

VIEWPOINT 4

"This system is one of robbery and cruel wrong, from beginning to end."

Slavery Is Oppressive

Peter Randolph (1825-1897)

Peter Randolph grew up a slave in Virginia. Emancipated with his fellow slaves upon his owner's death, Randolph settled in Boston and became a preacher. He published and sold *Sketches of a Slave Life*, based on his experiences as a slave, and he later wrote *From the Slave Cabin to the Pulpit: The Autobiography of Rev. Peter Randolph*.

Sketches of a Slave Life, originally published in 1847 and excerpted in this viewpoint, attempted to convince people of the cruelty of slavery and the necessity of its abolition. Randolph describes how slaves are mistreated by owners and overseers, and he attacks observers such as Nehemiah Adams for failing to see the truth about the cruelty of slavery.

The good Anti-Slavery men have very much to contend with, in their exertions for the cause of freedom. Many people will not believe their statements; call them unreasonable and fanatical. Some call them ignorant deceivers, who have never been out of their own home, and yet pretend to a knowledge of what is going on a thousand miles from them. Many call them dangerous members of society, sowing discord and distrust where there should be nought but peace and brotherly love. My Readers! give attention to the simple words of one who knows what he utters is truth; who is no stranger to the *beauties* of slavery or the *generosity* of the slaveholder. Spend a few moments in reading his statement in regard to the system of American slavery. Do not scoff or doubt. He writes what he does know, what he has seen and experienced; for he has been, for twenty-seven years of his life, a

slave; and he here solemnly pledges himself to TRUTH. Not once has he exaggerated, for he could not; the half of the woes and horrors of slavery, his feeble pen could not portray.

This system is one of robbery and cruel wrong, from beginning to end. It robs men and women of their liberty, lives, property, affections, and virtue, as the following pages will show. It is not only a source of misery to those in bonds, but those who fasten the chains are made wretched by it, for a state of war constantly exists between the master and servant. The one would enforce obedience to his every wish, however wrong and unjust; he would exact all the earnings of the slave, to the uttermost farthing. The latter feels the restraint and writhes under it; he sees the injustice, and at times attempts to assert his rights; but he must submit either to the command or the lash; obey implicitly he must.

The argument so often brought forward, that it would be for the interest of the owner to treat his slaves well, and of course he would not injure his own interests, may do for some, but not for the thinking and considerate. When does the angry tyrant reflect upon what, in the end, will be the best for him? To gratify his passion for the moment, to wreak out his revenge upon a helpless mental, is, at the time of excitement, his interest, and he will serve it well. . . .

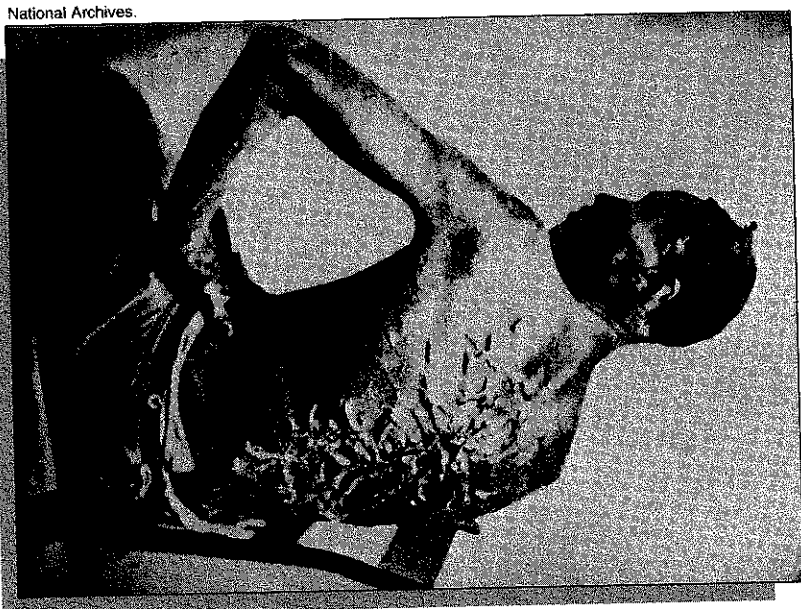
Some will say, "The slaveholder cannot live without the negro; the climate will not permit the white man to toil there." Very well; admit it. Then let him grant to men their rights; make them free citizens; pay them justly for their honest toil, and see the consequences. All would be happier and better. Slavery enriches not the mind, heart, or soil where it abides; it curses and blights everything it comes in contact with. Away, away with, tear up by the roots, these noxious weeds, which choke the growth of all fair plants, and sow in their stead the beautiful flowers of freedom, well watered by the pure waters of religion, and what a rich harvest will be yours!

