Yearning to Hear the Stories:
Listening in the Borderlands of the Human Heart

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Where does the story of the relationships between Native American and African American begin?

I believe that the story begins somewhere in Central America where Native peoples of the Americas and Native peoples of Africa first encountered each other long before Europeans began sailing the Atlantic currents. Beginning with Leo Wiener in the nineteen twenties, scholars have posited pre-Columbian contact between Africans and Indians and have offered archeological and historical evidence to support this position. However, for some reason this is an extremely controversial position; when I submitted the manuscript for my first book to a well known academic press, I was told by the first reviewer that "Anyone who believes that Africans were in the Americas before Europeans cannot be taken seriously as a scholar." Therefore, I have set aside such a quaint notion until that time that it, and thus I, can be taken seriously.

Written history, presumably that written by "serious scholars," tells us that the first permanent settlement in the New World was that of Jamestown in Virginia in and around the year 1607. However, I know another story. In 1526, Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon, a royal judge residing in Santo Domingo, led a voyage of 500 men and women, including African slaves and Dominican friars, to establish a Spanish colony called San Miguel de Gualdape on an island

just off the cost of Savannah Georgia.[1] It is also reported that Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon led a group of Spanish sailors and established a temporary colony in North Carolina, probably located at the mouth of the Cape Fear River.[2] Some historians even report that Vasquez de Ayllon attempted to settle on the Chesapeake River near what would become Jamestown Island about this same time; he is said to have brought 600 men and women, including many Negro slaves, 100 horses, and a Jesuit named Antonio Montesino to build a town named San Miguel.[3]

Now whether or not Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon really did get around this much or not or whether historians are really just a little confused about this whole matter, there is one certainty. In October of 1526, there was a slave revolt among the Africans under De Ayllon's command at San Miguel de Gualdape and the colony was overthrown and the Spanish departed; in a footnote in Peter Wood's *Black Majority*, he states that it is speculated that "Indians instigated the revolt."[4] What remained of the colony -- largely African slaves -- remained with the Cofitachiqui Indians at the head of the Santee River in what Herbert Aptheker refers to as "the first permanent inhabitants, other than the Indians, in what was to be the United States."[5] Further evidence of the permanence of this settlement

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[1] Edward Gaylord Bourne, ed., *Narratives of the Career of Hernando de Soto in the Conquest of Florida as told by a Knight of Elvas, and in a Relation by Luys Hernandes de Biedma, Factor of the Expedition; tr. by Buckingham Smith, together with a[n] account of de Soto's Expedition based on the Diary of Rodrigo Ranjel, his secretary, tr. from Oviedo's Historia General y Natural as Indias* (New York, A. S. Barnes and Company, 1904), vol. ii, 101.

[2] NCInformation, "Early History of North Carolina," [http://www.ncinformation.com/History.htm] (Accessed March 7, 2005).

[3] John Fiske, *The Discovery of America.* Volume III. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.), 1892.

[4] Peter Wood, Black *Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (*New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1974), 3.

[5] Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 163.

of Africans among the Mvskoke Indians is provided for us by a later visitor by the name of Hernando De Soto who, when he plundered a temple mound at the holy city of Talomeco, found "Biscayan axes or iron and rosaries with their crosses" and other items of European descent that had been left there by the refugee African slaves.[6] Thus, it seems that the first true permanent settlement of persons other than indigenous was, indeed, that of Africans. While this may not be " 'his' story," it is "my story" and, as they say, I am sticking to it.

I know yet another interesting story somewhat related to this one. When De Soto arrived among the Cofitachiqui Indians of the American Southeast, he also brought with him African slaves bearing Spanish surnames including the slave of one Andre de Vasconcelos. When Hernando De Soto and his party first met with the "Queen of the Cofitachiqui," she noticed this slave of Andre de Vasconcelos and in a matter of seconds, the borders that separated the "old world" and the "new world" were crossed and matters of state became superseded by matters of the heart. A few days later, De Soto seized the beloved woman and forced her to lead his expedition into the interior coastlands in search of gold. As she was leading them on their way, she "left the road, with the excuse of going in the thicket, where, deceiving them, she so concealed herself that for all their search she could not be found."[7] The beloved woman then met up with "Indian slave boy from Cuba," a "slave belonging to Don

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[6] Bourne, 100.

[7] Gentleman of Elvas in J. Franklin Jameson, *Original Narratives of Early American History: Spanish Explorers in the Southern United States* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 177.

Carlos, a Berber, well versed in Spanish," and "Gomez, a negro belonging to Vasco Goncalvez who spoke good Spanish."[8] A horseman sent to retrieve the runaway slaves returned to De Soto with the report that "The *Cacica* remained in Xuala, with a slave of Andre de Vasconcelas, who would not come with him (Alimamos), and that it was very very sure that they lived together as man and wife, and were to go together to Cutafichiqui."[9] The "Queen of the Cofitachiqui" and her new party returned to their "village of the dogwoods" in what would become "a very celebrated place"on the banks of the Savannah River near Silver Bluff, S.C.[10]

As the title of this workshop is "Learning To Hear The Stories," perhaps you will bear with me as I relate yet one more of my own.

In 1619, Sir Edwin Sandys -- the newly appointed treasurer of the Virginia Company headed by Captain John Smith -- put forward the idea of a college where "Indian youth would be acquainted with the more sophisticated aspects of Christianity and civility" [11] In order to finance this enterprise, The Virginia Company

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[8] Bourne, 104.

[9] Jameson, 177.

[10] William Bartam, *The Travels of William Bartram*, edited with commentary and an annotated index by Francis Harper. Naturalist's ed., (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1998), 199. In their study entitled *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya studied the history of the black church in the United States. In their work, they made the following notation, "The oldest church in the study was the Silver Bluff Baptist Church of Beech Island, South Carolina, which on its cornerstone claimed a founding date of 1750. It is generally regarded as the first known black church." [C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1990), 102.]

