From

Slave Narratives

A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves

Typewritten Records Prepared by the Federal Writers’ Project 1936-1938 – Assembled by the Library of Congress Project Work Projects Administration for the District of Columbia Sponsored by the Library of Congress

Washington 1941

30656

Pages 336-345

Interviewer Samuel S. Taylor

Person interviewed J. T. Tims, Age 86, 111 Mosaic Temple, Ninth & Broadway, Little Rock, Arkansas Occupation Cook, waiter and farmer

# Interview

"I was born in Jefferson County, Mississippi in 1853. That would make me eighty-six years old. I was born six miles from Fayette - six miles east of Fayette. I was eighty-six years old the eleventh day of September.

"My father’s name was Daniel Tims, and my mother’s name was Ann Tims. My mother was born in Lexington, Kentucky. Ma’s been dead years and years ago, and my father is gone too. My mother’s name before she married was - - -. She told it to us all right, but I just never can think of it.

"I don’t know the name of my mother’s master. But my father’s master was named Blount Steward. Pa was born on Blount’s plantation and Blount bought my ma because they brought her from Kentucky for sale. They had her for sale just like you would sell hogs and mules. Then my father saw her and liked her and married her. She was a slave too."

# Master

"Blount Steward was kinder good. He was very well till the war started---the Federal War. Miss Ann went to whip me for nothing.

# Whippings

" I was carrying her daughter to school every day except Saturdays and Sundays. One day, Miss Ann was off and I was at the back steps playing and she decided to whip me. I told her I hadn't done nothin', but she put my head between her legs and started to beatin' me. And I bit her legs. She lemme loose and hollered. Then she called for William to come and beat me. William was one of the colored slaves. William come to do it. Ma had been peeping out from the kitchen watchin' the whole thing. When William come up to beat me, she come out with a big carving knife and told him, "That's my child and if you hit him, I'll kill you."

"Then she sent for Tully to come and whip me, I mean to whip my mother. Tully was my young master. Tully come and said to my mother, ' I know you ain't done nothin' nor your child neither, but I'll have to hit you a few light licks to satisfy ma.'

"Blount come the next day and went down to where pa was making shoes. He said, ' Daniel, you' re looking mighty glum.'

"Pa said, 'You'd be looking glum too if your wife and child had done been beat up for nothin.'

"When he said that, Blount got mad. He snatched up a shoe hammer and hit pa up side the head with it."

Pa said, 'By God, don't you try it again.'

Blount didn't hit him again. Pa was ready to fight, and he wasn't sure that he could whip him. Pa said, 'You won't hit me no more.' The war was goin' on then.

# Runaways

"The following Sunday night, twelve head of 'em left there. My ma and pa and me and our whole family and some more besides was along. We went from the plantation to Rodney, Mississippi first, trying to get on a steamboat—gunboat. The gunboat wouldn't take us for fear we would get hurt. The war was goin' on then. So we just transferred down the river and went on to Natchez. We went there walking and wading. We was from Sunday night to Sunday night getting' there. We didn't have no trouble 'cept that the hounds was runnin' us. But they didn't catch us— they didn't catch none of us. My ma and my pa and my brothers and sisters besides me was all in the crowd, and we all got to Natchez.

"They are all dead and gone to Judgment now but me. I think that I got one sister in Chicago, Illinois. She is my baby sister. I ain't never heard nothing about her bein' dead."

# Natchez

"At Natchez, ma didn't do anything. We children didn't do nothin' either there. But pa joined the army. He joined it the next day after he got there. Then I went to work waiting on the sixty-fourth---lemme see---yes, it was the Sixty-Fourth Brass Epaulettes. I was waiting on one of the sergeants. He was a Yankee sergeant. The sergeant's name was Josephus, and the captain of the Company was Lieutenant Knowles. I was with them two years and six months. I never did get hurt. When they went to fight at New Orleans, the captain wouldn't lemme take part in it. He said that I was so brave he was 'fraid I might get hurt."

"Me and my father were the only ones working in the family at that time . I stayed right in Natchez but my father didn't. My father's first stop was in Bullocks Bar right above Vidalia. That was where his company was stationed first. Lemme see, he went from there to Davis Bend. I wasn't with them. He was in a colored regiment. I was with a white regiment. He left Davis Bend and went to Vicksburg. His next trip was up the Sunflower River. His next trip he went from there up here to De Valls Bluff. That is where he come free. That was the end of the fighting there---right there.

