AFRICAN AMERICAN SLAVE MEDICINE

Herbal and Non-Herbal Treatments

HERBERT C. COVEY

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LEXINGTON BOOKS
A division of
ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

LEXINGTON BOOKS

A division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200
Lanham, MD 20706

Estover Road
Plymouth PL6 7PY
United Kingdom

First paperback edition 2008

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

The hardback edition of this book was previously cataloged by the Library of Congress as follows:

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Covey, Herbert C.
African American slave medicine : herbal and non-herbal treatments / Herbert C. Covey.
p. ; cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Slaves—Medicine—United States—History—19th century. 2. Slaves—Medical care—United States—History—19th century. 3. Traditional medicine—United States—History—19th century. 4. Herbs—Therapeutic use—United States—History—19th century. 5. African Americans—Medicine—United States—History—19th century. I. Title.
[DNLM: 1. African Americans—history—United States. 2. Medicine, African Traditional—history—United States. 3. History, 19th Century—United States. 4. Phytotherapy—history—United States. 5. Social Problems—history—United States. WZ 80.5.B5 C873a 2007]
R149.C76 2007
615'.3210808996073—dc22 2006035166

ISBN-13: 978-0-7391-1644-9 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-7391-1644-4 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978-0-7391-1645-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-7391-1645-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)
eISBN-13: 978-0-7391-3127-5
eISBN-10: 0-7391-3127-3

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

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Acknowledgments

I want to thank all of the friends and colleagues whose interest in the topic motivated me to complete this book. A special word of appreciation goes to Mr. Dwight Eisnach, who provided me with important editorial suggestions and insights during the early and late stages of writing this manuscript. I also want to thank T. J. MacDuff Stewart and the staff at Lexington Books for their assistance. Finally, thanks to my significant other, Marty Covey, for all of the library help and emotional support she provided throughout the preparation of this manuscript. I have an advantage of being married to a librarian.

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Introduction

Medical Care and Slaves

> When the slave became sick we most time had the best of care take of us. Maser let our old mammy doctor us and she used herbs from the woods, such as: cami weeds, peach tree leaves, red oak bark, for fever, chills and malaria and yes one more weed, privet weed for T.B. or things that way that the white doctor could not cure. Yes if we got a leg or arm broken Maser would have the white doctor with us, but that was about all for our old negro mammy was one of the best doctors in the world with her herb teas. When she gives you some tea made from herbs you could just bet it would sure do you good.
>
> —John Mosley, born in 1851 in Texas

Scholars have viewed the study of health and medical care as an important avenue to understanding the complex social relationships of people living under slavery. The medical practices of a society provide valuable insight into the nature of human and economic relationships. This is true of all eras including the time of slavery in the United States. The nature of medical care experienced by Whites and those they enslaved is rich with economic, social, and cultural insights. However, historians have encountered difficulties in studying the health status and medical care experienced by slaves. Reasons for this are numerous and include a paucity of data, poor medical records, and illiteracy during the time.

This book looks at the medical care provided to and administered by slaves during the antebellum and Civil War years. It focuses on plant (herbal) and alternative medical practices employed by African Americans, enslaved and free, to address illness and injury. By studying these folk medical practices and the corresponding materia medica, one can

gain insight into the complex nature of human relationships under slavery. From the start, it was a foregone conclusion that enslaving African Americans had a devastating impact on communities, families, and systems of medical care (Semmes 1983).

From the beginning, it is apparent that many alternative approaches to formal medical care were available to and employed by the enslaved. Many of these approaches were driven by a lack of adequate or effective medical care provided by White plantation society, West African cultural beliefs and practices, and the perceived effectiveness of slave healing and medical practices. The medical approaches used by medical practitioners—White or African American—were sometimes effective in addressing medical conditions, had no impact, or made patients worse.

The socioeconomic system of slavery coupled with enduring West African folk traditions and the ineffectiveness of White medical traditions contributed to the reliance of the enslaved on folk medicine. This book focuses on some of the medical practices used by slaves, emphasizing and inventorying the specific plant and non-plant materia medica employed by slaves. It places a critical eye on whether any of the materia medica had any real medical value to the patient. While some previous scholars have identified plants and materials used for treatments during this period, a more comprehensive review and compilation of these materials has yet to be developed. To accomplish this end, it was essential to review what slaves had to say about the nature of their medical care and remedies used.

PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP ON SLAVE HEALTH CARE

Early White medical authorities wrote about medical care and needs of the enslaved from a racist point of view. Common themes of early writings clearly attempt to justify slavery and the biological superiority of Whites. Early White medical authorities identified special diseases, such as "black vomit," "rascality," "dirt eating" (Cachexia Africana), and "Drapetomania" (running away), which they believed to be common to the enslaved. They also focused on the assumed superiority of Whites, different medical needs based on race, and how to keep sick slaves working at the lowest cost. Medical authorities, especially those in the pro-slavery south, explored and wrote about medical care within a framework that maximized economic gain and served to justify slavery.

Contemporary medical historians have not focused much attention on the medical care of the enslaved. Wonda Fontenot (1994: 29) observed that, "There is no known comprehensive study on the early medical treatment administered to enslaved Africans." The medical practices and treatment of and by slaves remains a neglected area of medical history. This neglect has

started to change in recent years and there are a few notable works on the subject. Contemporary scholars have started to explore the subject of medical care of slaves.

A number of important pioneering books include William Dosite Postell's *The Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations* (1951). This book remains one of the first contemporary works on the subject of slave medical care. Postell concluded that slaves essentially had the same health status as Whites, which most scholars would now disagree with. Although inaccurate in some observations and conclusions, historians continue to reference Postell's study. Postell laid the foundation for later discourse on the subject.

Herbert M. Morais' *The History of the Negro in Medicine* (1967) provides a view of the historical development of professionally trained African American physicians. It remains a good source of information on the development of formal medical training of African American physicians. Morais devoted one chapter to medical care under slavery.

