

Excerpt from Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans by Kadir Nelson, 2011. Nelson both wrote the text and painted the images in book. He wrote the book from the perspective of a elder, a African American grandmother, and Nelson includes aspects of his own family's story throughout the book.

Prologue

Most folks my age and complexion don't speak much about the past. Sometimes is just too hard to talk about - nothing we like to share with you young folk. No parent wants to tell a child that he was once a slave and made to do another man's bidding. Or that she had to swallow her pride and take what she was given, even though she knew it wasn't fair. Our story is chock-full of things like this. Things that may make you cringe, or feel angry. But there are also parts that will make you proud, or even laugh a little. You gotta take the good with the bad, I guess. You have to know where you come from so can move forward.

Many of us are getting up in age and feel it's time to make some things know before they are gone for good. So it's important that you pay attention, honey, because I'm only going to tell you this story but once.

Reading Response Question:

1. Who is the narrator in the prologue and who is the "honey" whom she is addressing? Why did the author choose to tell this story through the voice of a narrator addressing someone she cares about?

Chapter 2: Slavery

"Dem days was hell." –Delia Garlic, former slave, Alabama

This may sound funny to you, but my grandfather, Joseph, didn't allow any of his kin to eat black-eyed peas on New Year's Day even though it's an old African American tradition – the beans bring good luck for the coming year, they say. But Pap, which is what we called him, wouldn't hear of it. When he was a young boy, each New Year's Day buckets of black-eyed peas were boiled and poured into a horse trough for all of the slaves on the plantation to eat like animals. Pap hated it and vowed that none of us in his family would ever allow people to treat us that way. Pap was the only Africa-born slave in my family. Pap was captured in 1850 when he was only six years old and brought to America. Even though it had been illegal to capture and import slaves to America since 1807, it still happened. And often. On New Year's Day of every year, Pap told us the story.

"When I was a child, I would play with all de other children in my village while de grown folk were working far away in de fields. They told us to look out for kidnappers 'cause dey were stories of people who went missing, mostly children left at home during the day. One day when de grown folk were gone out to de field, several of dos people ran into de village carrying nets and clubs and grabbed me and several other children 'fore we could cry out. Dey covered our mouths, tied our hands, and ran off with us into de woods."

The children were marched for miles all the way to the coast, where a large ship sat out on the water. For days Pap and many other captured Africans were kept inside a large fort on the beach before they were brought outside and paddled in a small boat to the ship.

Below the deck, African men, women, and children were packed like fish, chained together, and crammed into spaces so tight that they could not stand up. It was dark, and the air was heavy with the smell of sickness and the cries of women and children. When the ship was full, it set off for America.



The trip lasted several weeks. Pap was sold to a planter in Maryland as a playmate for his son. When he reached the age of seven, Pap was sent out to work as a field hand.

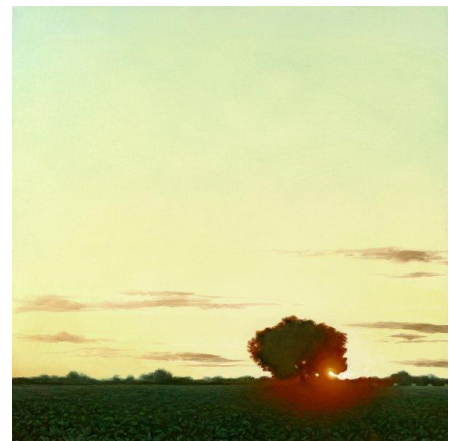
I could tell you about the life of a slave all day long, but even then you couldn't guess the awfulness of it. Slaves are people who are property of *other* people and must do whatever they are told. They were bought and sold as one would buy and sell any animal or thing. Slaves had no right to property, to family, to come and go as they pleased, to read or write, or to speak their own language or have a last name; no right even to protect themselves – no more rights than that of a horse or a pig. The only right a slave had was to work for his master. And work he did.

Every morning the slave driver blew the work horn or rang the bell; and all the slaves woke up, grabbed a hoe, and headed out to the fields. In the summertime the sun was up early and down late; and the air was hot, heavy, and full of mosquitoes. With each strike of the hoe to the ground the slaves sang to keep time with each other and help ease the hard work. Spirituals were born right there in that field, you know. Singing was the only way to keep from dying inside. Pap said it was the saddest thing in the world to hear slaves sing those songs, but it sounded so beautiful. Made him want to cry. Some of those songs held secrets, too – codes to pass on messages to other slaves right under the nose of the overseer. Like when a slave started singing "Steal Away," folks knew it was time to run away. Or when they sang "Follow the Drinking Gourd," the slaves knew to escape in the direction of the North Star right at the foot of the Little Dipper. To ease the trouble of their hard lives, the slaves got together and danced on Saturday evenings. Most other evenings they slipped off into the woods for prayer meetings, praying for the day that freedom would come.

Since Pap didn't have any blood family on the plantation, older slaves took him in as their own. Before he went out to the fields, he lived in the big house with a woman he called Aunt Hattie, who worked all day under the watchful eye of the Missus, cooking, cleaning, sewing, even nursing the Missus's children when they needed milk. She raised all three of the Missus's children.

There were about a hundred or so slaves on the plantation, and they were always hungry and dressed in rags. Most of them went barefoot 'cause the master didn't give 'em but one pair of shoes a year, and the shoes weren't made to last. In the fields they were watched over by an overseer, who rode around on a horse making sure everybody was doing their work. And, honey, that fellow was mean. To keep the slaves in line, he lashed them with a curlin' bullwhip he kept on his shoulder. Tied 'em to a tree and whipped 'em right in front of all the other field hands. Folks a mile away could hear them awful whippings. It's no wonder so many of the slaves wanted to run away.