"From there he come back to Rodney. We all went to Davis Bend while pa was there. When he left and went to De Valls Bluff, ma went to Rodney. I stayed with the soldiers two years and a half down there at Natchez. That's as far as I went with them. When they left I stayed.

"I went to Rodney with my mother and stayed with her and the rest of the children till she died. My ma died in 1874. My father died down here in Pine Bluff several years ago. After ma died, pa married another woman. He went back to Pine Bluff and was killed by a train when he was crossing a trestle.

# Age and Other Masters

Blount Steward was the only master any of us ever had, outside of ma's first master---the one in Kentucky. I don't know anything about them. I was eight years old when the war began and twelve years old when it ended. I must have been older than that because I was twelve years old when I was serving them soldiers. And I had to come away from them before the war was over.

# Slave Work

"The first work I ever did in slave time was dining-room service. When I left the dining-room table, I left carrying my young mistress to school six miles from Fayette. They give me to Lela, my young mistress. She was the young girl I was carrying to school when I got the whipping. When ol' mis' was whippin' me, I asked her what she was whipping me for, and she said, ' Nothing' cause you're mine, and I can whip you if I want to.' She didn't think that I had done anything to the girl. She was just mad that day, and I was around, so she took it out on me. After that, I never did any more work as a slave, because the whole family ran away about that time. I don't reckon pa would ever have run off if ol' miss hadn't whipped me and if ol' massa hadn't struck him. They was good till then; but it looked like the war made them mean.

# Patrollers, Jayhawkers, Ku Klux, and Ku Klux Klan

"They had patrols going ‘round watching the colored people to keep them from running off. That's all I know 'bout them. I don’t remember hearing' anything about the jayhawkers.

"I heard lots 'bout the Ku Klux. They were terrible. The white folks had one another goin' round watching and keeping them from runnin' off. The Ku Klux would whip people they caught out. They would whip them just because they could, because they called themselves bosses, because they was white and the colored people was n\*\*\*\*s. They didn't do nothin' but just keep the slaves down. It was before the war that I knew 'bout the Ku Klux. There wasn't no difference between the patrols and the KU Klux that I knows of. If they'd ketch you, they all would whip you. I don't know nothin' about the Ku Klux Klan after the war. I know they broke them up.

# Slave Houses, Furniture, Food, and Work

"Before the war, we lived in an old log house. It had one window, one door, and one room. Colored people didn't have no two or three room houses before the war. I'll tell you that right now. All the furniture we had was bed stools and quilts. Course we had them old stools that pa made. We kept food right there in the house where we was in one corner. We didn't have no drawers---nothing like that. The white folks fed us. They give us as much as they thought we ought to have. Every Saturday night you would go to the smokehouse and get your meat and meal and your molasses. Didn't get no flour, no coffee, no sugar. Pa was an ox driver and when he would go to Rodney to carry cotton, he would buy sugar and coffee for himself. You see, they would slip a little something and make a little money off it. Like they was goin' to Rodney tomorrow, they would slip and kill a couple of hogs and carry them along with them. That was the only way they could get a little money. My pa's main work was shoemaking, but he worked in the field too. He was a driver chiefly when he was out in the field. He hoed and plowed. He was the leader of the gang. He never got a chance to make no money for hisself before the war. Nope, the colored people didn't have no money 'tall, lessen they slipped and got it.

# Slave Marriages

Say I wanted this woman for my wife. We would just put down the broom and step over it and we would be married. That is all there was to it before emancipation. Didn't have no matrimony read nor nothing. You were married when you stepped over the broom handle. That was your wife.

# A Lincoln Story

"They say Abe Lincoln come down in this part of the country and asked for work. He had his little grip just like you got. The man said, 'Wait till I go to dinner.' Didn't say, 'Come to dinner,' and didn't say nothin' 'bout, 'Have dinner.' Just said, 'Wait till I go eat my dinner.' When he come back, Abe Lincoln was up there looking over his books. He'd done changed his clothes and everything. He had guards with him but they didn't see 'em. That is the story I heard them tell.