Todd L. Savitt's *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (1978) stands as a scholar's starting point on the subject of health care among slaves. The book evaluates hygiene, diet, clothing, and living conditions of the enslaved in Virginia. Savitt studied the diseases and health status of enslaved people during slavery and concluded that a dual system of medical care existed in antebellum Virginia. While many treatments and diseases were the same, Savitt found that Whites viewed African Americans as having different medical needs than their White counterparts. He also concluded that the enslaved were active participants in their own medical care in antebellum Virginia and not idle recipients. Although written almost thirty years ago, Savitt's work continues to be one of the most cited works on the subject.

Paul Finkelman's edited volume *Medicine, Nutrition, Demography, and Slavery* (1989) is a collection of important articles on the medical care of slaves. Finkelman collected articles on slave nutrition, infant mortality, medical care on plantations, fertility, diseases, medical insurance, medical experimentation, and other topics related to the medical status and care of slaves. This volume represents a critical collection of classic articles and essays on the medical care of slaves.

Wonda Fontenot's *Secret Doctors: Ethnomedicine of African Americans* (1994) is a treatment of medical practices of African Americans in Louisiana. Fontenot constructed the book from a mixture of historical and cultural references to medical care. She incorporated historical materials with contemporary interviews of modern African American practitioners ("secret doctors" or "treaters"). The book lists some of the traditional plant and herbal remedies still used by folk practitioners in Louisiana. Fontenot linked traditional African beliefs and practices with those found among African Americans. Her chapter on ethnobotany underscores the importance of interactions between Native

Americans and slaves. She concluded much of the knowledge held by secret doctors could be attributed to Native Americans. Fontenot was particularly interested in the therapeutic validity of the cultural beliefs associated with plants and health. She found that medicinal plants continue to be a mainstay of African American health care in modern Louisiana.

Katherine Kemi Bankole's *Slavery and Medicine: Enslavement and Medical Practices in Antebellum Louisiana* (1998) is a study of the medical practices found in antebellum Louisiana. Like Shara Fett (2002), Bankole offers many insights into the complex human side of medical care in the Deep South, with a focus on the unique features of these human relationships in Louisiana. The book provides detailed information on the African origins of medical practices among slaves, the role of punishment in the health status of enslaved people, medical experimentation, the brutality of slavery and its medical consequences, and other important aspects of medical care. Bankole classified medical issues regarding the perception of Africans, free and enslaved, into four categories: The human/subhuman controversy; the medical management of enslaved people; medical experimentation; and the perceptions of the enslaved of the medical care they received.

W. Michael Byrd and Linda A. Clayton's monumental *An American Health Dilemma, Vol. 1: A Medical History of African Americans and the Problem of Race: Beginnings to 1900* (2000) looked at the development of formal medical care of and participation therein of African Americans. This important book details the health and medical history of African Americans from a medical point of view. The authors emphasized vital statistics, epidemiological facts, and formal medical training throughout the study. Byrd and Clayton concluded that a dual system of medical care existed for slaves that worked to exclude them from formal medical training. Byrd and Clayton (2000: 200) wrote, "As chattel slavery became institutionalized, a slave health subsystem evolved that would attempt to serve the Black population's health needs for the next 246 years."

Sharla Fett's (2002) *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* is a treatment of the important socioeconomic relations between Whites and slaves on the subject of medical care and practice. It focused on the social and cultural aspects of health care among and for the enslaved. Fett's work uncovered the experimental and political dimensions of health. Fett was concerned with the social reality of illness and healing. She also paid attention to the struggle of slaves to gain control over their bodies from their owners and the formal White medical establishment. She viewed plantation health relations as taking place within a sharply defined social order that was complicated by power and social relationships between Whites and African Americans. Fett illuminated the political struggles between Whites and slaves in the acts of healing and medical practices.

SLAVES WERE ACTIVE IN THEIR OWN HEALTH CARE

Taken in sum, these and other scholarly works establish without question that slavery dominated the African American health experience in the Old South. Historians generally concur that during the period, there were two standards for health care, one for Whites and the other for the enslaved. However, evidence also shows that African Americans, free and enslaved, were not passive recipients of the medical care provided them by the dominant Whites. Rather, they took very active roles in their own medical care. For example, Savitt (1978) concluded that African Americans played such a significant role in the health care system in Virginia that their participation prompted colonial lawmakers to pass laws in 1748 to curb the growth of slaves claiming to be doctors and administering medical treatments. Specifically, these laws and others prohibited African Americans from dispensing medicines without first obtaining the permission of plantation owners.

Several factors promoted slave participation in their own medical care. These studies generally conclude that African American participation in medical care was driven by factors such as the lack of access to formal health care, extensive health problems caused by harsh living and working conditions, the scarcity and relative high cost of formally trained physicians, a lack of confidence in White medicine, an enduring confidence in folk and traditional West African medical practices, and a commitment to self-reliance (Byrd and Clayton, 2000). If Whites provided medical care, it was often administered by plantation owners, spouses, or overseers who lacked any formal medical training (Fontenot 1994). This medical care was generally of low quality and quantity. Specifically, plantation owners and others frequently practiced "physicking," which was a term for all medical knowledge of the time including surgery, medical theory, and treatment. Physicking techniques and ideas were often available in lay medical manuals. Faced with these and other unattractive alternatives, many slaves took their medical care into their own hands (Savitt 1978). Fontenot (1994: 33) commented that, "Plantation medicine forced the survival of African-American folk medicine."

WERE THE SLAVES MEDICALLY NEGLECTED?

Some contemporary historians suggested that many slaves were well cared for, especially when Whites viewed them as economic chattel. For example, Postell (1951) proposed that plantation owners provided the same care for slaves as they did for their families. Postell concluded that Whites were benevolent in providing medical care for slaves, who they viewed as financial investments. Other authorities portray the medical care of slaves as

being one of excessive neglect that hinged on the economic value of the individual to perform work. Yet other authorities contend that slaves were active participants in their own health care and seldom relied solely on the benevolence of White plantation owners. Reality was probably a combination of all these factors. Duffy (1967) observed that the nature of the personal relationships between plantation owners and slaves shaped an infinite number of medical care situations. These relationships ranged from severe brutality to relative compassion. Medical care for the slaves ran the full gamut of good to poor depending on the socioeconomic circumstances and personal relationships.