[11] Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom*: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975), 98.

acquired a particular commodity described in a letter from John Rolfe, widowed husband of Pocahontas, to Sir Edwin Sandys,:

> "About the latter end of August, a Dutch man of Warr of the burden of 160 tons arrived at Point Comfort, the Comandor's name was Capt. Jope, his Pilot for the West Indies one Mr. Marmaduke an Englishman. They mett with the 'Treasurer' in the West Indies and determined to hold consort shipp hetherward,but in their passage lost one the other. He brought not anything but 20 and odd Negroes, which the Governor and Cape Merchant bought for victualle [whereof he was in greate need as he pretended] at the best and easyest rate they could. He hadd a lardge and ample Comyssion from his Excellency to range and to take purchase in the West Indies."[12]

These Africans were not "slaves" as many people think because there were no slave laws in place at this time; these "20 and odd Negroes" were initially treated as indentured servants, and given the same opportunities for freedom dues as whites. These Africans were settled on "the governor's land," Governor Yeardley's twenty-two hundred acre tobacco plantation. That land was home to the Weyanoke people, in what is now Charles City County, Virginia.[13]

When these Africans had worked off their period of indentured servitude, they joined the immediate community and sought out those persons most like themselves with whom they could settle. They found the native peoples of Southeastern Virginia who shared with them a culture similar to their own -- one

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[12] Library of Congress American Memory Project, *The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 8. Virginia Records Manuscripts. 1606-1737.* Susan Myra Kingsbury, editor. Records of the Virginia Company, 1606-26, Volume III: Miscellaneous Records. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mtj8&fileName=mtj8pagevc03.db&recNum=267] (Accessed: March 13, 2005)

[13] Weyanoke Association, "Red & Black: The Legacy of Native & African Peoples in Charles City County," [http://www.weyanoke.org/symposium.html] (Accessed: March 13, 2005)

rooted in a sacred relationship to the subtropical coastlands of the middle Atlantic. They forged ties and kinship and bonds of love into a culture that would forever changes the landscape of the Southeastern colonies. There were great affinities between West African traditional cultures and traditional cultures of the Americas. Each emphasized the powerful nature of sacred relationships – both with the environment and within one's community; both stressed the importance of sacred order and the power of ritual to affect and overcome disorder; both attached great significance to kinship in their social organization; and both were rooted in a communal economy based on subsistence agriculture.

What were these points of contact? Where did these affinities find expression? They were borne of that most essential journey of all – the pathway through to the borderlands of the human hearts…where human stories become human histories…where lives intermixed become souls conjoined. They came in moments of intimacy where black and brown no longer mattered, but only the immediacy of human contact and the ability of an all encompassing love to overcome the pains and pitfalls of a hostile environment. They burst free in the ritual engagements with community when individual existence was eclipsed by the shared expression of a common identity and moved towards a collective self-understanding forged in the depths of traditional culture, history, and sacrality. Lastly, they came in that remarkable progression from isolated communities to a common people bound by the

commitments of an interconnected network of mutuality and linked by the metaphysical bonds of a common humanity.

Thus, the collective history of African and Indian peoples is not as explicit in the written word as it is implicit in the stories of the human heart. It is as bell hooks says in her article "revolutionary renegades:"

> In truth, sacred bonds between blacks and Native Americans, bonds of blood and metaphysical kinship, cannot be documented solely by factual evidence confirming extensive interaction and intermingling -- they are also matters of the heart. These ties are best addressed by those who are not simply concerned with the cold data of history, but who have "history written in the hearts of our people," who then feel for history, not just because it offers facts but because it awakens and sustains connections, renews and nourishes current relations. Before the that is in our hearts can be spoken, remembered with passion and love, we must discuss the myriad ways white supremacy works to impose forgetfulness, creating estrangement between red and black peoples, who though different lived as One.[14]

[14] bell hooks, "Revolutionary Renegades: Native Americans, African Americans, and Black Indians" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation,* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), p. 183.

Chaney Mack
Mississippi

[Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Mississippi Narratives.]

"Yes, my father was a full-blood African. He was about 18 years old when they brought him over. He come from near Liberia. He said his mother's name was "Chaney" and dats whar I gits my name. He said dar want no winter whar he come from and if dey felt like it, dey could all go "start naked." He wore a slip made of skins of wild animals, that come down to his knees. When ships would land in Africa, the black folks would go down to watch them and sometimes they would show them beads and purty things they carried on the ship. One day when my daddy and his brother, Peter, was standing round looking de Boss-man axed dem if dey wanted to work and handed dem a package to carry on de boat. When dey got in there dey see so many curious things dey jest wander aroun' looking, and before they know it the boat has pulled off from de landing and dey is way out in de water and kaint hep demselves, so they jest brought 'em on over to Georgy and sold 'em. There was a boat load of them --- all stolen. Dey sold my daddy and uncle Peter to Mr. Holland. He was put up on a block and Mr. Holland buyed him. Dat was in Dalton, Georgy.

"My daddy said in Africa, dey didn't live in houses. Dey jest lived in de woods, and et nuts, and wild honey they found in trees. Dey killed wild animals, skinned dem and et 'em, but made slips out of de skins to wear demselves. Dey jest eat them animals raw. Dey didn't know nothin' bout cooking. They even et snakes, but when they found 'em, they cut dere heads off quick, fore dey got mad and "pizened" demselves.

"He said dey never heard about God, and when they died dey always bury dem at night. Dey dig a hole in the groun' and den everybody would git him a torch and march behind the two who was carrying the corpse to whar dey dug de grave. Dey didn't know anything bout singing and God. Dat was de last of dem.

"He made him self a fiddle outa pine bark and usta play fer us to dance. He taught me to dance when I was little like dey did in Africa. Dey dance by derselves or swing each other 'round. Dey didn't know nothing 'bout dese "huggin' dances.

"I'd be settin' on my daddy's lap and he'd tell me all 'bout when he lived in Africa. He usta play de fiddle and sing 'bout "Africa------Dat Good Ole Land."------and den he would cry, when he thought of his mother back dere.

