviewees spoke about the practice of nursing children that were not their own. Being forced to nurse other people's children most likely was an embarrassing memory to recall to a white interviewer. Another explanation for the low number of respondents who mentioned nursing could have been that such a high percentage of the interviewees were never old enough to perform the task of nursing children because they were children themselves.[67]

Sarah Louise Augustus recalled that her enslavers would call her grandmother, Sarah McDonald, "black mammy because she wet nursed so many white children." Augustus explained further that in slavery time, her grandmother "nursed all babies hatched on her master's plantation and kept it up after the war as long as she had children." Annie Stephenson claimed that the only work she performed while in bondage was to "sweep yards an' nurse small chilluns." Margaret Thorton, who was seventy-seven at the time of her interview and only spent five years in bondage, stated that she was "brung up to nurse" and claimed that she had nursed about "two thousand babies I reckon." While this number is likely highly inflated, the high number Thorton claimed to have nursed could be explained by the fact that she "stayed on" the Jake Thorton plantation until she was "thirteen or fourteen" years old and that throughout her life, she continued to nurse children "off an' on."[68]

Ria Sorrell was twenty-five years old at the end of the Civil War and recalled that she

worked as a “nurse an’ house girl most of de time.” Many younger enslaved women tasked with wet nursing children were also responsible for many other tasks around the house. These other responsibilities often included cooking for the white family, cleaning their clothes, and sometimes caring for the older white children who no longer needed nursing. Dave Lawson explained to his interviewer that enslavers would not want mothers to nurse their young children because they “was a strain on de mammy that breas’ nussed it.” Martha Allen’s narrative supports Lawson’s statements concerning the care of newborns. According to Allen, mothers with young children would “stick de babies in at de kitchen” on their way to the fields. Several interviewees recalled that the wives of enslavers cared for enslaved children while mothers were at work. John Beckwith recalled that the “missus . . . raised de nigger babies” so their mothers could work. Beckwith claimed that he could remember the times that his “missus” would “rock me [Beckwith] ter sleep” and that she would put him to bed “in her own bed.” Enslaved women and enslavers' wives were also responsible for making clothes for enslaved people. These clothes were never good quality, and memories of this uncomfortable apparel appeared throughout the North Carolina collection.[69]

Booker Taliaferro Washington was born in slavery and spent the first nine years of his life in bondage, like many of the WPA interviewees. Growing up enslaved in Virginia, Washington’s memories of slavery are very similar to the memories of formerly enslaved people in North Carolina. Early in his autobiography. *Up From Slavery* (1901), Washington remembered that “the most trying ordeal” he was forced to endure as a boy was having to wear a “flax shirt.” Washington explained that these shirts were made from the “refuse” of flax plants that were “the cheapest and roughest parts.” This uncomfortable shirt was all that Washington’s enslaver provided him with to wear until he became “quite grown.” Joe High’s

WPA interview supports Washington's statements, showing that when enslavers did provide their enslaved children with clothes, these clothes were highly uncomfortable and were expected to last the child for years. High claimed that he "only wore a shirt" and that the shirt was all his enslaver provided him with until he "wuz a great big boy." High also stated that some of the older women on the plantations used to weave "cloth on looms" and that this cloth was either made into clothes for enslaved people or made into a product that their enslavers used themselves or sold.[70]

Alex Woods, enslaved in Orange County, also explained that children "had only one piece" of clothing that consisted of "a long shirt." Woods asserted that on the Jim Woods plantation, the children "did not have any shoes winter nor summer," but that his parents "had shoes with wooden bottoms an' leather tops." Many interviewees also remembered that enslaved people themselves produced most of the clothes that slaves wore on the plantations. Betty Cofer informed her interviewer that all of the "spinnin' wheels and flax wheels and looms" were still in her enslaver's family and that "Miss Ella" gave her one of the flax wheels as a present. Enslaved people would have used these flax wheels and looms to make their own clothes, like the flax shirt Booker T. Washington described. Annie Stephenson claimed that all the clothes she wore while enslaved were "wove in de loom." Henry Trentham reported that the "slave houses looked like a small town." Trentham told his interviewer he could still see the "grist mills for corn, cotton gin, shoe shop, tanning yards, and *lots of looms for weavin' cloth*." Hilliard Yellerday also described her enslavers' property as a small town; she recalled that Jonathan Yellerday had "blacksmith shops, shoe shops, *looms for weaving cloth*, a corn mill, and a liquor distillery.[71]

