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Till Freedom Cried Out: Memories of Texas Slave Life (Clayton Wheat Williams Texas Life Series)

Julie P. Baker

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"I's born in Palestine Texas. I don't know how old I is. I was 9 years old when freedom cried out."

These poignant words begin the memories of a former Texas slave interviewed by W.P.A. field workers in Oklahoma during the 1930s. This account, along with thirty-two additional oral histories recorded as part of the Federal Writers' Project, describes life as a Texas slave—the family relations, entertainment, religion, work on the plantations, foodways, and punishment.

For decades the bondage of black slaves to white masters was part of everyday life in Texas, and by the eve of the Civil War almost one-third of the total population consisted of slaves.

Most works about slavery have been written from the white viewpoint, since most slaves were kept illiterate. This collection offers a clear-eyed perspective on this institution from the slaves themselves—their recollections from being sold away from their parents, suffering the pain of the overseers' lash, and being chosen to gratify masters' desires to finding emotional release in religious services, appreciating music and dancing, and enjoying an brief escape to the woods. Vignettes of daily life are sensitively brought to life in the skilled drawings of artist Kermit Oliver.

Enriched by these illustrations and by an introduction and postscript commentary by editors T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P.Baker, *Till Freedom Cried Out* presents vivid memories of lives and times inside the bonds of an institution that tried to break the tellers' bodies and souls.

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Tony Edwin:

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