"My father wasn't much taller then me. After de war was over, dey carried boat loads of black folks back to Africa from Georgy. In 1884, he got up one mawning and

walked round de house. My boy axed whar he was goin' and he said "I be back directly"--and we ain't never seen him sence.

"My mother was a pureblood Indian. She was born near dat "Lookout Mountain" up in Tennessee, on a river, in a log hut. Dey lived in houses and her father was de Indian chief. His name was "Red Bird." Dey belong to de Choctaw tribe. De white people was trying to drive dem out and in an uprising wid de whites, all my mothers' folks was killed but her. The white folks took her and give her to Dr. Jernigan.

"She was big enough to know they was fighting and trying to drive 'em out. Her mother's name was "Marthy." She remembers when dey usta have "Green Corn Dances." Dey cooked all dere stuff together in a big pot, green corn, butter beans, and rabbit or any other kind of animal dey killed. After dey all eat dey have a big dance round de pot and call it de "Green Corn Dance." Dey used to make dere own whiskey out of corn and oats. Dey'd walk 50 mile to get a drink of whiskey. Dey sho' loved dere whiskey. Dey had holler canes what dey toted dere whiskey in. They lived in log huts, they cooked all their stuff together in big pots. They believed in de "Big Spirit."

"Some of dem was wild like Africans and dey didn't blieve in God, but my mother's folks did. She would git mad at us sometime, and when she did we would all "step light." I can see her now wid her long straight hair in two plaits hanging down her back, black as a crow. She'd look at us and say: "Ye pore sinner, fell from de rock, De day de moon went down in blood." Den she was going to whup somebody tell she see blood. She whupped my daddy jest the same as de rest of us. He was short--- no taller than me, and she was seven foot (?) tall. Dey call her "Big Sarah", and nobody fooled wid her.

I members how dey usta git married. Dey called it "Jumpin' Over De Broom." When a man wanted to git married he tole his boss and sometimes his boss would talk to de woman's boss and dey would agree to let dem git married. Sometimes dey would sell one to de odder so's dey could be together, er if they didn't wanta sell dey jest "stipulated" when dey could visit dere women. It was mostly on Saddy nights, and sometimes dey would let dem stay over Sunday. When dey got ready to marry de old Masta would say, "Now Git ready to Jump de Broom." De Old Masta would hold de broom. Dey would hold hands and jump dis way and den back again. Den Old Masta would say: "You is Married."

Dat de way the cullud folks got married but de Indians was different, and dis is de way dey done:

"De Chief would marry dem. He was always standing, and dey would stand before him and hold hands. The Chief would say:
"He is black; she is yaller;
Made out of beeswax, and no taller,
Salute your bride, you ugly feller!" (or devil)
Dat was how my mother say de Indians married when she was a little girl in Tennessee.

When my mother got to thinking about her folks sometime, she'd sit down and sing: "Swing Low Sweet Chariot, Comin' to Carry Me Back Home." Den we'd all gether round her cause we'd know she was thinkin' bout her folks back dere. She would cry and we would all cry together. [15]

Louisa Davis
South Carolina

[Louisa Davis was interviewed in Winnsboro, South Carolina by WPA field worker W.W. Dixon. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, South Carolina Narratives, Volume 14, Part 1.]

"I was born in de Catawba River section. My grandpappy was a full blood Indian; my pappy a half Indian; my mother, coal black woman. Just who I b'long to whom a baby? I'll leave dat for de white folks to tell, but old Marster Jim Lemon buy us all; pappy, mammy, and three chillun: Jake, Sophie, and me. De white folks I fust b'long to refuse to sell 'less Marse Jim buy de whole family; dat was clever, wasn't it? Dis old Louisa must of come from good stock, all de way 'long from de beginnin', and I is sho' proud of dat."

"When he buy us, Marse Jim take us to his place on Little River nigh clean cross de county. In de course of time us fell to Marse Jim's son, John, and his wife, Miss Mary. I was a grown woman then and nursed their fast baby, Marse Robert. I see dat baby grow to be a man and 'lected to legislature, and stand up in dat Capitol over yonder cross de river and tell then de Law and how they should act, I did. They say I was a pretty gal, then, face shiny lab a ginger cake, and hair straight and black as a crow, and I ain't so bad to look at now, Marse Willie says."

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[15] Chaney Mack, Works Progress Administration: Mississippi Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

"My pappy rise to be foreman on de place and was much trusted, but he plowed and worked just de same, mammy say maybe harder."

“Then one springtime de flowers git be blooming, de hens to cackling, and de guineas to patarocking. Sam come along when I was out in de yard wid de baby. He fust talk to de baby, and I asked him if de baby wasn't pretty. He say, 'Yes, but not as pretty as you is, Louisa.' I looks at Sam, and dat kind of foolishness wind up in a weddin'. De white folks allowed us to be married on de back piazza, and Reverend Boggs performed de ceremony."

"My husband was a slave of de Sloans and didn't got to see me often as he wanted to; and of course, as do housemaid then, dere was times I couldn't meet him, clandestine like he want me. Us had some grief over dat, but he got a pass twice a week from his marster, Marse Tommie Sloan, to come to see me. Bold as Sam git to be, in after years ridin' wid a red shirt long side of General Bratton in '76, dat nigger was timid as a rabbit wid me when us fust git married. Shacks, let's talk 'bout somthing else. Sam was a field hand and drive de wagon way to Charleston once a year wid cotton, and always bring back something pretty for me."

"When de war come on, Sam went wid young Marster Tom Sloan as bodyguard, and attended to him, and learned to steal chickens, geese, and turkeys for his young marster, just to toll 'bout it. He dead now; and what I blames de white folks for, they never would give him a pension, though he spend so much of his time and labor in their service.[16]

Robert Solomon
Des Arc, Arkansas

[Mr. Robert Solomon was interviewed in Des Arc, Arkansas by WPA field worker Irene Robertson. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Arkansas Narratives.]