Martha Adeline Hinton recalled that "slaves wore homemade clothes an' shoes" and

that these shoes had "wooden bottoms." Hinton remembered that her father made the "first pair of shoes" that she wore and that she "will never furgit it, I wus so please wid 'em." Louisa Adams illustrated that she "went barefoot in a way . . . we had shoes part of the time." Adams explained further that bondspeople received "one pair o' shoes a year" and that when that pair "wored out we went barefoot." William Hinton claimed children did not wear shoes on the James Thompson plantation. Hinton told his interviewer that once children were old enough to work in the field, Thompson would provide them with "wooden bottom shoes." Jane Lassiter remembered that she received one pair of shoes a year at Christmas time, and she went barefoot once that pair of shoes were worn out. Elias Thomas claimed that during slavery, the food was "purty good," and he had "plenty of clothes," but his enslaver only provided "one pair of shoes a year." While talking about their clothing during slavery, many interviewees also began describing the food rations their enslavers provided.[72]

At the beginning of Annie L. Burton's 1909 autobiography, *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days*, she provided readers with a brief overview of her early years, including a description of the "allowance" of food enslavers provided slaves with. Burton claimed this allowance included "molasses, meat, corn meal . . . and flour." In some instances, Burton explained that slaves would run out of their allowance and resort to stealing "hogs and chickens" from their enslavers. According to Burton, her enslaver would fill a bowl with "buttermilk . . . bread . . . greens or bones," and this bowl was "served for about fifteen children." Two North Carolina interviewees support Burton's claim that some enslavers fed children on their plantations "very much like . . . the hogs of the plantation were fed." Rena Raines recalled that "ole man Bert fed his little niggers out of a trough, like hogs," and Hilliard Yellerday likewise claimed that "masters fed their slave children from troughs . . . like the

hogs." Many interviewees similarly claimed the food their enslavers provided was of terrible quality and hardly enough to maintain the required energy levels for the extensive work enslavers expected. Other interviewees recalled that their parents and other enslaved people on the plantations would hunt at night to supplement the rations that enslavers provided.[73]

Anna Wright described the "ole slavery foods" that enslaved people ate on the James Ellis plantation in Scotland County. Wright listed numerous dishes and provided nearly full recipes for the foods she remembered eating while enslaved. Some of the meals that Wright described were "kush . . . fried chicken . . . griddle cakes . . . ash cakes . . . cornmeal dumplings," and many other foods, including directions on how to fry fish. After Wright's testimony, Julius Nelson provided the second most detailed depictions of the daily meals on the Nelson farm in Anson County, South Carolina. Nelson was in the North Carolina State Prison in Raleigh at the time of his interview and claimed that the meals at the jail reminded him of the "plantation dinners somehow," he then explained it was likely because the prison food was about "de same quantity." According to Nelson, his enslaver provided:

> Great big pots o' turnip salet, collards, peas, beans, cabbages, potatoes or other vegetables, an' a over full o' sweet 'taters in de winter. Dar wus a heap o' pies in de summertime, an' honey, an' 'lasses, an' 'lasses cake in de winter time Dar wus big pans o' cornbread all year round an' whole sides o' meat, an' on New Years Day hogshead an' peas. Fur supper we genuinely had pot licker, left from dinner, 'taters maybe and always some sweetening. Ash cakes for supper an' breakfast most o' de time an' hominy which de marster had grown hisself."[74]

Even with this abundance of food that Nelson described, he continued to explain that smart enslaved people would eat "possums an' coons . . . rabbits an' squirrels in abundance" to

increase their weekly food rations.[75]

