

"An hour before daylight the horn is blown. Then the slaves arouse, prepare their breakfast, fill a gourd with water, in another, deposit their dinner of cold bacon and corn cake, and hurry to the field again. It is an offense invariably followed by a flogging to be found at the quarters after day break. Then the fears and labors of another day begin and until its close there is no such thing as rest.

.....with the exception of ten or fifteen minutes, which is given them at noon to swallow their allowance of cold bacon, they are not permitted to be a moment idle until it is too dark to see, and when the moon is full, they oftentimes labor till the middle of the night. They do not dare to stop even at dinner time, nor return to the quarters, however late it be, until the order to halt is given by the driver."

Northup, pp. 167, 170.

"One day while my mammy was washing her back my sister noticed ugly disfiguring scars on it. Inquiring about them, we found, much to our amazement, that they were mammy's relics of the now gone, if not forgotten, slavery days. This was her first reference to her "misery days" that she made in my presence. Of course we all thought she was telling us a big story and we made fun of her. With eyes flashing, she stopped bathing, dried her back and reached for the smelly ol' black whip that hung behind the kitchen door. Bidding us to strip down to our waists, my little mammy with the boney bent-over back, struck each of us as hard as ever she could with that black-snake whip. Each stroke of the whip drew blood from our backs. "Now," she said to us, "you have a taste of the slavery days."

Frank Cooper  
Library of Congress

"The slave trader tried to present his "merchandise" so that it would bring the highest price. This meant that the slaves should look well fed, strong, and healthy. Between the time a slave was bought and sold by a trader, his well-being was the responsibility of that trader. Most slave traders wanted to keep their expenses as low as possible so they could make the maximum profit. Thus the slaves were fed only enough to keep them well until a few days before the auction. Then various tricks were resorted to so that on the day of the auction the slaves would look healthy, although they might in reality be quite ill. To the slave trader, it did not matter, as long as the new owner did not find out until after the sale."

"When I was fifteen years old, I was brought to the courthouse, put up on the auction block to be sold. Old Judge Miller was there. I knew him well because he was one of the wealthiest slave owners in the county and the meanest one. He was so cruel all the slaves and many owners hated him because of it. He saw me on the block for sale and he knew I was a good worker so when he bid for me I spoke right out on the auction block and told him: "Judge Miller! Don't you bid for me, 'cause if you do, I would not live on your plantation. I will take a knife and cut my own throat from ear to ear before I would be owned by you."

Delicia Patterson  
Library of Congress

"Granma used to tell this story to everybody that would listen, and I expect I heard it a hundred times. Granma say she was hired out to the Randolphs during the war. One day while she was weeding corn another slave, Mamie Tolliver, come up to her and whispered, "Sarah, they tell me that Massa Lincoln done set all us slaves free." Granma say, "Is that so?" and she dropped her hoe and run all the way to the Thacker's place – seven miles it was – and run to ol' missus and looked at her real hard. Then she yelled, "I'm free! Yes, I'm free! Ain't got to work for you no more. You can't put me in your pocket now!" Granma say Missus Thacker started boo-hooing and threw her apron over her face and run in the house. Granma knew it was true then.

Betty Jones  
*The Negro in Virginia*, p. 209.

"Guess I was about fifteen years old when massa came back from the fighting, mean as ever. Never did say nothing about the war and I didn't even know if it's over or not. But one day Massa Bob, his son, was switchin' me in the woods playful-like and he say, "Why don't you strike me back, Mici? You's free. That's what the war was for, to free you slaves." I took that switch away and beat him hard as I could across the head till it busted. Then I run across the fields to some colored folks about six miles away. Their names was Foreman and they was free sho' 'nough. They told me that was right. I been free more than a year. Ain't never been back to that place."

Armacie Adams  
*The Negro in Virginia*, p. 209.