

Documents from the Ante-Bellum South: Two accounts of slavery

Document A is a song composed by slaves in the South prior to the Civil War. Document B is part of a fictional novel written by a southerner in the 1830s meant to demonstrate the virtues of the slave system.

A. Go Down, Moses. Song composed by slaves from the Ante-Bellum South.

When Israel was in Egypt's land
Let my people go
Oppressed so hard they could not stand
Let my people go

No more shall they in bondage toil,
Let my people go,
Let them come out with Egypt's spoil,
Let my people go.

O let us all from bondage flee,
Let my people go,
And let us all in Christ be free,
Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land
Tell ol' Pharaoh, Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land
Tell ol' Pharaoh, Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land
Tell ol' Pharaoh, Let my people go.

Thus saith the Lord, bold Moses said,
Let my people go,
If not, I'll smite your first-born dead,
Let my people go.

The Lord told Moses what to do,
Let my people go,
To lead the Hebrew children through,
Let my people go.

We need not always weep and mourn,
Let my people go,
And wear these slavery chains forlorn,
Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land
Tell ol' Pharaoh, Let my people go.

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Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land
Tell ol' Pharaoh, Let my people go.

B Excerpts from *Swallow Barn* by John Pendleton Kennedy, 1851

taking instruction from history, all organized slavery is inevitably but a temporary phase of human condition. Interest, necessity and instinct, all work to give progression to the relations of mankind, and finally to elevate each tribe or race to its maximum of refinement and power. We have no reason to suppose that the negro will be an exception to this law.

At present, I have said, he is parasitical. He grows upward, only as the vine to which nature has supplied the sturdy tree as a support. He is extravagantly imitative. The older negroes here have—with some spice of comic mixture in it—that formal, grave and ostentatious style of manners, which belonged to the gentlemen of former days; they are profuse of bows and compliments, and very aristocratic in their way. The younger ones are equally to be remarked for aping the style of the present time, and especially for such tags of dandyism in dress as come within their reach. Their fondness for music and dancing is a predominant passion. I never meet a negro man—unless he is quite old—that he is not whistling; and the women sing from morning till night. And as to dancing, the hardest day's work does not restrain their desire to indulge in such pastime. During the harvest, when their toil is pushed to its utmost—the time being one of recognized privileges—they dance almost the whole night. They are great sportsmen, too. They angle and haul the seine, and hunt and tend their traps, with a zest that never grows weary. Their gayety of heart is constitutional and perennial, and when they are together they are as voluble and noisy as so many blackbirds. In short, I think them the most good-natured, careless, light-hearted, and happily-constructed human beings I have ever

seen. Having but few and simple wants, they seem to me to be provided with every comfort which falls within the ordinary compass of their wishes; and, I might say, that they find even more enjoyment,—as that word may be applied to express positive pleasures scattered through the course of daily occupation—than any other laboring people I am acquainted with.

(Accessed on 11.15.16 at <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abfijpka3t.html>)

	A. Go Down Moses	B. Swallow Barn
1. How does each document describe what life was like under slavery? Explain in your own words.		
2. Provide two examples from each document supporting the view of slavery proposed by each Example 1 (quote)		
Example 2 (quote)		
3. What does each document state or imply are the intellectual and moral capacities of the people who were slaves? Explain in your own words.		
4. Provide an example from each document supporting this assessment of the intellectual and moral capacities of the people who were slaves.		
5. What was likely the reason for writing each document?		
6. What is the value of this document to historians of this era?		
7. What are the problems of this document as a source of evidence for historians studying this era?		