Essex Henry rationalized why enslavers were willing to let slaves hunt for wild game at night, simply because enslaved people were "gettin' something to eat" without an enslaver "payin' fer it." George Rogers recalled that when his enslaver left the plantation, some of the boys would steal guns from the "big house" and "kill squirrels, turkeys, an' [other] game wid [the] guns." Joe High recalled seeing adults leave the slave cabins to go hunt at night, but claimed he had "never done any fishin' or hunting." Squire Dowd claimed he and his father "hunted a lot" and said his enslaver allowed them to sell the "furs of the animals" they caught. Other interviewees, such as Henry Bobbitt, claimed that their parents did not have the time or the energy to go hunting at the end of the workday. Bobbitt explained that he would "steal rabbits we eat from somebody elses plantation" because he did not have "no time ter hunt ner fish." Another fundamental aspect of enslaved life was the slave cabins.

Thomas Jones began his autobiography, *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones*, with a description of the first nine years of his life that were full of "poverty, suffering, and shame." On his master's land in Virginia, Jones recalled the "dear old cabin" that his parents worked tirelessly to maintain. This cabin had a clay floor and a mud chimney, and Jones remembered his parents spending many hours attempting to "stop up the chinks between the logs of their poor hut." Interviewee Jane Lassiter explained that she and her family lived in "little ole log houses," which they called "cabins." Describing these cabins further, Lassiter recounted to her interviewer that these "cabins" consisted of "stick an' dirt chimleys wid one door to de house an' one window." Nearly half of the interviewees in the North Carolina collection recalled some aspect of their sleeping quarters. While a select few interviewees, such as Mary Anderson, provided favorable memories of "comfortable houses," most interviewees

remembered a cabin with dirt floors and cracks in the walls, much like the cabin Thomas Jones described.[76]

Sarah Debro, enslaved in Orange County, detailed the slave cabins where she lived for the first quarter of her life during her interview. Debro illustrated the cabins on the Cain plantation to her interviewer, stating that the cabins were "planked up an' warm," but also "full of cracks." Debro explained that all the light and heat came from "lightwood knots burning in the fireplace." Roberta Manson also remembered the "log cabin with dirt floors, one door, and one small winder," where Manson spent the first five years of her life. These cabins weren't just for sleeping, as Fannie Moore explained, the single fireplace was responsible for heating the cabin and provided heat for all the cooking. One occurrence that interviewees mentioned frequently throughout the narratives was clandestine "prayermeetins" that occurred at night in slave cabins. Multiple interviewees, such as Essex Henry, mentioned that during secret evening prayer meetings, parents would turn "down de big pot front of de door ter ketch de noise." Charity Austin similarly explained that during "secret prayer meetin's" her parents would have "big pots turned down to kill" the sound of singing. Emma Blalock confirms this practice further, claiming that at night, her parents would turn "down pots on de inside of de house . . . to keep marster an' missus from hearin' de singing." However, not every family was able to host these covert prayer meetings. Jane Lassiter claimed that her enslaver, Kit Council, did not allow his slaves to "have prayer meetings in de cabins."[77]

For many enslaved people, where they lived during slavery ended up becoming their permanent homes after emancipation. Ophelia Whitley claimed that "after de surrender," her master, Augustus Foster, told his slaves people they were free and needed to leave. Whitley added that her master moved her "papy's cabin," and her family continued to work for Foster

"till he died." Isaac Johnson stated that he and his family "stayed on wid Marster after de war." According to Johnson, his family "lived in de same place until old Marster and Missus died." Even after his former enslavers passed away, Johnson "lived wid deir relations right on." Cy Hart, whose enslaver was Paul Cameron, not only lived with Cameron until he died but also asserted that Cameron selected Cy and several other former slaves to "tote his coffin to de chapel an' de buryin' ground." Not every family decided to stay with their master after the Civil War; many interviewees left plantations, moved into nearby cities, or searched for lost family members. No matter if the interviewees remained with their former master or not, the North Carolina collection shows that slave cabins were a fundamental part of enslaved children's lives.[78]