As noted earlier, many slaves were not passive recipients of White medical care or the lack thereof. There is considerable evidence that they were active participants in providing and caring for themselves and their own people. Likewise, a few Whites attempted to provide good medical care to slaves, even if it was for self-serving economic reasons. What we can draw from the evidence is that wide varieties of medical experiences characterize the literature.

SLAVE LIFE EXPECTANCY

Hard data on the health status of slaves is sparse. However, what is known indicates that health care worsened for slaves during the Jacksonian and antebellum periods (Byrd and Clayton 2000). What do some basic indicators suggest about this trend? To begin, historians often look at life expectancy as an important indicator of health. Census data offers one source of information about the health status of slaves. Historical demographers have concluded that slaves had lower life expectancies than Southern Whites. Using the 1850 census, Kenneth Stampp noted that the average age of the White population was 25.5 years compared to 21.4 for African Americans (Stampp 1956). He concluded the data did not support the belief that African Americans lived longer than Whites. According to the 1860 census, 3.5 percent of the slave population was older than sixty years of age, compared with about 4.4 percent for the White population (Parish 1989). Some historians have reached different conclusions. According to the 1850 Virginia Mortality Census and death registers from four counties, Savitt (1978) found more slaves died during old age than Whites. He concluded that this trend was present in other sections of the South for the same timeframe. Of the general slave population from 1830 to 1860, more than half of the slaves were younger than twenty years of age. Most plantations had very few slaves that were older than fifty. Only about 10 percent of the slaves during the period were considered elderly (Genovese 1974; Jones 1985). As table 1 shows, for those whose ages were known, slaves age sixty or over averaged about 3.76 percent of the slave population from 1830 to 1860.

Table 1. Age of Enslaved African Americans by Gender, 1820–1860

Year	Total Enslaved African Population	50–59 Years	Over 60	Unknown
Male				
1820	788,028	77,365	N/A	N/A
1830	1,012,823	N/A	42,293	N/A
1840	1,246,517	N/A	52,081	N/A
1850	1,602,534	65,254	57,463	1,870
1860	1,982,625	79,776	68,267	13,679
Female				
1820	750,010	70,637	N/A	N/A
1830	996,220	N/A	42,293	N/A
1840	1,240,938	N/A	50,327	N/A
1850	1,601,779	61,762	57,289	1,822
1860	1,971,135	75,926	67,796	12,407
Total for 1830–1860	11,624,793		437,80	
	(100%)		(3.76%)	

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Part 1, Washington, DC, 1975.

Caution should be used when studying the ages of slaves because slave ages recorded in plantation books may have been made without any pretense of accuracy (Genovese 1967). This point was underscored by Frederick Douglass who noted that African Americans' ages were frequently estimated or unknown (Douglass 1855). Historians must be prudent because there are instances where free African American mortality rates exceeded those of enslaved populations because of variations in environmental, living, and working conditions (Warren 1997).

SLAVE MORTALITY RATES

U.S. Census data provide information on mortality rates, another indicator of the health and medical status of populations. For example, mortality rates from the 1850 Federal Census, and later estimates made in Virginia reported by Byrd and Clayton (2000: 285) and Savitt (1978: 141), consistently show the highest mortality rates for slaves, followed by free African Americans, and then Whites. Specifically, according to the 1850 census, White Virginians died at a rate of 111 per 10,000 compared to 140 for free African Americans, and 178 for slaves.

There are numerous factors that, although not covered here, affected mortality rates, such as the type of plantation on which the slave resided.

According to a summary written by David McBride (1998), historians have found that United States slave mortality rates were higher on rice than cotton plantations. Caribbean and South American sugar plantations had the highest mortality rates.

Child mortality rates are another indicator of health and medical status of populations (Steckel 1986). For instance, child mortality rates in the nineteenth century were high, relative to those of contemporary American society. Kiple and King (1981: 96) wrote, "That the rate of slave child mortality was high, both absolutely and relative to the white rate, no one disputes." Kiple and King (1981) calculated the infant mortality rate of slave children to be four times that of their White counterparts. Steckel (1986) calculated that the child mortality rate at the end of the first year, including stillbirths and infant deaths, was nearly 50 percent. Federal census figures from 1850 indicate that nearly twice as many slave babies died compared with White infants (McMillen 1991). The 1850 census was influenced by a widespread cholera epidemic, which affected enslaved populations with rigor. The causes for high mortality rates of slave children also included neonatal tetanus and sickle cell anemia (McMillen 1991; Savitt 1978). The poor prenatal health and living conditions of slave women resulted in low infant birth weights and heights. These were major causes of high slave mortality rates during infancy (Steckel 1986). Summarizing the research on infant mortality, McBride (1998) noted a link between poor nutrition and infant mortality. On some plantations, he concluded slave women lost half of their pregnancies to stillbirths and infants to early childhood diseases, such as whooping cough or digestive problems. Others have suggested that maternal carelessness and neglect, due to exhaustion, may have resulted in sudden infant death syndrome for some (Savitt 1978; Steckel 1986). Kiple and Kiple (1977b) concluded, "Black children were victims of a conspiracy of nutrition, African environmental heritage, and North American climatic circumstances rather than planter mistreatment." Others might question this conclusion.

Historians attribute the differences in life expectancy and mortality rates between slaves and Whites to differences in the quality of life. In his classic study, Kenneth Stampp (1956) found that poor living standards—such as poorly heated living quarters, greater exposure to the elements, heavier labor, and inadequate medical care—resulted in higher mortality rates for slaves than Whites. In addition, there are many indications that the slave's diet was deficient in protein, vitamins, and minerals. However, some authorities have concluded that some ecological (coastal) areas of the South allowed for adequate slave nutrition (Gibbs et al. 1980). Nevertheless, a condition known as "protein hunger" was common among slaves, as cereals, fat back pork, and corn did not provide slaves with adequate amounts of protein (Kiple and Kiple 1977a). In addition, many slaves were lactose

intolerant and developed gastrointestinal complaints and severe diarrhea from very small amounts of milk (Kiple and Kiple 1977a). These and other dietary deficiencies reduced the ability of some slaves to resist disease and illness.