My father was African. I was born in Atlanta. My mother was a Cherokes Indian. Her name was Alice Gamage. I was born in 1864. I don't know where I was born - think it was in the Territory - my father stole my mother one night. He couldn't understand

[16] Louisa Davis, Works Progress Administration: South Carolina Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

them and he was afraid of her people. He went back to Savannah after so long a time and they was in Florida when I first seen any of her people. When I got up any size I asked my father all about him and my mother marrying. He said he knowed her bout two year fore they married. They sorter courted by signs - my mother learned me her language and it was natural fur me to speak my father's tongue. I talked for them. She was bout fifteen when she run away. I don't know if a preacher ever did marry em or not. My father said she was just so pretty he couldn't help lovin her. He kept makin signs and she made signs. I liked my Gramma Gamage. She couldn't understand much. We all went to the Indian Territory from Florida and Georgia. That's how I come out here.

I don't remember the Ku Klux. I remember hearing ma and gramma talk bout the way they tried to get way from 'em. My father was a farmer till freedom. He farmed around here and at Pine Bluff. He died at West Point. My mother and step-mother both died at Pine Bluff.

They took my mother to her nation in Oklahoma. She was sick a good while and they took her to wait on her. Then come and took her after she died. There show is a fambly. My father had twenty-two in his fambly. My mother had five boys and three girls and me. My stepnother had fourteen more children. That's some fambly aint it? All my brothers and sisters died when I was little and they was little. My father's other children jess somewhar down round Pine Bluff. I guess I'd know em but I aint seed none of them in I don't know how long.[17]

Mamie Thompson
Brinkley, Ark.

[Mrs. Mamie Thompson was interviewed in Brinkley, Arkansas by WPA field worker Irene Robertson. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Arkansas Narratives, Volume 2, Part 6.]

"I come here with my parents in 1887. Nothing much here in Brinkley then but woods and three stores. My mother was a mix-breed. She was mixed with Cherokee Indian and Negro. My father come from Virginia. He was black - so black he shined.

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[17] Robert Solomon, Works Progress Administration: Arkansas Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

My mother was born in Cairo, Illinois. My mother and father both died here in Brinkley. This town started from a big saw mill."

"Understand, all I knows was told to me by my parents. Grandma's master was Master Redman. He kept Aunt Emma and my mother. They never was sold. My mother was put on the block but her mistress come took her down. Master Redman had her in the field working. The overseer was a white man. He tried to take her down and carry on with her. She led him to the house. He wanted her whooped cause she had whooped him sort of. He was mad cause he couldn't overpower her. Master Redman got her in the kitchen to whoop her with a cow hide; she told him she would kill him; she got a stick. He let her out and they come to buy her - a Negro trader. Old Mistress - his wife - went out and led her down from there in the house and told Master Redman if he sold Mattie she would quit him - she meant leave him. Mistress Redman kept her with her and made a house girl out of her. She tended to the children and cleaned the house. Aunt Emma milked and churned.

"Grandma was a Molly Glaspy woman. She had straight wavy hair, small eyes. She was a small woman. Grandpa was a tall big man. He was a full blood Indian.[18]

Eliza Whitmire
Vinita, Oklahoma

[Mrs. Eliza Whitmire was interviewed in Vinita, Oklahoma by WPA field worker James Carselowey. Source: Oklahoma Historical Society, Indian Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma.]

Indian Masters Were Kind
While these old slave days were very trying, and we went through many hardships, our Indian masters were very kind to us and gave us plenty of good clothes to wear and we always had plenty to eat. I can't say that I have been any happier and contented, since I was free, than I was in those good old days when our living was guaranteed, even though we had to work hard to get it. Looking back over the time I have spent, since slave days, I can see that the colored race have had many ups and downs since being put on their own footing, and I believe that a great many of them would have fared better had they had their masters to feed them. It is true that there were a few hard masters, and I have heard of a few who whipped their slaves

[18] Mamie Thompson, Works Progress Administration: Arkansas Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

unmercifully, but they were few. Most of us slaves fared well and many of them did not know what to do when set free, and they had a hard time getting a start in life. Some of the slaves went back and worked for their old masters for several years, rather than to try and make a living, after being set free. The slaves, who belonged to the Cherokees fared much better than the slaves who belonged to the white race, for the reason that the Indian slaves who had left the states could come right back to the Territory and settle on Indian land, and when allotment came they gave us an equal right with them in land drawings. The United States Government forced them to do this, I have been told.[19]

Phoebe Banks

[Mrs. Phoebe Banks was interviewed in Muskogee, Oklahoma by WPA field worker Ethel Wolfe Garrison in 1938. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume 13.]

In 1860, there was a little Creek Indian town of Sodom on the north bank of the Arkansas River, in a section the Indians called Chocksha Bottoms, where Mose Perryman had a big farm or ranch for a long time before the Civil War. That same year, on October 17, I was born on the Perryman place, which was northwest of where I lived now in Muskogee; only in them days Fort Gibson and Okmulgee was the biggest towns around and Muskogee hadn't shaped up yet.

My mother belonged to Mose Perryman when I was born: he was one of the best known Creeks in the whole nation, and one of his younger brothers, Legus Perryman, was made the big chief of the Creeks (1887) a long time after the slaves was freed. Mother's name was Eldee; my father's name was William McIntosh, because he belonged to a Creek Indian family by that name. Everybody say the McIntoshes was leaders in the Creek doings away back there in Alabama long before they come out here.

With me, there was twelve children in our family; Daniel, Stroy, Scott, Segal, Neil, Joe, Phillip, Mollie, Harriett, Sally and Queenie.

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[19] Eliza Whitmire in George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport CT.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 380-381.

The Perryman slave cabins was all alike -- just two-room log cabins, with a fireplace where mother do the cooking for us children at night after she get through working in the Master's house.