The Reverend W. H. Robinson, born in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1848, stated that his autobiography revealed the "pathetic moan of slaves in almost utter despair . . . bitterly waiting and still hoping for freedom." Robinson was nearly thirteen years old when the Civil War erupted, enabling him to recall many events he witnessed before, during, and after the war. Robinson claimed that on April 15, 1861, he left home with his enslaver "to go to the war and whip the Yankees in three days." To motivate Robinson further, his enslaver told him that "the Yankees had horns." Robinson then explained that he carried a club to war with him, and this club was meant "*to knock off Yankees' horns*." Many enslavers provided their slaves with intimidating and scary descriptions of the "Yankees." While no respondent in the North Carolina collection claimed to raise arms against Union troops, some interviewees did claim they were afraid of the "Yankees." Jennylin Dunn recalled that she remained hidden from Union troops because her enslaver had told her that "the Yankees eats little nigger youngins." The interviews exhibit that no matter their age, the Civil War was an event that remained

engrained in the minds of enslaved people for the rest of their lives.[79]

Isaac Johnson witnessed something that remained in his memory for over seventy years: the sight of Black soldiers wearing Union blue. Johnson recalled that he "saw colored people in de Yankee uniforms." Johnson then went on to recall, as many interviewees did, that both Union and Confederate soldiers "took everything dey wanted, meat, chickens, an' stock." Jerry Hinton, born in 1855, also recalled that Union troops reaped havoc on his enslaver's plantation. Hinton stated that he did "remember the Yankees," and claimed that they "killed hogs, an' chickens . . . dey shot cows . . . knocked de heads out o' de barrels o' molasses . . . took horses, cows an' everything." However, Hinton informed his interviewer that Union troops "did not hurt any o' de children." At the start of the war in 1861, James McLean was eight years old, and in 1937, he claimed he could still remember seeing "the Yankees" and Confederate General Joseph "Wheeler's Cavalry." Like Isaac Johnson and Jerry Hinton, McLean recalled that the "Yankees took chickens and things," but McLean also asserted that "Wheeler's Cavalry stomped things and broke up more dan de Yankees." Kitty Hill claimed she was "a little girl 'bout five years old when de surrender come." During her interview, Hill recalled information that her mother had told her about slavery. Hill's mother spoke consistently about Wheeler's cavalry being "de meanest in de war."[80]

Some former slaves recalled memories of the Civil War with [what psychologists have labeled] sensory memory. Tina Johnson, who resided in Georgia during the war, described hearing the "guns roarin'" and how the cannons made it feel like the "earth [was] shakin' like an earthquake." Johnson claimed she could still remember how her "nostrils seemed like dey would bust wid de sting of it." Sarah Debro recalled that the "first cannon I heard skeered me near 'bout to death." Debro also remembered sitting with her enslaver, hearing the cannons

“goin’ boom boom” and how she “thought it was thunder.” Her enslaver “Mis Polly” told Sarah to listen to the cannons and informed her that the “Yankees are killin’ our mens.” Some interviewees reported seeing Union troops for the first time; for others, it was witnessing troops from both sides stealing food, and a few interviewees described the war's sounds, sights, and smells. Nearly every interviewee had important revelations about the Civil War seventy years later during their interviews in 1937.[81]

Conclusion

Historians have utilized many different sources to understand the lives of enslaved people throughout the Southern United States. Beyond the Works Progress Administration Ex-Slave Narrative collection, only a few other sources exist that represent eyewitness testimony of slavery from the perspective of the former slaves themselves. Despite this, many scholars still decide not to utilize information found within the narratives because of arguments that are decades old. However, after thoroughly analyzing the narratives from the WPA collection, it became evident that it contains a wealth of information concerning southern slavery. Like every primary source, the WPA collection remains imperfect. The methodological challenges should not deter scholars from researching the narratives and drawing their own conclusions regarding the collection's value as historical evidence. If more historians utilized the WPA collection, more historical works would include evidence from the formerly enslaved. After an exhaustive analysis of the North Carolina collection, this thesis argues that the information found within the collection is highly important and valid.