You might wonder, "Why didn't they fight back?" Chile, believe me when I tell you that they did, every step of the way; but unlike the Africans who captured them, they didn't have any guns to fight back with, so they fought with their fists and died. They fought over the ocean on slave ships and were shot and drowned. They fought in the fields, in homes, and in factories where they worked and were whipped, beaten, and murdered. They fought and fought and lost almost every time. It would be a long while before we figured out that we could not win our freedom with our fists or guns. We would have to find another way.



Ch. 2 Reading Response Question:

1. What was life like for enslaved Africans? What details from the text show this?
2. In the last paragraph it says "They fought and fought and lost almost every time." How did the institution of slavery force people into submission (or staying in slavery)?

3. Chapter 3: Abolition

"That which is not just is not law." - William Lloyd Garrison, abolitionist

"I expose slavery in this country, because to expose it is to kill it." - Frederick Douglass, abolitionist



Even though it didn't specifically say so, slavery was written into the new Constitution right along with "We the People." The framers, who wrote the Constitution, could have ended slavery right then and there if they wanted to, and they even thought about it, but instead they chose to keep it. They thought they needed it. You see, America grew up in slavery. It was like mother's milk to the new country, and it made her grow big and strong. Southern planters had lined their pockets with profits from slave grown crops and northern industries depended on them too.

To justify slavery, southern white folks had convinced themselves that black people were fine with being slaves. We were convinced that they were all nuts, or as we would say, "touched in the head." Not a one of them would have traded places with us. And since those white gentlemen running the country wouldn't give us our freedom, we

decided to take it ourselves.

One of the slaves on Pap's plantation had taught himself to read, which was very dangerous, because if white folks had found out, he would have got a sound licking. White folks thought that if slaves learned to read or write, they could read the Bible for themselves or antislavery papers (if they got their hands on them) and begin to question their master's behavior. They might also be able to communicate with other slaves and antislavery folks outside their plantations. Education is a powerful thing and often made slaves hard to control and likely to run away, so their masters took good care to make sure they remained illiterate. In fact, at the time it was illegal for slaves to read or write. A lot of them learned anyway. They'd trick their young masters into teaching them the alphabet or finding a spelling book and sneak off to learn it and then teach other slaves.



As it turns out, white folks were right about slaves who learned to read. That boy from Pap's plantation eventually ran away to Massachusetts, where he became a great speaker, talking to large crowds of white folks about how terrible it was to be a slave. He also wrote a narrative about his life that made him very famous. Many came to know him as "The Lion of Anacostia." Pap knew him as Frederick Douglass.

Up North, Douglass joined with other free black folks, former slaves, and good white folks who were trying to end slavery. They were called abolitionists because they wanted to abolish (get rid of) slavery. Abolitionists were everywhere, even in the South. They worked with folks like Harriet Tubman to help slaves escape to the North by way of the Underground Railroad - not a real railroad, but a loose network of safe houses and secret routes.

Preaching about the awfulness of slavery was one of the best ways to fight it, and Douglass and Tubman did their best to spread the gospel. They lit a fire inside many a slave to take their freedom.

But it was a hard row to hoe. Even though slavery was dying out up North, it was getting stronger down South. Cotton was the most profitable crop in the country, and plenty of slaves were needed to grow it. To meet the demand for more cotton, tens of thousands of slaves in northern slave states were marched hundreds of miles on foot out west and down the Mississippi River into the Deep South. Pap remembered seeing a group of them tied together like horses to a wagon, marching down the road past his plantation.

New states were being added all the time as Americans started settling in the West. Congress would determine whether or not each new state should allow slavery, and it was *always* a fight. As the country grew in size, so did the tension between North and South. Then in 1854, Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which left it up to the settlers of the new territories to decide whether or not to allow slavery. The new law allowed slavery to exist above the Mason-Dixon Line, the symbolic dividing line between North and South at the border of Maryland and Pennsylvania, which was drawn thirty-four years prior during the Missouri Compromise. This scared the pants off of antislavery folks, because the compromise made it so that slavery would be limited to the South. But now slavery seemed to be on the move. It put a fire in the bellies of abolition folks all over the Union, including a country lawyer named Abraham Lincoln. Because of it, that fellow decided to run for President.

Southern white folks couldn't stand Lincoln. He had often spoken out against the spread of slavery; and southerners were convinced that if he were elected president, it would spell the end to their way of life. It's no wonder why slaves and free black folks took an instant liking to the country lawyer. In him, they saw a chance to put an end to slavery for good. The truth, though, was that Lincoln didn't have any intentions of abolishing slavery and very publically said as much. But southerners didn't believe him.

Slaves on Pap's plantations were following the election closely, eavesdropping on white folks in the streets and at the dinner table. Election Day came and went. Lincoln didn't get a single vote in the South but won the election anyway by winning the popular vote in all but one of the northern states. White folks in the South were spittin' mad; so riled up that seven southern states quit the Union, followed by four others not long after. The states formed their own country, the Confederate States of America, and elected Jefferson Davis their president. President Lincoln demanded they stop all of the foolishness and come back to the Union, but they didn't pay him any mind. The South was fixin' for a fight. And so Lincoln had to give 'em one.

Ch. 3 Reading Response Question:

1. Do you agree with the author when he wrote: "Education is a powerful thing and often made slaves hard to control and likely to run away." Why or why not?
2. What do you think abolitionist Frederick Douglass meant when he said "I expose slavery in this country, because to expose it is to kill it"? What was the goal of Douglass and other abolitionists?
3. How did slavery divide the North and South? Use a quote from the text to support your answer.