Mother was the house girl -- cooking, waiting on the table, cleaning the house, spinning the yarn, knitting some of the winter clothes, taking care of the mistress girl, washing the clothes -- yes, she was always busy and worked mighty hard all the time, while them Indians wouldn't hardly do nothing for themselves.

On the McIntosh plantation, my daddy said there was a big number of slaves and lots of slave children. The slave men work in the fields, chopping cotton, raising corn, cutting rails for the fences, building log cabins and fireplaces. One time when father was cutting down a tree it fell on him and after that he was only strong enough to rub down the horses and do light work around the yard. He got to be a good horse trainer and long time after slavery he helped to train horses for the Free Fairs around the country, and I suppose the first money he ever earned was made that way.

Lots of the slave owners didn't want their slaves to learn reading and writing, but the Perrymans didn't care; they even helped the younger slaves with that stuff. Mother said her master didn't care much what the slaves do; he was so lazy he didn't care for nothing.[20]

Jane Battiest

[Mrs. Jane Battiest was interviewed in Pushmataha, Oklahoma by WPA field worker Hampton Johnson. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume 12S.]

I was born in the Cherokee Nation, near Tahlequah, Oklahoma, which was then in the Cherokee Nation. I am not able to tell what year I was born nor the month or the day. I have been told by my people that I am about 105 years old, but I don't know. I can hardly get around anymore and I am almost blind. I have no education at all so I am not able to tell you very much of the happenings of the Indians during my life.

My mother and father were slaves, and they belonged to a Cherokee Indian by the name of John Lowery. He had some slaves besides them, but did not have many.

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[20] Phoebe Banks, Works Progress Administration: Oklahoma Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

Those he had were all named for him so we were all named Lowery and my name is Jane Lowery. We did not mix and mingle with other people very much, as we just had to stay at home and work on the farm and other places he wanted us to work. He kept us at home and did not give us the privileges of visiting anyone except the other slaves he had on the farm.

We had plenty to eat and to live on while we were living with our master. He fed us good and took care of us. When we got sick he would get us medicine or a doctor if we needed one. He surely was good to us. Of course he worked us pretty hard, but we could stand it for we were well fed and stout enough to do any hard work that we had to do for him. We got along better then than we did after we were freed. I remember that our master, John Lowery, joined the army. Before he left for the army he give us some cattle, hogs and ponies. I don't know what he said to my father, but anyway he gave us the stock: and he gave us some furniture out of the house when he left for the army. I don't know where he went then, but we left there and came down to this country. I guess we were what you call refugees from the war, anyway we came down here and were living down here when we were freed by President Lincoln. We never went back to the Cherokee Nation after we were freed.[21]

Della Mun Bibles

[Della Mun Bibles was interviewed in Waco, Texas by WPA field worker Mrs. Ada Davis in October of 1937. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Texas Narratives, Volume 02T]

"My Mammy was a white woman. Her daddy and mammy were pore folks and they took sick and died and left her a little baby. Old Man Snell back in Missouri, took er and put her on the yard with the other children. She was given to the charge of a black slave and raised as a Snell slave. When she was about fourteen, Marse Snell, he married her to a full blood Indian that he had on the place, named Ephram Snell. He was Marse Snell's slave same as the negroes, but I never knew how or why. Now, that's the tale about mammy that Old Man Snell told. But my black grand mother what raised my Mammy, she said that my Mammy belonged to a niece of Old Man Snell and that she was not married right like the white folks always did. And that Old Man Snell took Mammy and raised up that way and sent his niece up north to hide

[21] Jane Battiest, Works Progress Administration: Oklahoma Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

the disgrace. Any way, my Mammy was a sure enough white woman and my daddy a full blooded Indian daddy. And there was sister Sally, Dania, Emma and Pearlie. We were all slaves. I was next to the baby."I don't know my exact age but Mammy always cooked my birthday cake on the 9th day of August. We lived on Neale's Creek on the old Snell place.

"If there was a church near us, I don't know 'bout it. I didn't see till I was grown and come out of the brush. I guess the white folks went some time, but I didn't pay much attention to them. Mammy had her little house to herself and her family didn't mix with the negroes no more than the Snell folks did. Of course, with us, like with all families 'round us, all the children white and black grew up on the yard together. But they didn't eat or sleep together. I never have in my life, lived with the negroes.

"Mun Bibles come to work for Marster Snell and we 'cided to get married. So, we up and went to Bosqueville to a Justice of the Peace. The Bibles, some white, some Indian, and some negroes, were plentiful up and down the Bosque. They were good people. Yes, I 'member the dress I wore when I got married; it was a calico dress, a white one with blue specks in it. Mun wore jeans britches and a cotton shirt. Mun Bibles died nine years ago. We got married, come home and went to work. Before Mun died, we owned nine hundred acres of land. But, when we got too old to work it ourselves, we got renters. Seasons were bad, no crops, things ran down and we sold it. I got a lot and a little house in Waco and that's all now. Just lost it all.

"Mun's name was Monroe Bibles. His mother was Agnes. He had two brothers, Jack, who was killed while breaking horses, and Stoke who died with a fever (from a fever). There was Nat, Ike and John Bibles, but they were not kin to Mun. Nat married Emma Snell. They were not Indian, they were negroes. Mun was a Tonkaway Indian. Ike Bibles married a woman named Kate. They had Henrietta, Edmond, Rhoda, Nan, Babe, Victoria, Laura, and John, them was their children. Phoebe was John's wife and they had Philip, Gilbert, George and Duck. All these are dead but Gilbert. He lives at Valley Mills and is well respected by black and white. Rosa was another of them children and she is dead now. There is one of Nat's granchildren living in East Waco now. No, I don' know much about them.[22]

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[22] Della Mun Bibles, Works Progress Administration: Texas Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

Julia Blanks
Milford, Texas

[Julia Blanks was interviewed in Milford, Texas by an unknown WPA field worker. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Texas Narratives, Volume 16]

"I was born in San Antonio, in 1862. My mother's name was Rachael Miller. I don't know if she was born in Tennessee or Mississippi. I heard her talk of both places. I don't know nothing about my father, because he run off when I was about three months old. He was three-quarter Cherokee Indian. They were lots of Indians then, and my husband's people come from Savannah, Georgia, and he said they was lots of Indians there. I had two sisters and one brother and the sisters are dead but my brother lives somewhere in Arizona. My mother's master's name was John C. Wilcox.