For nearly a hundred years, scholars from various fields have doubted the validity of the memories contained within the WPA collection. Arguments from the 1970s concerning the validity of the memories of WPA interviewees still appear despite the lack of hard evidence to support those arguments. After examining the WPA interviews through an interdisciplinary lens of history and psychology, I found that the memories of the WPA interviewees were indeed coherent and valid. Specifically, these memories align with what psychologists have termed autobiographical memories. Such memories in the WPA collection are highly personalized and connected to the interviewees. The general memories that appear most often through the WPA collection are highly personalized and fall under the psychological category of autobiographical

memory. Research, however, beyond generalized memories reveals how the WPA interviewees also expressed "vital memories" and "flashbulb memories" that had remained with them for seven decades. Reading through the WPA collection leaves little doubt that the physical and mental abuses recollected throughout the interview constitute what psychologists have defined as vital memories. Finally, flashbulb memories come in the form of recollections of the Civil War. Whether it was excitement, fear, or jubilation from freedom, these memories from such a "dramatic public event" such as the Civil War created lasting memories that interviewees expressed to their interviewers. These memories remain evident throughout the WPA collection.

Unquestionably, the WPA narrative collection offers a rich and seemingly never-ending source of data for students or scholars seeking to further their understanding of the lives of African Americans. Historians can utilize the narratives for studies focused on slavery in the 1800s. Because the WPA commissioned the ex-slave narrative project in the late 1930s, the narratives also contain data for researchers interested in the lives of African Americans during the Great Depression. Completing data sets for other states provides the best means to broaden this study. If more complete data sets were available, researchers could compare the conditions of slavery in different states. The greatest strength of the WPA Ex-Slave Narrative collection remains the fact that it is one of the largest collections of first-hand evidence concerning antebellum slavery. This study presents a picture of what information one will find throughout the North Carolina collection. This final chapter is broken into the same categories as the data charter. Yet, instead of only raw data, this thesis provides commentary from the entire collection arranged by topics.

The best way to advance this study would be to provide similar data analysis for other

former slaveholding states. While historians such as Paul D. Escott have published data on the entire WPA collection, the present work remains the only study focusing on just one state. By adding more states to this study, historians can raise more questions from the data and even draw comparative conclusions between states. This would allow a better understanding of the commonalities and differences between slavery across different states. The WPA collection contains information on topics outside of slavery, topics that scholars in sociology, gender studies, and possibly psychology could utilize for different studies in their fields. The ex-slave oral testimony provides powerful primary evidence of how North Carolina's formerly enslaved population coped with their past and their prospects as free men and women in the 1930s.

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[4] Anya Jabour, *Topsy-Turvy: How the Civil War Turned the World Upside Down for Southern Children,* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010): 170.

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Chapter One

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[7] John W. Blassingame *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977): I; C. Vann Woodward, "History from Slave Sources," *American History Review* 79, no. 2 (April 1974): 480; David Thomas Bailey, "A Divided Prism: Two Sources of Black Testimony on Slavery." *Journal of Southern History* 46, no.3 (August 1980): 404; Donna Spindel, "Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27, no. 2 (Autumn 1996): 250.

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[13] Howe, *The Fate of Early Memories,* 134; Mary Barbour interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 80.

[14] Sarah Debro interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 253 [emphasis added].

[15] Ibid, 242; W. Solomon Debnam interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 243.

[16] Henry Bobbit interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter 120; Cathrine Williams interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 382.

[17] Alex Woods interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 414; Herndon Bogan interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 126.

[18] Anna Wright interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 421; Mark M. Smith, *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7; Emma Blalock interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 105.

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[20] Brown and Reavey, *Vital Memory,* 3.

[21] Brown and Reavey, *Vital Memory,* 5.

[22] John David Smith, *Black Judas: William Hannibal Thomas and The American Negro* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 270-73; Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 8-10.

[23] Stephen Porter and Angela Birt, "Is Traumatic Memory Special? A Comparison of Traumatic Memory Characteristics with Memory for Other Emotional Life Experiences" *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 15 (2001), S113.