Personal History

Before going into particulars relative to the horrors of slavery, I will give a little of my own history. I was owned, with eighty-one others, by a man named Edloe, and among them all, only myself could either read or write. . . .

My father did not belong to Edloe, but was owned by a Mr. George Harrison, whose plantation adjoined that of my master. Harrison made my father a slave-driver placing an overseer over him. He was allowed to visit my mother every Wednesday and every Saturday night. This was the time usually given to the slaves to see their wives. My father would often tell my mother

how the white overseer had made him cruelly whip his fellows, until the blood ran down to the ground. All his days he had to follow this dreadful employment of flogging men, women and children, being placed in this helpless condition by the tyranny of his master. I used to think very hard of my father, and that he was a very cruel man; but when I knew that he could not help himself, I could not but alter my views and feelings in regard to his conduct. I was ten years old when he died.



National Archives.

The hideous network of scars on the back of this former slave attests to the severe beatings many slaves endured.

When my father died, he left my mother with five children. We were all young at the time, and mother had no one to help take care of us. Her lot was very hard indeed. She had to work all the day for her owner, and at night for those who were dearer to her than life; for what was allowed her by Edloe was not sufficient for our wants. She used to get a little corn, without his knowledge, and boil it for us to satisfy our hunger. As for clothing, Edloe would give us a coarse suit once in three years; mother sometimes would beg the cast-off garments from the neighbors, to

cover our nakedness; and when they had none to give, she would sit and cry over us, and pray to the God of the widow and fatherless for help and succor. At last, my oldest brother was sold from her, and carried where she never saw him again. She went mourning for him all her days, like a bird robbed of her young,—like Rachel bereft of her children, who would not be comforted, because they were not. She departed this life on the 27th of September, 1847, for that world “where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.” . . .

The Hours for Work

The slave goes to his work when he sees the daybreak in the morning, and works until dark at night. The slaves have their food carried to them in the field; they have one half hour to eat it in, in the winter, and one hour in the summer. Their time for eating is about eight in the morning, and one in the afternoon. Sometimes, they have not so much time given to them. The overseer stands by them until they have eaten, and then he orders them to work.

The slaves return to their huts at night, make their little fires, and lie down until they are awakened for another day of toil. No beds are given them to sleep on; if they have any, they find themselves. The women and the men all have to work on the farms together; they must fare alike in slavery. Husbands and wives must see all that happens to each other, and witness the sufferings of each. They must see their children polluted, without the power to prevent it. . . .

House Slaves

When the slave-master owns a great many slaves, ten or a dozen are always employed to wait on himself and family. They are not treated so cruelly as the field slaves; they are better fed and wear better clothing, because the master and his family always expect to have strangers visit them, and they want their servants to look well. These slaves eat from their master's table, wear broadcloth and calico; they wear ruffled-bosomed shirts, too,—such as Doctor Nehemiah Adams declares he saw while on his visit to the South, where he became so much in love with the “peculiar institution.” These slaves, although dressed and fed better than others, have to suffer alike with those whose outward condition is worse. They are much to be compared to galvanized watches, which shine and resemble gold, but are far from being the true metal; so with these slaves who wait upon their masters at table—their broadcloth and calico look fine, but you may examine their persons, and find many a lash upon their flesh. They are sure of their whippings, and are sold the same as others.

Sometimes their masters change, and put them on the farm, that the overseers may whip them. Among those who wait upon the master, there is always one to watch the others, and report them to him. This slave is treated as well as his master, because it is for the master's interest that he does this. This slave he always carries with him when he visits the North; particularly such slaves as cannot be made to leave their master, because they are their master's watch-dog at home. So master can trust them. Before leaving, master always talks very kindly to them, and promises something very great for a present, if they are true to him until his return.

Slaves and the Irish People

Born a slave, Frederick Douglass escaped to freedom and became one of the foremost black leaders of his time. This excerpt is taken from a collection of his speeches entitled Lectures on American Slavery and originally published in 1851.

It is often said, by the opponents of the Anti-Slavery cause, that the condition of the people of Ireland is more deplorable than that of the American slaves. Far be it from me to underrate the sufferings of the Irish people. They have been long oppressed; and the same heart that prompts me to plead the cause of the American bondman, makes it impossible for me not to sympathize with the oppressed of all lands. Yet I must say that there is no analogy between the two cases. The Irishman is poor, but he is not a slave. He may be in rags, but he is not a slave. He is still the master of his own body, and can say with the poet, "The hand of Douglass is his own."

These slaves know what they must say when asked as to their treatment at home, and of the treatment of their fellows. They leave their wives, their mothers, brothers and sisters, and children, toiling and being driven and whipped by the overseer, and tortured and insulted on every occasion.