"When we was small chillen, they hired my sisters out, but not me. My grandfather bought my grandmother's time and they run a laundry house. They hired my mother out, too.

"You see, my grandmother was free born, but they stole her and sold her to Miss Donaldson. She was half French. She looked jes' like a French woman. She wasn't a slave, but she and her brother were stolen and sold. She said the stage coach used to pass her aunt's house, and one day she and her brother went down to town to buy some buns, and when they wore comin' back, the stage stopped and asked 'em to ride. She wanted to ride, but her brother didn't. But they kep' coaxin' 'em till they got 'em in. They set her down between the two women that was in there and set her brother between two men, and when they got close to the house, they threw cloaks over their heads and told the driver to drive as fast as he could, and he sure drove. They taken 'em to Washin'ton, to the White House, and made her a present to Mary Wilcox (Miss Donaldson) and her brother to somebody else. Then this woman married John C. Wilcox and they come to Texas.[23]

[23] Julia Blanks, Works Progress Administration: Texas Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

Charlie Davenport
Mississippi

[Charlie Davenport was interviewed in Adams, Miss. by WPA field worker Mrs. Edith Moore. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Mississippi Narratives, Volume 07S]

"De marster had a town mansion what's pictured in a lot o' books. It was called 'Montebella.' De big columns still stan' at de end o' Shields Lane. It burnt 'bout thirty years ago(1937).

"I's part Injun. I aint got no Nigger nose an' my hair is so long I has to keep it *wropped. I'se often heard my mammy was reddih-lookin' wid long, straight, black hair. Her pa was a full blooded Choctaw an' mighty nigh as young as she was. I'se been tol' dat nobody *dast meddle wid her. She didn' do much talkin', but she sho' was a good worker. My pappy had Injun blood, too, but his hair was kinky.

"De Choctaws lived all 'roun' Secon' Creek. Some of 'em had cabins lak settled folks. I can 'member dey las' chief. He was a tall pow'ful built man named 'Big Sam.' What he said was de law, 'cause he was de boss o' de whole tribe. One rainy night he was kilt in a saloon down in 'Natchez Under de Hill.' De Injuns went wild wid rage an' grief. Dey sung an' wailed an' done a heap o' low mutterin'. De sheriff kep' a steady watch on 'em, 'cause he was afeared dey would do somethin' rash. After a long time he kinda let up in his vig'lance. Den one night some o' de Choctaw mens slipped in town an' *stobbed de man dey b'lieved had kilt Big Sam. I 'members dat well.[24]

Lucinda Davis
Tulsa, Oklahoma

[Lucinda Davis was interviewed in Tulsa, Oklahoma by WPA field worker Robert Vinson Lackey in the Summer of 1937. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume 13.]

Dey call all de slaves "Istilusti." Dat mean "Black man."

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[24] Charlie Davenport, Works Progress Administration: Mississippi Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

My own pappy was name Stephany. I think he take dat name 'cause when he little his mammy call him "Istifani." Dat mean a skeleton, and he was a skinny man. He belong to de Grayson family and I think his master name

George, but I don't know. Dey big people in de Creek, and with de white folks took my mammy name was Serena and she belong to some of de Gouge family. Dey was big people in de Upper Creek, and one de biggest men of the Gouge was name Hopoethleyoholo for his Creek name. He was a big man and went to de North in de War and died up in Kansas, I think. Dey say when he was a little boy he was called Hopoethli, which mean "good little boy", and when he git grown he make big speeches and dey stick on de "yoholo." Dat mean "loud whooper."

Dat de way de Creek made de name for young boys when I was a little girl. When de boy git old enough de big men in de town give him a name, and sometime later on when he git to going round wid de grown men dey stick on some more name. If he a good talker dey sometime stick on "yoholo", and iffen he make lots of jokes dey call him "Hadjo." If he is a good leader dey call him "Imala" and if he kind of mean dey sometime call him "firigo."

My mammy and pappy belong to two masters, but dey live together on a place. Dat de way de Creek slaves do lots of times. Dey work patches and give de masters most all dey make, but dey have some for demselves. Dey didn't have to stay on de master's place and work like I hear de slaves of de white people and de Cherokee and Choctaw people say dey had to do.

Maybe my pappy and mammy run off and git free, or maybe so dey buy demselves out, but anyway dey move away some time and my mammy's master sell me to old man Tuskaya-hiniha when I was jest a little gal. All I have to do is stay at de house and mind de baby.

Master had a good log house and a bresh shelter out in front like all de houses had. Like a gallery, only it had de dirt for de flo' and bresh for de roof. Dey cook everything out in de yard in big pots, and dey eat out in de yard too.[25]

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[25] Lucinda Davis, Works Progress Administration: Oklahoma Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

George Fortman
Evansville, Indiana

[George Fortman was interviewed in Evansville, Indiana by WPA field worker Lauana Creel. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Indiana Narratives, Volume 5.]

"My two ancestors, John Hawk, a Blackhawk Indian brave, and Racheal, a Chackatau maiden had made themselves a home such as only Indians know, understand and enjoy. He was a hunter and a fighter but had professed faith in Christ through the influence of the missionaries. My greatgrandmother passed the facts on to her children and they have been handed down for four generations. I, in turn, have given the traditions to my children and grandchildren.

"No more peaceful home had ever offered itself to the red man than the beautiful valley of the Wabash river. Giant elms, sycamores and maple trees bordered the stream while the fertile valley was traversed with creeks and rills, furnishing water in abundance for use of the Indian campers.