[24] John C. Betcom interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 94; Ben Johnson Interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 9.

[25] W. L. Bost interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 142.

[26] Porter and Brit, "Is Traumatic Memory Special?" S102; Louisa Adams interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 5; John C. Betcom interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 97; Fanny Cannady interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 160.

[27] Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 163; Patsy Mitchner, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 119; Annie Tate interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11,

North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 333.

[28] W. L. Bost interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 139-40.

[29] Brown and Reavey, *Vital Memory*, 29.

[30] Gillian Cohen, Martin Conway, and Elizabeth Maylor, "Flashbulb Memories in Older Adults," *Psychology and Aging* 9, no. 3 (1994): 454; Henry Bobbit interview, *Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter,* 124; S-M Grant, "Dere never wuz a war," 160.

[31] Ibid, 178; John C. Betcom interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter 96; Mark A. Smith, and Wake Sokolosky, *"No Such Army Since Julius Ceasar": Sherman's Carolina Campaign: From Fayetteville to Averasboro* (Cincinnati: Ironclad Publishing, 2005), 59-65.

[32] Charlie Barbour interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 76; Patsy Mitchner interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson- Yellerday, 118; John Coggin interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 178.

[33] Elias Thomas interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 347-8; Herndon Bogan interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams- Hunter, 127.

[34] Ida Atkins interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Jackson-Yellerday 11; Mandy Coverson, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 180. For more examples of enslaved people assisting their enslavers during the Civil War, see Herbert Covey and Dewight Eisnach, *How the Slaves Saw the Civil War: Recollections of the War Through the WPA Slave Narratives* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 68-70.

[35] Mary Wallace Bowe interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 148.

[36] Emma Stone interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 326.

[37] Cohen, Conway, and Maylor, "Flashbulb Memories," 454.

Chapter Two

[38] Cornelia Andrews interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 14.

[39] "WPA Writers' Program Records: Appraisal Sheet," Box A902, Folder 13, Accession No. 320282, WPA Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project (Washington, D.C.: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).

[40] "WPA Writers' Program Records: Appraisal Sheet," Box A902, Folder 13, Accession No. 320025, WPA Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project (Washington, D.C.: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) (emphasis added).

[41] Two publications that argue against using the narratives as a historical source are John W. Blassingame *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) and David Thomas Bailey "A Divided Prism: Two Sources of Black Testimony on Slavery," *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 3 (August 1980), 304-404.

[42] Other sources that provide quantitative analysis of the WPA narrative collection include Paul D. Escott *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979) and Stephen C. Crawford "Quantified Memory: A Study of The WPA and Fisk University Slave Narrative Collections" (Ph.D. diss., University of

Chicago, 1980) https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/quantified-memory-study-wpa- fisk-university-slave/docview/303096081/se-2.

[43] Henry James Trentham interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 365.

[44] Nearly all 149 narratives that mention the Civil War used the word *Yankee* when discussing the Union Army. Listed below are few examples of narratives that contain the word Yankee multiple times: Tina Johnson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 21; William George Hinton interview, Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 442; Eustace Hodges interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 447.

Chapter Three

[45] Andrew Boone interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 131.

[46] Austin Steward, *Twenty-Two Years A Slave and Forty Years A Freeman* (New York: William Atling Publishing, 1857), 13.

[47] John Daniels interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 231; Georgianna Foster interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 317; Millie Markham interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 107.

[48] Clay Bobbit interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 118; John Smith interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 270; Ann Parker interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 156.

[49] John B. Boles, *Black Southerners: 1619-1869* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 69; Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery* (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Gunn Printers, 1838), 14.

[50] John David Smith, "'I Was Raised Poor and Hard as Any Slave': African American Slavery in Piedmont North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 90, no. 1 (January 2013): 10, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23523655; Abner Jordan interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 35; Doc Edwards interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 296; Cy Hart interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 380; "Lists of Enslaved People," Cameron Family Papers 133, series 2.1.1, box 88, folder 2012, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[51] Cornelia Andrews interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 28; Charlie Crump interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 213; William Hinton interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams- Hunter, 371; Lucy Ann Dunn interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 279; Midge Burnett interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 156.