Deception of the Slaveholder

All the slaves, as well as their owners, are addicted to drinking, so when the slaveholder wants to make a show of his niggers, (as he calls them,) he gives them rum to drink.

When the master knows a Northern man is to visit him, he gives orders to the overseer, and the overseer orders every slave to dress himself, and appear on the field. If the slaves have any best, they must put it on. Perhaps a man has worked hard, extra times all the year, and got his wife a fourpenny gown,—she must put it on, and go to the field to work. About the time the stranger is expected, a jug of rum is sent to the field, and every slave has

just enough given him to make him act as if he was crazy.

When such a stranger as Rev. Dr. Adams appears with the master, he does not see the negroes, but the rum that is in them; and when he hears their hurrahs, and sees their Jim-Crow actions, he takes it for granted that they are as happy as need be, and their condition could not be bettered.

The owner gives the visitor liberty to ask his "niggers" questions. He will ask them if they love their master, or wish to leave him. Poor slave will say, he would not leave his master for the world; but O, my reader! just let the poor slave get off, and he would be in Canada very soon, where the slaveholder dare not venture.

The slaves do not speak for themselves. The slaveholding master and his rum are working in their heads, speaking for slavery; and this is the way the slaveholder deceives his friend from the North.

Flogging

For whipping the slaves in Virginia, there are no rules. The slave receives from the slaveholder from fifty to five hundred lashes. The slave-owner would think fifty stripes an insult to the slave. If the slave is let off with fifty lashes, he must show a very good temper. Men, women, and children must be whipped alike on their bare backs, it being considered an honor to whip them over their clothes. The slaves are placed in a certain position when they are flogged, with sufficient management to hold them very still, so they cannot work their hands or feet, while they are "wooding them up," as they call it in Virginia.

Some of the slaves have to lie down on their stomachs, flat on the ground, and stretched out so as to keep their skin tight for the lash and thus lie until they receive as much as they choose to put on; if they move, they must receive so many lashes extra. When the slaveholder expects to give his slave five hundred lashes, he gives him about half at a time; then washes him down with salt and water, and then gives him the remainder of what he is to have. At such times, the slave-owner has his different liquors to drink, while he is engaged in draining the blood of the slave. So he continues to drink his rum and whip his victim. When he does not flog his victims on the ground, they are tied by their hands, and swung up to a great tree, just so the end of their toes may touch the ground. In this way, they receive what number of lashes they are destined to. The master has straw brought that the blood may not touch his shoes. Ah, reader! this is true, every word of it. The poor slave is whipped till the blood runs down to the earth, and then he must work all day, cold or hot, from week's end to

week's end. There are hundreds of slaves who change their skins nearly as often as they have a new suit of clothes....

Food and Clothing

I shall now show what the slaves have to eat and wear. They have one pair of shoes for the year; if these are worn out in two months, they get no more that year, but must go barefooted the rest of the year, through cold and heat. The shoes are very poor ones, made by one of the slaves, and do not last more than two or three months. One pair of stockings is allowed them for the year, when these are gone, they have no more, although it is cold in Virginia for five months. They have one suit of clothes for the year. This is very poor indeed, and made by the slaves themselves on the plantation. It will not last more than three months, and then the poor slave gets no more from the slaveholder, if he go naked. This suit consists of one shirt, one pair of pants, one pair of socks, one pair of shoes, and no vest at all. The slave has a hat given him once in two years; when this is worn out, he can no more from the slaveholder, but must go bareheaded till he can get one somewhere else. Perhaps the slave will get him a skin of some kind, and make him a hat.

The food of the slaves is this: Every Saturday night, they receive two pounds of bacon, and one peck and a half of corn meal, to last the men through the week. The women have one half peck of meat, and one peck of meal, and the children one half peck each. When this is gone, they can have no more till the end of the week. This is very little food for the slaves. They have to beg when they can; when they cannot, they must suffer. They are not allowed to go off the plantation; if they do, and are caught, they are whipped very severely; and what they have begged is taken from them....

City and Town Slaves

The slaves in the cities (Petersburg, Richmond and Norfolk, in Virginia) do not fare so hard as on the plantations, where they have farming work to do. Most of the town and city slaves are hired out, to bring in money to their owners. They often have the privilege of hiring themselves out, by paying their owners so much, at stated times,—say once a week, or once a month. Many of them are employed in factories and work at trades. They do very well, for if they are industrious, they can earn considerably more than is exacted of them by their owners. All can dress well, have comfortable homes, and many can read and write. Many of them lay up money to purchase either their own freedom or that of some dear one. These slaves are not subjected to the lash as the poor creatures upon the plantations are, for their owners would

feel (as every man should feel, in the true sense) their dignity fallen, their nobility sullied, by raising the whip over their human property.