COMMON DISEASES OF THE TIME

The migration of Europeans and Africans to North and Central America introduced new diseases to the regions. Bewell (1999: 187) wrote, "An important aspect of disease during the colonial period was that it affected different populations differently, because people from different parts of the world would have been previously exposed to different pathogens." For example, the Europeans introduced influenza, tuberculosis, smallpox, measles, and the plague, as well as strong alcoholic beverages and firearms, to African American and Native American populations with devastating effects (Semmes 1983). While Africans had some immunity to small pox, even so, the spread of smallpox was so prevalent that Louisiana authorities quarantined slave-bearing vessels from Africa and the West Indies (Duffy 1967). White populations had developed some degree of immunity to influenza, tuberculosis, and the plague that Africans and Native Americans lacked. African Americans were particularly susceptible to bacterial pneumonia (Savitt 1978). Likewise, Byrd and Clayton (2000: 184) wrote, "The slave trade transported malaria and yellow fever to the new world." African populations had developed a degree of immunity to diseases such as yellow fever, leprosy, and malaria. Yellow fever would have more devastating affects on Whites than Africans because Whites lacked any immunity to the disease (Savitt 1978). The picture becomes more complex when indigenous populations are considered with their exposure to different diseases and relative degree of immunity. The Native American groups also exposed these immigrant populations to local illnesses and diseases. Each population's response to pathogens differed depending on their origin, resulting in some populations faring better than others, depending on the type of disease.

The high morbidity rates for slaves can be associated with a number of factors including disease. Poor diets of Whites and slaves made them susceptible to nutritional deficiencies such as pellagra (niacin deficiency), riboflavin deficiency, and starvation. Byrd and Clayton (2000: 224) wrote, "High mortality rates for Black slaves were associated with dysentery, typhoid fever, cholera, hepatitis, and worms." All of these diseases relate to poor sanitation and living conditions. Specifically, typhoid epidemics occur primarily because of contaminated water, typhus from body lice, measles, mumps, and chicken pox from poor living conditions, such as poor ventilation and damp dirt floors (Gibbs et al. 1980).

Among slaves, the common ailments included dysentery, parasites, anemia, trichinosis, hookworm, tapeworm, guinea worm, yaws, periodic fevers (ague), infant mortality, colic, cankers, humors, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, obstructions, inflammations, leg ulcers, malaria, syphilis, gonorrhea, cholera, miscarriage, and joint pains (Kiple and King 1981; Meyer 1975; Savitt 1978). Incident rates were higher for slave populations than for Whites. For example, cholera killed many more African Americans than Whites (McBride 1998). Sickle-cell anemia killed many African American children before age twenty (Savitt 1978). Malaria caused more time lost in slave labor than did other diseases but was less deadly (Savitt 1978). These and other diseases spread rapidly through slave communities because of poor living conditions. The childhood diseases of chicken pox, mumps, and measles flourished in slave living quarters and took a harsh toll on slave children. Todd Savitt wrote of slave living conditions:

> At the slave quarters sneezing, coughing, or contact with improperly washed eating utensils and personal belongings promoted transmission of disease-causing micro-organisms among family members. Poor ventilation, lack of sufficient windows for sunshine and damp earthen floors merely added to the problem by aiding the growth of fungus and bacteria on food, clothing, floors and utensils and the development of worm and insect larvae.
>
> Improper personal hygiene, body lice, planters' use of "night soil" to fertilize gardens, dirty living conditions, unwashed clothes, infrequent baths, and other filthy conditions promoted nuisances such as lice, ringworm, pinworms, and other parasites. The cold winter months were characterized by respiratory illnesses and the hot summer with intestinal disorders. (Savitt 1978: 51)

Some White medical authorities of the period, driven as much by racism as ignorance, proposed that Africans had their own set of diseases that were peculiar to their race. Medical authorities of the period viewed tetanus, worms, diphtheria, cholera, and other ailments as mostly African diseases (Kiple and King 1981). For example, pulmonary tuberculosis, a leading cause of death among African Americans during the nineteenth century, was also known as, "Negro Consumption, Struma Africana, or Negro Poisoning" (Savitt 1978). White physicians viewed West African–based cultural practices, such as eating clay or soil (pica), as diseases peculiar to slaves. Southern Whites viewed pica with contempt (Gibbs et al. 1980) even though it has a long tradition in Western history dating back to the ancient Greeks (Haller 1972). Physicians, along with plantation owners, considered the custom of pica as a disease that was contagious and one that should be prevented from spreading from one slave to another. Physicians and plantation owners used a variety of techniques to deter slaves from dirt eating by using mild purgatives, threats, punishments, iron masks or gags, cutting

off the heads of those dying from the practice, and other harsh responses (Haller 1972).

Southern Whites, having the notion that slaves had different medical needs than Whites, transferred this idea into medical practices. For example, many White physicians relied heavily on sugarcoated pills based on the premise that slaves were inclined to place more confidence in tasteful remedies (Kiple and King 1981). According to Kiple and King (1981: 173), plantation physicians referred to these as "nigger pills." In the Works Project Administration (WPA) narratives collected during the 1930s, some of the ex-slave respondents referred to other useless medications such as flour pills and "blue mass" or "blue moss" pills. Ex-slave Rebecca Fletcher remembered that taking "blue mass" pills made folks sick. She commented:

> Old missis used to give us blue mass pills when we needed medicine. It sho did make us sick. We had to get sick to get well, old missis said. (Clayton 1990: 46)

REMAINING QUESTIONS

Slaves suffered from poor health and received inadequate, unequal, or no medical care. Previous studies have established these facts. What then remains to be answered? To begin, investigators have not fully explored what the slave had to say about the medical care they received or provided. Numerous narratives of ex-slaves refer to medical topics and care. One of these major sources of untapped medical information is the Works Project Administration (WPA) narratives. Although some scholars have identified quotes that address medical care, a full-scale review of the WPA narratives focusing on medical topics has not occurred. In addition, some references in the WPA narratives mention specific remedies used by slave folk practitioners. To date, no scholar has attempted to compile the substances (materia medica) used by slaves for treatments. From previous writings, scholars have only identified a small sample of the materia medica that was used. Scholars have paid little attention to how folk practitioners mixed these materials and used these remedies to treat medical concerns. Previous scholars have mentioned herbal but have neglected non-herbal materia medica and its corresponding uses.