"The Indians and the white settlers in the valley transacted business with each other and were friendly towards each other, as I have been told by my mother, Eliza, and my grandmother, Courtney Hawk.

"The missionaries often called the Indian families together for the purpose of teaching them and the Indians had been invited, prior to being driven from the valley, to a sort of festival in the woods. They had prepared much food for the occasion. The braves had gone on a long hunt to provide meat and the squarls had prepared much corn and other grain to be used at the feast. All the tribes had been invited to a council and the poor people were happy, not knowing they were being deceived.

"The decoy worked, for while the Indians were worshiping God the meeting was rudely interrupted by orders of the Governor of the State. The Governor, whose duty it was to give protection to the poor souls, caused them to be taken captives and driven away at the point of swords and guns.

"In vain, my grandmother said, the Indians prayed to be let return to their homes. Instead of being given their liberty, some several hundred horses and ponies were captured to be used in transporting the Indians away from the valley. Many of the

aged Indians and many innocent children died on the long journey and traditional stories speak of that journey as the 'trail of death.'"[26]

J.N. Gillespie,
Little Rock, Arkansas

[J.N. Gillespie was interviewed in Little Rock, Arkansas by WPA field worker Samuel S. Taylor. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Arkansas Narratives, Volume Arkansas Narratives, Volume 2, Part 3]

"I was born near Galveston, in Texas, January 19, 1863, so they tell me. I been in this town and been living right here at 1112 Park Street for fifty-three years and ain't never had no trouble with anybody.

"My grandparents were Gillespie's. My grandma was an Indian woman. She was stolen off the reservation-her and her daughter. The daughter was about twelve years old and big enough to wait table. Both of them were full blooded Cherokee Indians. My grandma married a slave, and when she growed up, my mother married a slave; but my mother's parents were both Indians, and one of my father's parents was white, so you see about three-fourths of me is something else. My grandmother's name before her first marriage was Courtney and my mother's first name was Parthenia.

"When they were stolen, they were made slaves. Nick Toliver bought 'em. He was their first master, far as I heard 'em say. After old man Nick Toliver died, Tom Brewer bought my mother. Toliver and Brewer were the only two masters she had.[27]

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[26] George Fortman, Works Progress Administration: Indiana Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).
[27] J.N. Gillespie , Works Progress Administration: Arkansas Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

Sim Greely
Spartanburg, S.C.

[Sim Greely was interviewed in Spartanburg, S.C. by WPA field worker Caldwell Sims. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, South Carolina Narratives, Volume 14, Part 2]

My father was a full-blooded Indian from Virginia. He was a refugee. But you know dat dey had a way of selling people back den. Somebody caught him and sold him at one of dem sales. De man what bought him was Mr. Jeff Buzzard. He went back to Virginia atter de surrender. I would not go. He took another woman on de place, and my mother would not let me go. De woman's name dat he took was Sara Danby. She had two brothers and a sister --- Samuel, Coffee, and Jenny.

"My mother was mixed Indian and African blood. My folks got 'stroyed up in a storm. My grandfather was named Isaac Haltiwanger. My grandmother, his wife, was named Annie. Dey had one child who was my mother; her name Frances. My grandmother's name was Molly Stone.

"My parents, talking 'bout de Africans, how funny dey talked. Uncle Sonny and uncle Edmund Ruff was two of de old'uns. Old man Charles Slibe was de preacher. He was a Methodist. My father was a Baptist. His white folks, de Billy Caldwells, prepared de barn for him to preach to dere slaves. In dat day, all de Africans was low chunky fellers and real black.[28]

Green, James
San Antonio, Texas.

[James Green was interviewed in San Antonio, Texas. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Texas Narratives, Volume 16, Part 2]

"I never knowed my age till after de war, when I's set free de second time, and then marster gits out a big book and it shows I's 25 year old. It shows I's 12 when I is bought and $800 is paid for me. That $800 was stolen money, 'cause I was kidnapped and die is how it come:

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[28] Sim Greely , Works Progress Administration: South Carolina Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

"My mammy was owned by John Williams in Petersburg, in Virginia, and I come born to her on dat plantation. Den my father set 'bout to git me free, 'cause he a full-blooded Indian and done some big favor for a big man high up in de courts, and he gits me set free, and den Marster Williams laughs and calls me 'free boy.'

"Then, one day along come a Friday and that a unlucky star day and I playin' round de house and Marster Williams come up and say, 'Delia, will you 'low Jim walk down de street with me?' My mammy say, 'All right, Jim, you be a good boy,' and dat de las' time I ever heared her speak, or ever see her. We walks down whar de houses grows close together and pretty soon comes to de slave market. I ain't seed it 'fore, but when Marster Williams says, 'Git up on de block,' I got a funny feelin', and I knows what has happened. I's sold to Marster John Pinchback and he had de St. Vitus dance and he likes to make he niggers suffer to make up for his squirmin' and twistin' and he the bigges' debbil on earth.

"We leaves right away for Texas and goes to marster's ranch in Columbus. It was owned by him and a man call Wright, and when we gits there I's put to work without nothin' to eat. Dat night I makes up my mind to run away but de nex' day dey takes me and de other niggers to look at de dogs and chooses me to train de dogs with. I's told I had to play I runnin' away and to run five mile in any way and then climb a tree. One of de niggers tells me kind of nice to climb as high in dat tree as I could if I didn't want my body tore off my legs. So I runs a good five miles and climbs up in de tree whar de branches is gettin' small.

"I sits dere a long time and den sees de dogs comin'. When dey gits under de tree dey sees me and starts barkin'. After dat I never got thinkin' of runnin' away.[29]

[29] James Green, Works Progress Administration: Texas Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

Jim Henry
Winnsboro, S. C.