[52] Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains* (New York: H. Dayton Publisher, 1859), 16; Robert Glenn interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 328; Sarah Grudger interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 352; Jacob Thomas interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 350.

[53] Robert Hinton interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter,

438; Hilliard Yellerday interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 433; Catherine Williams interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 382 (emphasis added); Mattie Curtis interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 218.

[54] Elias Thomas interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 345; Robert Glenn interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 333; Lindsey Faucette interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 304.

[55] Louis Hughes *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom* (Milwaukee: South Side Printing Company, 1897), 18; Jacob Thomas interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 349; Susan High interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 418.

[56] Henry James Trentham interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 365; Parker Pool interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 186; Issac Johnson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 15.

[57] Jane Arrington interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 48; Abner Jordan interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 36.

[58] James W. C. Pennington, "The Fugitive Blacksmith," in *Great Slave Narratives*, ed. Arna Bontemps (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 208; Charles W. Dickens interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 256; Hannah Crasson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 189.

[59] Thomas Hall interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 360 (emphasis added); Drew Lawson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 45; Viney Baker interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 71.

[60] Parker Pool interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 187; Sam Steward interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson- Yellerday, 320; Marjorie Jones interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, W. L. Bost interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 141.

[61] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Boston: N.P., 1861), 55; Martha Allen interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 14; Harriet Ann Daves interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 233; Hattie Rogers interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 227.

[62] W. L. Bost interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 248 (emphasis added); Martha Adeline Hinton interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 435; Fannie Moore interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 131; Alex Woods interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 417; Willie McCollough interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 77.

[63] Hilliard Yellerday interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson- Yellerday, 434; Viney Baker interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 71.

[64] William J. Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt* (Boston: The Cornhill Company,

1918), 3.

[65] Mary Barbour interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 79; Ben Johnson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 9.

[66] Sarah Grudger interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 22; Robert Glenn interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 330.

[67] Jacobs, *Incidents*, 254.

[68] Sarah Louise Augustus interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 54; Annie Stephenson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 313; Margaret Thorton interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 353.

[69] Ria Sorrell interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 300; Dave Lawson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 45; Martha Allen interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 14; John Beckwith interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 88.

[70] Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1901), 20; Joe High interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 412.

[71] Alex Woods interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 415.

[72] Martha Adeline Hinton interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 434; Louisa Adams interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-

Hunter, 3.

[73] Annie L. Burton, *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* (Boston: Ross Publishing Company, 1909), 4; Rena Raines interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson- Yellerday, 194; Hilliard Yellerday interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 432.

[74] Julius Nelson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 144.

[75] Anna Wright interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 424; Julius Nelson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 145.

[76] Thomas Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones; Who Was For Forty Years A Slave* (Boston: H. B. Skinner, n.d.), 7; Jane Lassiter interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 39; Mary Anderson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 20.

[77] Sarah Debro interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 248; Roberta Manson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 102; Fannie Moore interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson- Yellerday, 129; Essex Henry interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 396; Charity Austin interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 62; Emma Blalock interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 107; Jane Lassiter interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 41.

[78] Ophelia Whitley interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-

Yellerday, 374; Isaac Johnson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 19; Cy Hart interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 381.

[79] W. H. Robinson, *Fifteen Years a Slave*, 3rd ed. (Eau Claire, WI: James Tifft Publishing, 1913), 96 (emphasis added); Jennlyin Dunn interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 277.

[80] Isaac Johnson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 18; Jerry Hinton interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 430; James Turner McLean interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 87.

[81] Tina Johnson interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 2, Jackson-Yellerday, 21; Sarah Debro interview, Slave Narratives, Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1, Adams-Hunter, 250.