This book answers some of the previous questions by identifying, classifying, and then analyzing much of the materia medica referenced in the WPA narratives. Did the materials used make a medical difference or not? In addition, what do the references to folk practitioner medical care tell us about interpersonal relations under the system of slavery? As Fett (2002) and others established, slavery played an important role in the nature of medical care and social relations among slave populations.

SOURCE MATERIALS AND APPROACH

Most of African American medical folk knowledge is oral and not written down. Fontenot (1994: 33) concluded, "African-American folk medicine is . . . purely an oral tradition." Much of what is known today about medical and healing practices has been handed down orally from generation to generation. The stories of slaves sometimes referred to medical care and practices during the antebellum and adjoining periods. During the Jacksonian and antebellum periods, a limited number of ex-enslaved people wrote down or told their life stories under slavery. During the 1840s and 1850s, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Anthony Burns, and others who had escaped from slavery wrote down or told their stories. These first narratives fuelled the fires of abolitionists before the Civil War. Following the Civil War, the public and scholars showed little interest in these ex-slave narratives.

Another type of narrative are those published following the Civil War by people such as Booker T. Washington. His *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (1901) sought to inspire African Americans to work hard and persevere against the racism in American society. These narratives, or more appropriately, autobiographical statements, provide personal views of life under and after slavery.

Yet, the stories of life under slavery were, for all practicable purposes, ignored or neglected. In the late 1920s, this neglect changed when John B. Cade, Ophelia Settle Egypt, and others collected new narratives in Louisiana. Also in the late 1920s, scholars at Fisk University made similar efforts. African American research staff at Fisk University (1945) conducted two hundred interviews of older ex-slave respondents in 1929 and 1930 in Tennessee and Kentucky. The largest collection of narratives stems from the Federal Writers' Project that was conducted during the late 1930s. During the middle of the Depression, the federal government, through a WPA project, created jobs for unemployed writers and researchers by paying staff to interview ex-slaves. This massive project was an effort to capture—before their stories were lost—the life experiences of older African Americans who had experienced slavery. Under the Federal Writers' Project, staff conducted interviews with ex-slaves wherever they could find them throughout the South. More than 2,200 ex-slaves from seventeen states participated in the project during the 1930s (Rawick 1972). The collection of narratives includes interviewees from every state that condoned slavery.

After more than seventy years, these WPA narratives remain a major and relatively untapped source of information about everyday African American life during and after slavery. Scholars have used the WPA narratives to uncover the experiences of women who were enslaved (Goodson 1979; Martin 2000), old age (Covey and Lockman 1996), and general life under slav-

ery in numerous works (Clayton 1990; Blassingame 1977; Genovese 1976; Hurmence 1990; Rawick 1972). Few scholars have fully explored the narratives for references to medical care.

Because the WPA staff conducted the interviews during the 1930s, over two thirds of the interviewees were aged over eighty (Yetman 1967). Thus, the interviews represent a large sample of rural Southern older African Americans during the Depression. Several of the interviewees continued to live and work on the same plantations as they did when they were enslaved (Rawick 1972). The narratives provide a rare glimpse into the daily lives of slaves and their interactions with White society. Scattered throughout these narratives are references to medical care and practice by Whites and African Americans. These references to illness, health care, and medicine, as well as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical sources from the period, provide the basis for this book.

Scholars have noted that the narratives have limitations and shortcomings, such as the editing done by some of the WPA interviewers (Clayton 1990). Concerns have also been raised that the respondents' reported ages were sometimes inaccurate, their experiences with slavery were limited to childhood memories, some had memory loss, and biases could have existed, as attributed to White interviewers interviewing African Americans during the 1930s (Bailey 1980; Blassingame 1975; Clayton 1990; Woodward 1974).

Living in the rural South during the 1930s was also marked by continued discrimination and racism that undoubtedly affected the perceptions and attitudes expressed by the respondents in the Jim Crow South. It may have also affected what they were willing to tell predominantly White interviewers. Comments about White society and slavery were often guarded because many of the former slaves resided in the same areas as their ex-master's descendants and were dependent on them for help in obtaining old-age pensions (Blassingame 1975; 1977). The gender, race, and educational backgrounds of the WPA interviewers varied, as did the interviewing techniques and questions used (Bailey 1980). In addition, the absence of a systematically drawn sample for the narratives has been criticized (Yetman 1984).

A methodological issue of relying on the WPA narratives to identify medical treatments and remedies is that the interviewees sometimes are unclear as to what is being referenced. For example, a few respondents referred to "cami root" as a plant used as a remedy but it is unclear what plant is being referenced. Were the respondents referring to chamomile, calamus, or some other plant? All plants have at least one name and many have several names. Sometimes the WPA respondents' use of plant names was imprecise or highly regionalized. At times, folk and slang expressions are unknown, unclear, or simply inaccurate. For example, "sheep tea" might refer to a tea made from sheep

dung or a plant. Some plants and herbs have different or multiple names depending on region or knowledge of the respondent. Other times the WPA interviewer may have misspelled, misreported, or misheard terms.

A significant concern is the ability to generalize from the WPA narratives to the full antebellum period. Caution must be exercised when writing about the antebellum South and relying solely on the narratives, as most all of the respondents would not have been alive before the 1850s. The narratives thus, while somewhat reflective of the antebellum and neighboring periods, are restricted to the end of that period. In addition, most of the WPA narratives were of respondents that would have been very young at the time of slavery. In some narratives, references were made to periods other than during slavery and are difficult to unravel. In short, working with the WPA narratives is not always an exact science.

Caution should also be exercised regarding whether the medical references found in the narratives are actually referring to the antebellum period or a time thereafter. While the intent of the interviews was to capture information about life under slavery before it was lost, the respondents frequently drifted back and forth to times other than this period. WPA respondents make many references to the Great Depression and life following slavery. It is sometimes difficult to conclude whether medical references and knowledge were present or came after the antebellum and Civil War periods. In some cases however, it is clear the respondent linked comments to the period under study.

In spite of some shortcomings, the WPA narratives represent a rich source of information about slave life and should not be ignored (Woodward 1974; Yetman 1967). Without the WPA narratives, the largely neglected but important voices of those who experienced slavery would remain silent. The WPA sample represents a broad spectrum of African Americans who lived during the period (Yetman 1984). The WPA narratives, when used with supplementary documents, represent a rich source of information about life under slavery.