[Jim Henry was interviewed in Winnsboro, S.C. by WPA field worker W. W. Dixon. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, South Carolina Narratives, Volume 14, Part 2]

"I was born in the Bratton slave quarter, about six miles northeast of Winnsboro. I was born a slave of General John Bratton. He use to tell me I come from 'stinguished stock, dat he bought my father, James, from de Patrick Henry family in Virginia. Dat's de reason my pappy and us took dat name after freedom.

"My mother, Silva, and her mother, was bought from de Rutledge family in Charleston, by General Bratton. My grandfather, on my mother's side, was name Edward Rutledge. No, sir, I don't mean he was a white man; he just ginger-cake color, so my mother say. My pappy say his father was a full-blooded Indian, so, dat makes three bloods in my veins, white folks, Indian folks, and Negro folks. Derefore, us been thrifty like de white man, orafty like de Indians, and hard workin' like de Negroes.

My mother's name was Charity; her nationality was a half-breed Creek Indian. She died long about 1853.

"My father's name was Faithful. His nationality was a full blood Creek. He was killed in the war between Mexico and the United States.

"I have one sister and her name is Betsy. As near as I can recall she is near one-hundred years old. She was living somewhere in Indiana last time I heard of her.[30]

Kiziah Love
Colbert, Oklahoma

[Kiziah Love was interviewed in Colbert, Oklahoma. Source: WPA Slave Narrative Project, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume 13]

Frank Colbert, a full blood Choctaw Indian, was my owner. He owned my mother but I don't remember such about my father. He died when I was a little youngun. My Mistress' name was Julie Colbert. She and Master Frank was de best folks that ever

[30] Jim Henry, Works Progress Administration: South Carolina Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

lived. All the niggers loved Master Frank and knowed jest what he wanted done and they tried their best to do it, too.

I married Isom Love, a slave of Sam Love, another full-blood Indian that lived on jining farm. We lived on Master Frank's farm and Isom went back and forth to work fer his master and I worked ever day fer mine. I don't 'spect we could of done that way iffen we hadn't of had Indian masters. They let us do a lot like we pleased jest so we got our work done and didn't run off.

Old Master Frank never worked us hard and we had plenty of good food to eat. He never did like to put us under white overseers and never tried it but once. A white man come through here and stopped overnight. He looked 'round the farm and told Master Frank that he wasn't gitting half what he ought to out of his rich land. He said he could take his bunch of hands and double his amount of corn and cotton.

Master Frank told him that he never used white overseers, that he had one nigger that bossed around some when he didn't do it himself. He also out and all the scent would be on them sticks and the cat wouldn't small at all. They'd cook it like they did possum, bake it with taters or make dumplings.

We had plenty of salt. We got that from Grand Saline. Our coffee was made from parched seal or wheat bran. We made it from dried sweet potatoes that had been parched, too.

One of our choicest dishes was "Tom Pashofa", an Indian dish. We'd take corn and beat it in a mortar with a pestle. They took out the husks with a riddle and a farmer. The riddle was a kind of a sifter. Then it was beat fine enough to go through the riddle we'd put it in a pot and cook it with fresh pork or beef. We cooked our bread in a Dutch oven or in the ashes.

When we got sick we would take butterfly root and life-everlasting and boil it and made a syrup and take it for colds. Balcony and queen's delight boiled and mired would make good blood medicine.[31]

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[31] Kiziah Love, Works Progress Administration: Oklahoma Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941).

Patsy Perryman
Muskogee, Oklahoma

[Patsy Perryman was interviewed in Muskogee, Oklahoma in the Summer of 1938. Source: Oklahoma Historical Society Slave Narrative Collection.]

The Taylor place, where I was born, was in the Caney Creek settlement, near Walkingstick Spring, in the old Flint District of the Cherokee Nation. The Taylor family was Cherokees and the mistress and master always treated us mighty good. We didn't know what whippings were, only what we heard about other slaves getting beaten for trying to runaway or too lazy to work.

My mother had always been with Mistress Judy Taylor and she was the only mother my mama ever had, least the only she could remember for her own mother (my grandmother) died when she was three days old. She was raised by the Indians and could talk Cherokee.

There was two boys and three girls; myself, Jude and Victoria, 'Boney' (Bonaparte) and Lewis. Father belonged to some other man for a long time; he would get a pass to visit with mother and us children, then go back the next day. The Taylors bought him so that we could all be together.

My brother Lewis married a full-blood Indian woman and they got lots of Indian children on their farm in the old Cherokee country around Caney Creek. He's just like an Indian, been with them so much, talks the Cherokee language and don't notice us negroes any more.

The last time I saw him was thirty year ago when he come to see mammy at the agency. We started out walking and pretty soon he dropped behind, leaving me to walk in front. I looked back and there he was standing in the middle of the road with his eyes shut.

"What's the matter, brother Lewis?" I wanted to know. "Sister wants you to come on," I told him.

"I darn tired looking at negroes!" he said, keeping his eyes shut tight, and I knew just how he felt.

That's what I use to tell Mistress Taylor when I leave my own mammy and run to the mistress, crying to stay with her, even after the peace come that set us free.

"Honey," Mistress Judy say kindly, "stay with your own mammy, she cries for you."[32]

Throughout the slave narratives, we see vivid depictions of life at the crossroads of the African American and Native American historical and cultural experience. If anything, the quintessential element in the Aframerindian slave experience was a tentative and tenuous grasp on those most fundamental of human rights, the right to personal sovereignty and the right to share that small bit of oneself with those whom we hold most dear. It is also the right to find and define oneself in relationships with others in ones most immediate community. Though the contingencies and particularities of individual's circumstances may have varied, these voices speak to us of the undeniable exigencies of the human spirit for the stability and continuity that comes only from the freedom of the human will to pursue it owns means and ends. If we yet listen to those most important and sacred conversations - the stories found in the borderlands of the human heart - then can we find commonality and learn that their stories are little different from our own. In so doing, we move from seemingly unique stories to a collective history.

[32] Patsy Perryman, Oklahoma Historical Society. Slave Narrative Collection, Oklahoma City, OK.