

WHY RENAMING CONFEDERATE NAMED STREETS IS IMPORTANT

Ed Sebesta 12/20/2017

The slaves suffered, cruelly, horribly, in terror, and they suffered by the millions in imaginable and unimaginable ways. They were whipped, beat, burnt, immolated, tortured, lacerated, exhausted to death, and subjected to all cruelties which the human mind can imagine. They had their children, their parents, their wives, their husbands sold away or were sold away from them. Their mothers, their daughters, their wives were raped. They were worked to an early death.

Unfortunately there is a type of forgetting where this suffering, an integral part of America's history, is boxed away in our thinking and abstracted and otherwise faded out from our thinking.

To help the reader remember, remember in a way in which they can feel and empathize, to remember in a way that doesn't lead to abstraction and a type of forgetting I present these accounts of slaves suffering.

Don't skip over these accounts. They are exercises in remembering and we need to remember.

Slaves were whipped and brine or salt rubbed into their wounds. This account is from the book, "An Empire for Slavery," by Randolph B. Campbell. It is an account of a whipping by a white women which she remembered from her childhood. The quote is as in the original in the language of this white woman with its racist terminology, but I have kept it because the terminology is also a part of the raw historical experience. They were not considered human.

"This white man was whipping him and the blood was all over this nigger and he was saying "o, master, o, master, I pray you not to hit me any more. Oh, Lordy, oh, Lordy, has mercy on me. Master, please has mercy on me, please has mercy." But this man wouldn't stop a minute and spits tobacco juice and cuss him and then starts in whipping him again. This nigger was jumping around on the ground all tied up, just like a chicken when you chops his head off when this man was whipping him and when the white folks would stop awhile this nigger would lay there and roll from side to side and beg for mercy.

I runs off a good piece when this white folks started whipping him and stopped and looks back at him, I was so scared that I just stood there and watched him till he quit. Then he tells some of the slaves to wash him off and put salt in the cut places and he stood there to watch them to see that they did. He was chewing his tobacco, spitting and cussing that nigger and when they gets him washed off and puts salt in the raw places he sure did scream and groan.

But when he groaned they just keeping putting the salt in to the wounds on his poor old beat up body.

The first thing that I know my father was patting me on the back and said, "Honey, you better run along home now," and I sure did and I didn't go back over there anymore. That was the only slave I ever saw get a whipping."¹

They were torn up by dogs. This is from "Slave Testimony," edited by John W. Blassingame. Spelling as in the original.

My name is Tom Wilson. I arrived here in a ship called the Metropolis, Captain Foster. ... I belonged to Colonel Barr, of Woodford, Mississippi. There I had a wife and three children, besides having another child which died. I was sold by auction, by major Baird's auctioneer, for \$2,500, and was taken down to New Orleans, away from my wife and children, and I hav'n't seen them since. Shortly after I got there, Mr. Fastman's overseer, Burke, commenced to ill-use me. I didn't understand typing the cotton; it was new to me, and I was awkward, so I was flogged. They used to tie me down across a cotton bale, and give me 200 or 300 with a leather strap. I am marked with the whip from the angle-bone to the crown of my head. Some years before I was sold down from Mississippi, the overseer there, because I resisted punishment once, cut my right arm across the muscle, and then had it stitched up. He did that, as he said, to weaken me, because I was too strong in the arm.

About a year and a half after I had been in New Orleans, I ran into the woods. I was followed by Burke and a pack of bloodhounds into the Baddenrush swamp. The dogs soon caught me. They tore my legs and body with their teeth. Here are the marks yet. ... He rode up to me with his gun, and shot me in the hip with 14 buck-shot, which can be seen and examined at any time. The dogs continued to pin me with their teeth.

After that I knowed nothing about what they did to me for about a week. When I got a little strong, they burned my back with a red hot iron, and my legs with strong turpentine, to punish me for escaping.

Not surprisingly in Wilson's account of his escape, when he talks about being pursued by alligators in the swamp, he says, "*I had several times to climb up trees to escape them; but I felt safer among the alligators than among the white men.*"²

This is from Blassingame's, "Slave Testimony," also.

"I was sold at auction in the city of St. Louis," said Mills, "on the east side of the Court House in 1847. ... My two brothers and my sister and her three children were sold at the same time and place. My brother James brought a higher price than I did, although he was younger. I was sold by Joseph F. Grove, of Saline county, Mo. To William Penn, of this city, located at the corner of Vine and Fourth streets. Men who had trades frequently brought as much as \$1,200 and \$1,500. The made us strip and examined us for broken bones and deformities; also to see if we had been whipped much.

They opened our mouths and looked at our teeth, just as a horse buyer does. When a negro was put on the block he had to help sell himself by telling what he could do. If he refused to praise himself and acted sullen, he was sure to be stripped and given thirty lashes. Frequently a man was compelled to exaggerate his accomplishments, and when his buyer found he could not do what he said he could he would be beaten unmercifully. It was pretty sure to be a thrashing either way.

....

Yes, I saw some pretty hard things during slave times. At Glasgow, Mo., I saw a woman sold away from her husband. She had a two months' old baby in her arms and was crying. A driver asked her what she was bellowing about. She said she didn't want to leave her husband. He told her to shut up, but she couldn't and he snatched her little baby from here and threw it into a pen full of hogs. ³

From, "American Slavery As It is," edited by Theodore Dwight Weld is this account by a Dr. Nelson.

"I was one day dressing a blister and the mistress of the house sent a little black girl into the kitchen to bring me some warm water. She probably mistook her message; for she returned with a bowl full of boiling water; which her mistress no sooner perceived than thrust her hand into it, and held it there till it was half cooked."⁴

Ultimately the issue of streets named after Confederates is this:

If we have any humanity we can't but recognize the humanity of the slaves and the inhumanity of their suffering. If we remember, if we avoid forgetting, if we are humane, then the inhumanity, the horror, of the treatment of the slaves is abhorrent, and a street named after someone who fought for slavery, fought to continue these horrors and terrors is **intolerable**.

To find a Confederate name street tolerable is to not recognize the humanity of the slaves and to not care about the inhumanity of their suffering. It has to be asked why they don't care about the inhumanity of their suffering.

The Mayfair condominiums in Dallas are on Lee Parkway named after Robert E. Lee and borders the west side of what was formerly Robert E. Lee Park. No less than six residents went down to city hall to complain about the streets name being changed including the president of the Mayfair home owners association. A small group of us later picketed the Mayfair.

A person walking their dog in front of the Mayfair decided to talk to us and tell us of what they thought were more important matters which the person suggested were more important than getting rid of Confederate street names such as picking up trash in the

parks. How trivializing, how devaluing of the humanity of the slaves and their suffering is this!

Better that every Dallas park be bestrewn with garbage and trash, the streets of Dallas littered with trash, than us forgetting the humanity and suffering of the slaves.

For in forgetting the humanity and suffering of the slaves we lose our humanity.

¹ “An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865,” by Randolph B. Campbell, Louisiana State University, 1991. The original source is *Am. Slave. Supp. Ser. 2, IV*, 1120-22, (Mollie Dawson.) Account is on page 147.

² “Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies,” Edited by John W. Blassingame, Louisiana State University. Account on page 338.

³ “Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies,” Edited by John W. Blassingame, Louisiana State University. Account on pages 502-504.

⁴ “American Slavery As It Is,” edited by Theodore Dwight Weld, originally published American Anti-Slavery Society in 1839. This is an account by Dr. Nelson on page 220 of a reprint by the University of North Carolina DocSouth Edition. The original version can be downloaded as a PDF from www.archive.org.

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