# What the Slaves Got

When the slaves got freed, they wasn't expecting to get nothing that I knows of 'cept what they worked for. They weren't spectin' no forty acres and a mule. "Who was goin' to give it to 'em? The Rebs? They didn't give 'em nothin' but what they could put on their backs---I mean lashes.

"Blount had stocks that he used to put them in. The stocks had hinges on one side and latches on the other. The n\*\*\*\*\* would put his head in one hole and his arms through the others, and the old man would get on the other end. Your feet would be stretched out and you would be layin' on your belly."

"Blount whipped me once because I wouldn't go to the cow barns to get the milk to put in the coffee that morning. I didn't have time. They had given me to Lela, and I had to take her to school. I was 'sponsible if she was late. He had given me to Lela. Next morning with her, and we didn't come back till Friday evening. She went down to her Aunt Leona Harrison's and carried me with her. She was mad because they whipped me when I belonged to her.

" After slavery, we worked by the month on people's plantations. I did that kind of work till after a while the white people got so they rented the colored people land and selled them mules for their work. Then some worked on shares and some rented and worked for theirselves. Right after the war most of the farms were worked on shares. We were lucky to be able to get to work by the month.

# Schooling

"I went to school in Natchez, Mississippi. My teacher came from the North, I suppose. But those I had in Rodney, I know they come from the North. Miss Mary---that's all the name I knowed---and Miss Emma were my teachers in Rodney. They come from Chicago; I never went to school here. I didn't get no further than the second grade. I stopped school to go work when the teacher went back to Chicago. After that I went to work in the field and made me a living. I hadn't done but a little work in the field helping pa now and then before that.

# Marriages

"I married a long time ago in Rodney. Lord, it's been so long ago I couldn't tell you when. I been married four times. They all quit me for other men. I didn't quit none of them.

# Present Condition

"I get along tolerably now for an old man. The Welfare gives me a little help. But I have to pay five dollars for these two rooms every month. What's more, I got to eat, and I got to have somethin' to wear. Washington won't allow me nothin' for my army service. They say I wasn't regular. I gets eight dollars from the Welfare.

# Opinions

"The young people's terrible. They rather go to the penitentiary or the county farm or get killed than to do what is right."

# Voting and Vocational Experiences

"I used to vote. I never had no trouble about it."

"They tried to whip me once since freedom, but not about votin'. A man tried to whip me down in Stoneville because another man give me a drink. He tried to cut me with his knife. I knocked him down. I told him I could kill him, but I just didn't want to. While I was swearing out a warrant to get him arrested, he went and got a gun somewheres. He came right on in with his pistol and struck me with it. I knocked him down again, and he was dead for twenty-five minutes. They didn't have to go nowheres to serve the warrant on him. Nobody did anything to me about it."

"I come to Little Rock fifty years ago or more. I farmed as long as I was able. Doctor stopped me when I began to fall out. "

"I cooked for Dr. Stone and his wife for ten years in Greenville, Mississippi. Then I come to Pine Bluff on a vacation. The next time they give me a vacation, I stayed away for eleven years. I went to get some money Dr. Stone owed me for some work I had done for him once and he wanted me to come back and cook again. I didn't do that and he died without paying me for the work. He said it was his brother that owed me. But it was him that hired me. I 'tended to some mules for nine months at four dollars a week. I never got but one four dollars. The mules belonged to him and his brother both, but it was him that hired me. It wasn't Captain Stone, his brother. It was him, and I looked to the man that hired me for my money. I didn't have nothing to do with nobody but him. It was him promised to pay me."

# Interviewer's Comment

Throughout his story Tims carefully avoided using his first name. Never at any time did he let it slip.

The capture of New Orleans was effected in 1862. If the troop with which he worked took part in the capture, he must have been twelve years old by 1862, and his age must be at least eighty-eight. But this would be inconsistent with his statement that he served Sergeant Josephus for two years and a half. The detachment might have gone to New Orleans later than '62. At any rate, Tims is at least eighty-five, and possibly older.

Here again we have a definite conviction of the use of the word Ku Klux before the War. The way he talks of it, the term might have been a colloquial term applied to a jayhawker or a patroller. He doesn't mean Ku Klux Klan when he says Ku Klux.

The Lincoln story is included on my part merely because it is at least legendary material. I don't know what basis of fact it could or might have.