



**Voices from the Days of Slavery:
Stories, Songs and Memories – Wallace Quarterman (transcript)**

LC ANNOUNCEMENT: From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: [Sings “*I Surrender*”]

*Oh, let me come on i-in.
I surrender, and open the door.
Let me come in open up.
Yeah, let me come i-inn.
Oh, let me come i-i-i-innn.
I surrender, yes open the door, and let me come in.
I said baby, don't you cry,
mothers and father are born to die.
I surrender.*

Born in 1844.

MARY ELIZABETH BARNICLE: What's your name?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: My name is Wallace Quarterman, in and through the state of Georgia.

AFC ANNOUNCEMENT: Welcome to the American Folklife Center’s podcast series, “Voices from the Days of Slavery: Stories, Songs and Memories.” Drawn from the unique collections of the Center’s Archive, the series presents first-person accounts of African Americans whose experiences spanned the last years of slavery. They were recorded during the 1930’s and 1940’s, most often for the large-scale documentation projects sponsored by New Deal agencies during and after the Great Depression. Many of these recordings survive only as fragments and the audio quality occasionally suffers due to the deterioration of the original recorded media. Nevertheless, the compelling voices of these individuals transport the listener to a defining period in this country’s history. In this interview from 1935, Mr. Wallace Quarterman of St. Simons Island, Georgia, recalls the last days of slavery for Zora Neale Hurston, Alan Lomax, and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle of the Library of Congress.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: ...Morning I was toting in breakfast in the house. And the... the big gun shot-- suppose to have. The big gun shot so I buy a [unclear] take back within the house. The overseer ask me: "What is that... if that isn't thunder?" I tell him I don't know. I know what the Yankees.... [background noise] I'm sorry.

ALAN LOMAX: That's all right.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: ...three time and he commence to shoot until the plate commence to rattle on the table. And he call me and told me to run down in the field and tell Peter to turn the people loose, that the Yankees coming. And so I run down in the field and... and I whooped and holler. They done... he done told them Mr. [unclear] said turn the people loose because the Yankees coming.

ALAN LOMAX: And who was Peter?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: The driver. And so he said that Wallace is lying if he...he said so, then he said so, then the Yankee [beat to the landing the drum (?)]. You understand? [recites]

*Way down South getting mighty poor.
Say they used to drink coffee, but now they drinking rye.
They said left ... band [unclear]
Make the rebel understand.
To leave our land for the sake of Uncle Sam.
Way down South getting might poor.
Shot at the wildcat and see the Rebel run.*

I ain't going [over there and see the ...]. I've been to war already ...yeah, yeah.

And ... the people then throws away their hoe then. They throwed away their hoes, and...and they call we all up, you know and... and give we all freedom, said we are just as much as free as them now, you understand. But the Yankees saying we must go back to the South... they'll help we. Well they didn't. Of course there was so much doubt, and [it seems an easy way?]...they would have done more, but it was so much doubt in the way. They couldn't because the colored people sure been poor, and some white people sure been poor, too. You understand? And they rather help them [white people] than help we. I satisfied so far, for the Lord has done for me, I come through...through all the....been up and downs through the ...

ALAN LOMAX] All right now!

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: After they said you can go free, then what did you do? Did you run on off the plantation that day? Did you leave the plantation that day after they told you to go free?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Well, that day master promised so... to give we forty dollars a month in pay. Well, lots of the boys said they ain't want it. They'd rather go free, you know.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Hmm-hmm.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Well, of course, why I have them pay us, you understand? I get along with them, you know. He brought out the big pot, you know. [loud thump]

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: And .. after they, after they [Confederate soldiers] throwed down, throwed ... they just make them throw their swords down, and they just get on their swords and squash them down. You go in Hawkinsville and you see all the swords down now in the ground...

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: And after the sword was down... the tension... in the South..[there was] tension. And after the South... tension... then they play. Yeah...play... [sings "Kingdom Coming"]

*One foot one way.
One foot the other way.
One foot all around.
Jumping... standing.
Couldn't cut a figure.
And he couldn't go halfway around.
Old master run aw-a-a-a-y.
And set them darkies free.
For you must be think thy kingdom a coming in the hour of jubilee.*

So we had a big breaking up right there, you know, after it! That's right!

ALAN LOMAX: What about afterwards? You know when the... when the colored people had the jailer and everything? Tell us about that.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Yes...everything been in we hand. But they couldn't control the colored people. They do so much mischief until we have to go on back and tell the white people we had education. You know when a man ain't got no education he ain't got no sense. All we tried to show them, they wouldn't take it... they just kill one another and going on. So we had to nominate democrat over their head. They didn't like it... the many got killed by nominate the democrat, but we couldn't help it, to stop them so much killing. You understand?

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Uhmm.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: So we nominate the democrat, and we had a big time from that till now. The time ain't bad because we been then. Because a man think nothing about killing a man and taking a drink of water. But since we nominate the democrat we have more assurance. You understand.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: The law come in protecting them, you know, they wouldn't yell [(?)] at the colored people.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yeah.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: At all, ma'am, at all. Yes. And that's the way they come in and protect them. But we had we own lawyers, judge and everything, well they just would, run everything in the dust, you know.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Kill everything. Couldn't stand it. No, no--

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Well, did you ever have a office? Did you, would you ever, did you ever hold office?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: I wouldn't want an office.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Oh, yeah?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: No ma'am. I'm a man. I wouldn't want an office. An office [unclear] kind of thing. You understand. You got to go and please the.. the fellow, you know.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: You got to stop do what God tell you and go please that fellow!

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: And that's right there where you left out.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: But what became of your old master?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Old master? He died in the yellow fever. He was a nice man to me.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: I wouldn't take anything from him.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: What was his name?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Colonel Fred Weary [unclear].

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Fred Weary [unclear].

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Yes. And he was a colonel. I wouldn't take anything... why, me and he was just like one, you know.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Yes, ma'am.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Well, where was his plantation?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: His plantation on.. on Savannah River. You know, Skidaway Island? And he had another one...Chatham County, you know,. Savannah.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yeah.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Skidaway Island. I wouldn't take nothing from him.

ALAN LOMAX: Well, did the white folks like it when you all were in power?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Oh, they liked me. They would like me all the way, because I protect them, you know.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: I protect them... I told them, I told them... the Yankee myself and they didn't feel sorry for them, you know. You see, I just would understand how they think, you know.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Tell me things you know. I see a man going a do a wrong thing I should stop it though. I stop him. Why...

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Well, did the white people, did your master and all them, like to see the Negroes be the judge and the jailer and everything?

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Whooo! You see according to law, you know, they don't mind you be that, I mean, if you know what you doing. Don't you see?

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yes.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: Yeah. We... you see, they... they don't know what they doing.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: Yeah.

WALLACE QUARTERMAN: And they prove that they don't know.

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AFC ANNOUNCEMENT: That concludes this program in the American Folklife Center's podcast series, "Voices from the Days of Slavery: Stories, Songs and Memories." This episode was produced and edited by Guha Shankar, American Folklife

Center and Lisa Carl, North Carolina Central University. The audio engineer was Jonathan Gold, American Folklife Center. The website for the online collection, “Voices from the Days of Slavery: Former Slaves Tell Their Stories,” was developed by John Barton and the Library’s American Memory Project team. To hear and read the unedited version of **Wallace Quarterman**’s story, along with other personal accounts of former slaves, please visit the Library of Congress website - [“memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/).

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