Cruelty and Chance

Lydia Maria Child wrote numerous books, pamphlets, and articles for the abolitionist movement including the one that is excerpted here. An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans, published in 1836.

The following occurred near Natchez, and was told to me by a highly intelligent man, who, being a diplomatist and a courtier, was very likely to make the best of national evils: A planter had occasion to send a female slave some distance on an errand. She did not return so soon as he expected, and he grew angry. At last he gave orders that she should be severely whipped when she came back. When the poor creature arrived, she pleaded for mercy, saying she had been so very ill, that she was obliged to rest in the fields; but she was ordered to receive another dozen lashes, for having had the impudence to speak. She died at the whipping-post; nor did she perish alone—a new-born baby died with her. The gentleman who told me this fact, witnessed the poor creature's funeral. It is true, the master was universally blamed and shunned for the cruel deed; but the laws were powerless.

I shall be told that such examples as these are of rare occurrence; and I have no doubt that instances of excessive severity are far from being common. I believe that a large proportion of masters are as kind to their slaves as they can be, consistently with keeping them in bondage; but it must be allowed that this, to make the best of it, is very stunted kindness. And let it never be forgotten that the negro's fate depends entirely on the character of his master; and it is a mere matter of chance whether he fall into merciful or unmerciful hands; his happiness, nay, his very life, depends on chance.

Slavery, as seen here by the casual observer, might be supposed not to be so hard as one would imagine, after all the outcry of philanthropists, who "sit in their chimney-corners amid the Northern hills, and conjure up demoniac shapes and fiendish spirits, bearing the name of slaveholders." But Slavery is *Slavery*, wherever it is found. Dress it up as you may, in the city or on the plantation, the human being must feel that which binds him to another's will. Be the fetters of silk, or hemp, or iron, all alike warp the mind and goad the soul.

The city slave may escape the evil eye and cruel lash of the overseer, but if he offend the all-important master, there is retribution for him. "Hand this note to Capt. Heart," (of Norfolk,) or Capt. Thwing," (of Petersburg,)—and well does the shrinking

slave know what is to follow. These last-mentioned gentlemen give their time to, and improve their talents by, laying the lash upon the naked backs of men and women!

Ah, my readers! take what side you will of slavery,—Dr. Adams's "South side," or the Abolitionist's North side,—there is but *one side*, and that is dark, *dark*. You may think you see bright spots, but look at the surroundings of those spots, and you will see nothing but gloom and darkness. While toiling industriously, and living with a dear family in comparative comfort and happiness, the city slave (whose lot is thought to be so easy) suddenly finds himself upon the auction-block, knocked down to the highest bidder, and carried far and forever from those dearer to him than life; a beloved wife, and tender, helpless children are all bereft, in a moment, of husband, father and protector, by a fate worse than death,—and for what? To gratify some spirit of revenge, or add to the weight of the already well-filled purse of some *Christian white man*, who professes ownership in his fellow-man. Wretch! you may command, for a season, the bones and sinews of that brother, so infinitely your superior; but, remember! that form is animated by a never-dying spirit; it will not always slumber; a God of infinite love and justice reigns over all, and beholds your unholy, inhuman traffic! Believe you, justice will triumph, the guilty shall not go unpunished on the earth; the righteous are to be recompensed, *much more the wicked and the sinner*.

VIEWPOINT 5

"We had such a good time, and everybody cried when the Yankees cried out: 'Free.'"

A Positive Reminiscence of Slavery

Millie Evans (1849?—?)

Millie Evans was a slave in North Carolina from the time of her birth around 1849 until the Civil War. She was interviewed in 1936 as part of the slave narrative program of the Federal Writers' Project, which in the 1930s interviewed hundreds of ex-slaves between the ages of 75 and 100. B.A. Botkin, director of the project, later compiled and edited these narratives into a collection titled *Lay My Burden Down*.

In the following viewpoint, Evans describes her life under slavery. She emphasizes what she remembered as positive aspects of slave life, including the kindness of her masters and the difficulties she endured following emancipation.

Was born in 1849, but I don't know just when. My birthday comes in fodder-pulling time 'cause my ma said she was pulling up till 'bout a hour 'fore I was born. Was born in North Carolina and was a young lady at the time of surrender.

I don't 'member Old Master's name; all I 'member is that we call 'em Old Master and Old Mistress. They had 'bout a hundred niggers, and they was rich. Master always tended the men, and Mistress tended to us.

Better Living Then

Every morning 'bout four 'clock Old Master would ring the bell for us to git up by, and you could hear that bell ringing all over the plantation. I can hear it now. It would go ting-a-ling, ting-a-