The WPA narratives, selected earlier narratives (autobiographies), and primary and secondary sources were reviewed for references to medical and health care, herbal and plant treatments, non-herbal and non-plant materia medica, illness, conjure, folk medicine, practitioners (folk and formally trained), and other related terms. The WPA narratives provided a first-person account of medical issues and care for the period. One objective for the review was to determine what materia medica were used and whether they contained any medical value. Emphasis was placed on who, what, when, and how folk medicine was referenced. Most of the information presented stems from direct quotes from the WPA narratives but a few earlier non-WPA narratives were also incorporated.

One important research question was: Were the remedies used effective or not? Once WPA narrative references to herbal remedies were identified, the next step was to search modern herbal medical guides and treatments to determine if modern science supports the efficacy of the treatment. Some of the remedies mentioned have medical value while others were either harmful or useless. It was noted when modern science and research supports the specific remedy mentioned in the WPA narratives. What cannot be determined is whether the belief of the patient in the power of the treatment had a curative or healing impact on the patients. The faith in treatment can, as has been recognized in modern medicine, have a powerful affect on the health of the patient. Most of the narratives register great faith in the curative powers of the mentioned. What is not measured is how effective this faith operated to attain the desired medical results.

TERMS USED

The historical literature on antebellum medical and health care is sometimes inconsistent and often uses terms interchangeably. Scholars have not agreed on a set of definitions and use differing typologies and lexicons. In the interest of clarity and consistency, it was necessary to define some terms used throughout this book. Even in this work, there will be occasions when the distinctions among terms may be unclear or may disagree with other interpretations.

The terms *enslaved* and *slave* refer to any person of African ancestry who was forced into involuntary servitude. The enslaved referred to in this book are solely of African origin or heritage. *White* or *Whites* refers to people of European ancestry and *Native American* to those of North American ancestry. The terms *planter*, *owner*, *plantation owner*, and *slaveholder*, imply Whites, although other groups, such as the Native Americans, also enslaved each other and African Americans.

The term *medicine* will refer to any effort or activity that involves diagnosis, treatment, or the prevention of illness, disease, injury, or other damage to the physical body or mind. Medicine can be divided into two general categories of formal or folk medicine. *Formal medicine* refers to any medical approach that has been learned or gained from formal training in an established (formal) medical school or from a formally trained physician as an apprentice. *Physician* refers to an individual who was formally trained in medicine in an established medical school and which bases medical treatments on scientific and medical evidence. Formal medical schooling usually includes an internship or apprenticeship with experienced physicians with similar training.

Folk medicine refers to medical and healing approaches not acquired through an established (formal) medical school. Folk medicine can be either natural or magico-religious (Yoder 1972). Don Yoder wrote:

> Of folk medicine, there are essentially two types, two branches: (1) natural folk medicine, and (2) magico-religious folk medicine. The first of these represents one of man's earliest reactions to this natural environment, and involves the seeking of cures for his ills in the herbs, plants, minerals, and animal substances of nature. Natural medicine, which is sometimes called "rational" folk medicine, and sometimes "herbal" folk medicine because of the predominance of herbs in its materia medica, is shared with primitive cultures, and in some cases, some of its many effective cures have made their way into scientific medicine. The second branch of folk medicine is the magico-religious variety, sometimes called "occult" folk medicine, which attempts to use charms, holy words, and holy actions to cure disease. This type commonly involves a complicated, pre-scientific world view. (Yoder 1972: 192)

Both of these forms of folk medicine precede science-based medicine, which has adopted selected folk cures over the centuries. According to Jackson (2000), natural folk medicine assumes a direct cause and effect by the direct application of some substance to some medical problem. In contrast, magico-religious folk medicine attempts to influence some spiritual entity other than the doctor or patient to intervene on behalf of the subject or patient.

A folk practitioner refers to anyone who practices medicine using an approach or treatments not acquired through an established medical school (folk medicine). Folk practitioners generally rely on medical treatments that are not initially founded on scientific evidence, although such scientific support may come later. Folk practitioners instead rely on folk wisdom, custom, belief, practice, observation, oral tradition, intuition, and other ways of understanding to develop their medical approaches. They generally combine natural and magico-religious folk medicine, placing more emphasis on one or the other. They, like formally trained physicians, can error.

Folk practitioners use a number of approaches and treatments that sometimes overlap. According to Krippner and Colodzin (1981), folk practitioners (healers) fall into four general categories:

Shamans—Shamans are healers but also are perceived to have the ability to leave the body and ascend to the heavens or descend into the underworld. They are spiritual adventurers. They sometimes use herbs to treat medical conditions, diagnose using the stars or other media, and sometimes dance or practice curative ceremonies. Shamans generally try to control, seek advice, or cooperate with spiritual entities. The patient's belief in the shaman's rituals, words, and power are of crucial importance.

Spiritualists—Spiritualists become the instruments of spiritual entities during healing ceremonies. They employ a variety of mediums to contact the spirit world, such as entering into trances or practicing exorcisms on patients. They sometimes use herbs to assist in healing and some herbs are believed to contain spirits. The patient's belief in the spiritualist's rituals and ability to connect to the spiritual world are of crucial importance.

Esoterics—Esoterics follow a range of occult approaches including tarot, tantra, astrology, or alchemy, among others, to treat medical conditions. They may also ascribe to acupuncture, mediation, and herbal treatments.

Intuitives—Intuitive healers do not receive special medical training but generally receive a "call" from a higher being that gives them the gift of healing. Faith healers represent this approach of medical treatment when they lay hands on people to cure them. Some intuitives rely on herbs to assist in the healing process.

When studying slave folk medical practices, it is necessary to modify Krippner and Colodzin's (1981) typology of folk healers to encompass other terms, such as herbalists, conjurers, herb doctors, root workers, and voodoo and hoodoo practitioners. Historians and cultural anthropologists have relied on these terms to classify African American folk practitioners.

