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Slavery: Primary Source

30 points

From: <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text6/text6read.htm>

There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal.

Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 1781,
Query XVIII

From the author of the Declaration of Independence we have a stark admission of the contradiction of slavery in America—that its existence required the "perpetual exercise" of *in*equality among human beings. Not only were masters to be masters, they were to be tyrants. Not only were slaves to be chattel labor, they were to act as accomplices in their subjugation. "In practice," writes historian Colin A. Palmer, "this required knowing and using the proper forms of deferential address for whites, the uncomplaining acceptance of verbal and other forms of abuse, and a day-to-day obsequiousness that whites needed to assure themselves of their superiority."[1](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text6/text6read.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn1%22%20%5Co%20%22endnote%201) How did a person maintain a sense of worth (and worthi*ness*) when survival required "degrading submissions," as Jefferson wrote, and constant self-monitoring to avoid the master's wrath? The slave's perspective of the master-slave relationship is the focus of these two groups of selections.

1. **The master-slave relationship.** The first group presents statements from eleven formerly enslaved black men and women whose narratives were published between 1825 and 1868. Harriet Jacobs came to realize that her status as property *defined* her role in the master-slave relationship: no matter how humane a master might be, he or she could sell a slave with little or no discomfort. Frederick Douglass recalls becoming aware as a child of his status as a slave—"Why am I a slave? Why are some people slaves, and others masters?"—and struggling to reconcile slavery with his belief in a benevolent God. And James Curry asserts in his narrative that, no matter how ignorant masters kept their slaves, it was "impossible to beat it into them that they were made to be slaves."
2. **Masters' sexual abuse of slaves.** The second group deals with one of the cruelest hardships endured by enslaved African Americans—sexual abuse by their slaveholders, overseers, and other white men and women whose power to dominate them was complete. "I know these facts will seem too awful to relate," warns former slave William J. Anderson in his 1857 narrative, ". . . as they are some of the *real* 'dark deeds of American Slavery.'" Enslaved women were forced to submit to their masters' sexual advances, perhaps bearing children who would engender the rage of a master's wife, and from whom they might be separated forever as a result. Masters forcibly paired "good breeders" to produce strong children they could sell at a high price. "Forced breeding in the slave quarters manifested itself as an indirect form of rape," writes Daina R. Berry, a scholar of African American history, "where *powerless* enslaved males and females became the victims of reproductive abuse to which they did not *willingly* give their consent."[2](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text6/text6read.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn2%22%20%5Co%20%22endnote%202) Resistance brought severe punishment, often death. These selections are drawn from the nineteenth-century published narratives as well as the twentieth-century interviews of former slaves compiled in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Slave Narrative Project.

From the following link (Pages 1-4, through James Curry) answer the following Questions:<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text6/masterslaverelationship.pdf>

1. What aspects of slavery do these writers emphasize to rebut the view that slavery was beneficial to the enslaved and that most slaveowners were humane?
2. Why does Frederick Douglass conclude that his growing awareness of slavery as a child, while deeply painful, was "knowledge quite worth possessing"?
3. What aspect of the slave's awareness does Douglass call "a constant menace to slavery"? Why?

Respond to the following statements about the master-slave relationship?

1. - "It is not the fault of the slaveholder that he is cruel, so much as it is the fault of the system under which he lives." Solomon Northup
2. - "It was not *color*, but *crime*, not *God*, but *man* that afforded the true explanation of the existence of slavery." Frederick Douglass
3. - "The disposition to tyrannize over those under us is universal, and there is no one who will not occasionally do it." William Grimes
4. "slavery is a curse to the whites as well as to the blacks." Harriet Jacobs

From the following link (page 1-4): <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text6/masterslavesexualabuse.pdf>

1. What forms of sexual abuse did enslaved women and men experience, as documented in these accounts?
2. What effects did the sexual abuse have upon enslaved women and men, upon the masters and their wives and children, and on the slaveowning society overall?