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## **Interview, Charles Griffin, Ex-Slave 100 Years Old Now Living in Orlando, Florida, May 18, 1937**

Charles Griffin

Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Florida

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CHARLES GRIVIN  
(Ex-slave, 100 years old  
Now living at Orlando, Florida)

"My Master's name was McKinna an' he was a big officer in de war. He had 12 plantations. Him an' old Judge White were partners an' dey had more niggers'n any eight men in de whole state of Virginia. He had so many niggers you couldn't even begin to count 'em.

"I was borned in Richmond, Virginia. My father died a'fore I was borned and my mother died 'bout six weeks after I was borned an' den my Master taken me to raise.

"I 'members once my Master wanted to know how many niggers he had on de plantation an' I 'members all de women standin' in rows id all de chillen lined up. Man alive, nobody don't know how many niggers he had, he had so many.

"Some overseers were bad, bad, but not ours. He was a pretty fair fellow an' pretty good to us niggers. We made plenty of crops an' we had plenty. Eatin' was powerful good an' we had clothes. I don't 'member what kind, but we had clothes. My Master had overseers and nigger drivers. Each man would do so much work and den de overseer would write it all

down in a big book so as to know how much each nigger was doin'. Every nigger in hoein' cotton time was s'posed to chop one acre a day.

"De niggers lived in de quarters built somethin' like a town with de houses close together and with roads runnin' 'tween de rows of buildings. We had a big bell somethin' like a church bell what rung every mornin' 'fore day, den dat same bell ring 'bout jus' 'fore sun-rise for to go to de field and 'cepin' you sick you better be dar.

"De niggers dey have church every Sunday but de house servants go to de white peoples church an' sit in de back on benches an' taken care of de chilluns for de white missus.

"I was borned on de twenty-sixth day of November 1833, an' if de Lord lets me live 'til November de twenty-sixth of 1937 I'll be one hundred an' one years old. I have never been sick in all de days of my life but now I'se gettin' pretty old an' can't do much as I used to. In de war people was dyin' all round me but I never was sick a single day. I didn't know dem diseases was catchin'.

"My Master was an officer in de Army an' I went with him. He was wounded in de las' battle that was fought an' after de war was over he went to de hospital in Saint Louis and was dere ten whole months. I went dere with him and nursed him all de time and stayed with him right on to his death. He done died in Quincy, Florida, de seventeenth day of January 1863.

"There's nothin' in de world dat I love like I did my Master. After his death my two young masters went off —.

"Once I 'members hearin' my Master ask some of de other officers how old would a nigger have to be 'fore he could be taken to de Army as a body servant and dey told him 21. It was in 1861 when he got entitled to go to de war, so we went dere and was dere a good little while. I was dere in Richmond when General Grant taken Richmond and General Lee an' General Grant shaken hands with a lion-claw grip and look each other straight in de eye an' den de flag of de South went down. Dey went down all over de country, I guess, all de flags of de South. My Master stepped back and shouted in a loud voice, "It ain't fair"; an' he proved it to you too. He was a man of his promise. Yes sir, you ought to love my Master sleepin' in his grave right now.

"My Master told me one night at de supper table, dat I was 26 years old dat night, an' dat it was my birthday an' I was free and could vote as I liked. I 'members every word my Master said to me, an' I spoke words with my Mistress.

"After my Master died dey put this watch in my hands. I didn't know he was a goin' to will it to me 'til after he was dead. His father gave it to him when he was 21 years old an' he (grandfather) had it a'fore he was married to de grandmother. De young masters gave it to me. After my Master died I took on so much den when I knew my two young Masters were gone 'way. I thought maybe dey was at relatives or somthin'.

Every time I was sent to the post office or somethin' I would go jus' as straight as I could to my Master's grave. I was so bad they thought they would have to send me off somewhere.

"Once when we went to Jacksonville we went to de hotel where Mr. Winslow was at. My young masters was dere and dey said to me, 'Let me see dat watch, nigger.' An' dey said it would take a long while for dem to look at it. He stayed dere for 'bout ten days an' den dey gave me back my watch an' said, "'Look here, nigger.' Inside dey had had written my Master's name an' to me with de date of 1904. You see I was a Mason so dey had de emblem printed on there too." (He showed the watch, old and scratched, in a big thick silver case about five inches across and two thick) "It's jes' like me now. We is old an' I don't wind it up all de time. I'se jus' like de watch an' don't care what time it is. I don't need to know nohow.

"On de eighteenth day of August in 1925 I hit my head on de corner of de sink. I was settin' near it jes' about like I am from dat wall now. An' when I hit my head I saw my Master jus' as plain as I can see you all now. He told me why he done give me dat watch. He say he know I loved him better'n' anythin' in the world an' dat he would give me de watch. An' he say dat he give it to me so I would have somethin' to take care of me in my old age. He say I could sell it for \$30 an' two dollars an' a half worth of groceries every week for 26 weeks. An' den it will be my time to go.

I know jus' 'zakley how long I'se gona live. 'Cause when I sells dis here watch I will live 'zakley twenty-six more weeks.

"If my Master told you he was gona do a thing he would do it, if he didn't die, and if he said no you couldn't change his mind nohow noway. One time my Master say to me:

"If a person has faith, he will have confidence, and confidence creates a trust. Dis here trust will make you get a-long. I'm goin' 'way now and am sendin' you out in dis cruel an' wicked world, where you will find many things dat go 'gainst you but you mus' take it to de Lord in prayer."

"Yes sir, de white people is jus' like de Lord, dey always was an' dey always will be."