Applying this typology, African American conjurers are certainly shamans and spiritualists but have elements of esoteric and intuitive folk healing in their approaches and treatments. Conjurers, similar to other groups, also rely on herbal and other non-herbal treatments in their practice. They are true eclectics. In contrast, hoodoo and voodoo are approaches that more fit the classification of being shamans. They both attempt to control spirits and others through incantations, rituals, charms, and dances and use substances that are ingested by patients. They also manipulate substances to achieve their ends.

This book focuses on African American folk practitioners that practiced natural folk medicine and predominantly relied on plant and herbal approaches to medical care. While these folk practitioners incorporated ritual and ceremony as well as belief and faith in their practices, plants and herbs are at the core of what they did. For the sake of consistency, the study will use the expression *folk practitioner*. Folk practitioners employed various organic and non-organic substances to bring about cures in their patients.

Herbs will refer exclusively to plants and plant parts. Non-herbal substances will refer to all other non-herbal materia medica. Sometimes herbs were altered and processed to the extent that they were not associated with their original herbal or plant origin. For example, pine was used in a variety of forms as an herbal treatment, such as pine tea. Pine is also the basic

ingredient in the manufacture of turpentine, which was one of the treatments finding wide medical applications in the antebellum South. The question was should turpentine be classified as herbal or non-herbal for the purposes of this book. This was a difficult judgment call. This issue was resolved by noting that when the herb lost its original herbal identity through the manufacturing process—or was renamed or significantly changed through processes other than common herbal preparation, such as making teas, salves, pills, ointments, decoctions, tinctures, etc.—then it was considered a non-herbal. This was how turpentine, pine tar, whiskey, and other significantly altered and renamed plant-based substances were treated.

2

White Medical Care of Slaves

> De marsters on de misses, dey look atter dere niggers good do on see dat dey keep demselves clean en 'spectible, on try ter keep de disease outen 'em. Ebery Monday mornin' dey gib 'em all or little square, brown bottle or bitters for dem ter take dat week. Dat was dere medicine, but iffen or nigger do git sick, don dey sont for do doctor right or way on hab de doctor ter 'zamine de sick one on sey, "Doctor, kin you do dat nigger eny good?" or "Do whut yo kin for dat nigger, Doctor, kase he is or valuable han' on with muney."
>
> —Henry Green, Arkansas

> Our Master looked after his slaves too when dey got sick and got de doctor, de would bleed you in dem days ef you got sick and would draw nearly a quart of blood from de body and you'd get well too.
>
> —Hattie Anne Nettles, Alabama

THE NATURE OF WHITE MEDICAL CARE

The plantation system provided medical care to slaves. This chapter reviews the nature of that medical care, as reflected in the WPA narratives and historical documents. It details some of the competing medical approaches and ideas held common to Southern Whites of the period.

A useful starting point is the nature of formal medicine and formally trained physicians. In the nineteenth century, physicians learned their trade through apprenticeships with other practicing physicians, attended medical school, or both (Cavender 2003). It was through these mechanisms that

formally trained physicians learned about the theory of depletion. In fact, the prevailing medical theory in the antebellum period was that of depletion. The five major treatment modalities in the antebellum South of bleeding, sweating, blistering, purging, or vomiting were all essentially depletion techniques. Hence, formally trained physicians ascribed to the merits of purging and bleeding patients for almost any ailment. Physicians also bled (phlebotomy) their patients to prevent illness in the spring (Moss 1999). They administered large doses of castor oil, calomel, and salts to cleanse their patients of illness (Morais 1967). All of these substances typically resulted in patients vomiting, excreting, spitting up, or having excessive bowel movements and diarrhea. In short, they were methods of depleting the body of assumed overabundances of fluids and substances that physicians believed led to imbalances and, hence, illness.

In general, formal medical care was not available routinely in the antebellum South except for wealthy Whites. Even when it was available, formal medical care was not particularly effective. Given some of the misdirected medical practices of the period, such as excessive bleeding, the unavailability of medical care was not always a negative thing. A number of formal treatments were more harmful than helpful to the patient. Physicians equally applied depletion and other theories to Whites and African Americans. More than fifty years ago, Weymouth Jordan observed:

> Medical treatment of both Whites and slaves in the United States before 1861, though flourishing, was harsh and in the light of present-day information, mostly a shocking procedure. A survey of various so-called "recipes" and home remedies leads to the conclusion that Americans were indeed a hardy race. They had to be strong in will and in body to undergo and survive many of the customary medical ordeals imposed upon them by their families, friends, and physicians. Every imaginable object, including iron, roots, bark, soot, soil, charcoal, animals, teas, rust, was concocted into home-made medicines. Trained physicians were inclined to experiment almost as much as domestic practitioners and the death rate was appalling. (Jordan 1950: 85)

Given the harm and pain inflicted, it should come as no surprise that many Whites and enslaved people distrusted formally trained physicians. They saw them as not serving the common folks and as being expensive (Duin and Sutcliffe 1992). Further confounding the situation was the absence of clear boundaries between traditional medicine and lay or domestic practice. At times, little separated the two, as both borrowed extensively from each other. In addition, various competing medical approaches laid claim to superiority and effectiveness. Homeopathy, Thomsonianism, water treatments (cures), herbalism, and more traditional medical approaches competed for medical dominance. In the Old South, Thomsonianism was by far the most popular form of domestic medicine (Keeney 1989). Ante-

bellum medicine was a "veritable free-for-all" wrought with skepticism, experimentation, and conflicting claims of legitimacy (Fett 2002: 4). This is not a new idea, Postell (1951: 108) wrote, "Throughout all medical practice there was the element of quackery, superstition, magic, and sheer humbug."

Throughout the period, there was a struggle for the control of medicine and healing. While many plantation owners and overseers used formal approaches, some also frequently turned to alternative or "domestic" medicine for solutions. One alternative system, homeopathy, held that small doses of a substance that produces symptoms most similar to the illness being treated would be a cure. Thus, homeopaths matched symptoms with similar substances for treatments. Samuel Thomson (1769–1843) of New Hampshire founded another alternative system, the Thomsonian. Thomsonian medicine promoted the use of vegetable emetics and tonics. The Thomsonian system held that everyone should be his/her own physician. Thomson developed a simple theory of disease that postulated that all illness was produced by coldness and treatments that generated heat led to patient recovery. The Thomsonian system relied heavily on the use of the seeds of the plant *Lobelia inflata*, a yellowish-green plant, similar in taste to tobacco. When the patient ingested *Lobelia inflata*, it caused vomiting and profuse sweating from a rise in body temperature. Because it is highly toxic in high doses, it is now banned in the United States as a medical treatment (Duin and Sutcliffe 1992).

