

## “No Such Thing as Rest”

Solomon Northrup was a free black who was kidnapped in New York and sold into slavery for twelve years. He was finally returned to freedom. In the following selection he describes how cotton was raised on his Louisiana plantation. Read the passage and answer the following questions.



The hands are required to be in the cotton field as soon as it is light in the morning, and, with the exception of ten or fifteen minutes, which is given them at noon to swallow their allowance of cold bacon, they are not permitted to be a moment idle until it is too dark to see, and when the moon is full, they often times labor till the middle of the night. They do not dare to stop even at dinner time, nor return to the quarters, however late it be, until the order to halt is given by the driver.

The day's work over in the field, the baskets are carried to the gin-house, where the cotton is weighed. No matter how fatigued and weary he may be - - no matter how much he longs for sleep and rest - a slave never approaches the gin-house with his basket of cotton but with fear. If it falls short in weight - - if he has not performed the full task appointed him, he knows that he must suffer. And if he has exceeded it by ten or twenty pounds, in all probability his master will measure the next day's task accordingly. So, whether he has too little or too much, his approach to the gin-house is always with fear and trembling. Most frequently they have too little, and therefore it is they are not anxious to leave the field. After weighing, follow the whippings; and then the baskets are carried to the cotton house, and their contents stored away like hay, all hands being sent in to tramp it down.

This done, the labor of the day is not yet ended, by any means. Each one must then attend to his respective chores. One feeds the mules, another the swine - - another cuts the wood, and so forth all done by candle light. Finally, at a late hour, they reach the quarters, sleepy and overcome with the long day's toil. Then a fire must be kindled in the cabin, the corn ground in the small hand-mill, and supper, and dinner for the next day in the field, prepared. All that is allowed them is corn and bacon. Each one receives, as his weekly allowance, three and a half pounds of bacon, and corn enough to make a peck of meal. That is all - - no tea, coffee, sugar, no salt....

An hour before day light the horn is blown. Then the slaves arouse, prepare their breakfast, fill a gourd with water, and hurry to the field again. It is an offense invariably followed by a flogging, to be found at the quarters after daybreak. Then the fears and labors of another day begin; and until its close there is no such thing as rest....



No Such Thing as Rest” Questions

Directions: Use information from the passage to answer the following questions.

1. How is a typical day for a slave on a cotton plantation BEST described?
  - A. One with extended active hours
  - B. One dominated by work
  - C. One absent of personal choices
  - D. All of the Above
2. Why did a slave “approach the gin house with fear”?

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3. Using the underlined portion, why would a slave be worried even if they had collected a large amount of cotton?
  - A. If a slave picked too much cotton, other slaves would resent them
  - B. If a slave picked too much cotton they would be punished
  - C. If a slave picked too much cotton, they would be required to pick even more the next day
  - D. If a slave picked too much cotton, they would receive the next day off
4. Based on the context, provide a synonym for the term ‘quarters’ and explain your reasoning.

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5. Throughout his account, Northup casually mentions whippings and floggings. This MOST LIKELY tells us what?
  - A. Beatings were common place and routine
  - B. Beatings were only used on the rarest of occasions
  - C. Beatings were used infrequently
  - D. Beatings were traumatic experiences
6. Imagine that you are Northup. In the space below, use the information gained to create a diary entry that reflects a typical day for a cotton plantation slave. Entries should be AT LEAST 5 sentences long. Make sure to include: daily duties, meal routines, as well as the emotions felt.

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