Another competing system was hydropathy or water doctoring. Adherents to this system developed a number of water-based cures, such as trickling water on parts of the body or total water immersion, most of which were ineffective. Possibly at the farthest end of the alternative medicine continuum were the eclectics who permitted patients or relatives to prescribe treatments (Postell 1951). The eclectics believed intuition should guide the application of medical treatments rather than formal medical training or theory. These systems were practiced in a medical context where formally or apprentice-trained physicians blistered, bled, cupped, and poisoned their patients with great vigor. After all, the prevailing theories of formal medicine held that disease (fevers, etc.) originated from decaying animal or vegetable matter and was transmitted through the air or water, or was due to imbalances in bodily humors.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, physicians accomplished depletion or draining through the processes of bleeding and cupping. Influential physicians, such as Dr. Thomas Sydenham in England and Dr. Benjamin Rush in America, adhered to and touted the merits of bleeding and purging patients. Bleeding is the practice of draining blood from the patient to bring body humors into balance. Often patients would lose enough blood to faint and there were reports of fifty ounces being drawn from patients over a few-day span (Cavender 2003). Cupping is the slow draining

of blood by the application of a heated cup used to create a vacuum when pressed against the skin. Fontenot (1994: 32-43) observed, "Self-taught European doctors did a lot of cutting, bleeding, opening of abscesses, and amputations."

The notions of bleeding, cupping, and, in general, surgical cutting or amputations was generally foreign to Western African healing traditions (Fontenot 1994) and was not part of the healing tradition of their ancestors. Thus, these traditional Western medical practices would have been frightful to populations, enslaved and free. They were in direct conflict with West African cultural beliefs. Savitt (1978) found that most Southern physicians and planters who wrote on the subject thought that Africans could not endure the loss of blood that Whites could. Undoubtedly, this belief benefited those African Americans at risk of being treated by this method. Today, any form of cutting, or surgery, as such, is still viewed with skepticism among rural African American populations. Some contemporary African Americans continue to observe that, "White doctors are too quick to cut on black people."

The WPA narratives include several references to bleeding and cupping of slaves, such as ex-slave Charlie Hinton's (Arkansas) comment, "I want to tell you when the old folks got sick they would bleed them, and when the young folks got sick they give you some blue mass and turn you loose." Hattie Anne Nettles (Alabama) stated, "Our Master looked after his slaves too when dey got sick and got de doctor, de would bleed you in dem days ef you got sick and would draw nearly a quart of blood from de body and you'd get well too." Savilla Burrell (South Carolina) observed:

> Our doctor was old Marse son-in-law, Dr. Martin. I seen him cup a man once. He was a good doctor. He give slaves castor oil bleed dem some times and make dem take pills.

Joe Mccormick (Georgia) recalled:

> There was not much sickness on the plantation. A doctor paid them a visit about once or twice a month to make sure he wasn't needed. If a slave happened to be sick, the doctor would often bleed him. Blue Mass (pills) were a favorite remedy.

Adeline Hodge (Alabama) provided details of the process:

> Ob course, us got sick but dey had de Doctor, in dos days de Doctor w'uld cup you an' bleed you. I seen a many a person cupped; de Doctor had a li'l square lookin' block of wood wid tiny li'l pen knifes, attached to hit an' on top war a trigger lack is on a gun, an' de doctor w'uld put block ob wood at de nape ob dere neck, an' pull dat trigger, an'den hab a piece ob cotton wid sumpin' on hit to stop de blood when he had cupped you long 'nuf. Dey w'uld allus gib us

> "calamus" to clean us out, an' den de nex' mawnin' gib us a big bowl of gruel, made out ob meal and milk, an' den us w'uld be allright.

Elbert Myers (Mississippi) also elaborated on the process:

> There was not much sickness in those days. Dr. Sanderson, Dr. Weir, and Dr. Armistead were the doctors here then. When we had a bad headache or any other ache, they used what they called a cupping-glass (a kind of cup with India rubber top). They would prick the skin and place the cup over the place, and the cup would just fill up with blood.

Joe Hawkins (Mississippi) recalled the pervasiveness of bleeding:

> Doctors then didn't doctor a person like they does now. No sir, he'd bleed you so many minutes while he watched his big watch which he always carried. Bleed you for most any sickness. A person had to be mighty sick 'fore a doctor was called. Ashes and salt was given to chillun by their mammies for worms and other ailments. I goes to the woods now and gets 'erbs to make me tea. I learnt dis from my Mammy. I'se ain't gwine to tell you what 'erbs I gits 'cause dat's a secret but I knows 'erbs.

Rev. Wade Owens (Alabama) stated, "When us 'ud git sick, dey would bleed you, stick somp'n in your arm and draw de blood. Den dey would giv' us scurry grass and fever weed."

WHITE MEDICAL RELIANCE ON HERBS AND PLANTS

Many of the formal medical practices of the time relied heavily on herbal and plant remedies. Medical use of herbal remedies was entrenched in Western medicine centuries long before the colonization of North America. Europeans generally believed that every illness had a corresponding herbal treatment and that one only need to link the correct plant with the specific ailment. In addition, Europeans generally thought that plant characteristics, such as shape, size, and color, helped reveal what illnesses that plant was useful in treating. This theory was known as the doctrine of signatures, which held that God gave clues as to the medical uses of plants. For example, heart-shaped plants were thought to be good for the heart, walnuts for the brain, and so forth. Another example was the use of beans, especially kidney beans, for the treatment of kidney problems (Moss 1999).

Over the centuries, Europeans adopted a number of herbal remedies. For example, Duin and Sutcliffe (1992) noted that opium, henbane, and mandrake root have been popular choices to induce general anesthesia. Physicians also relied on alcohol, a substance made from plants, to make

patients drunk and less sensitive to pain. Many White physicians believed fevers were caused by "marsh miasma" and prescribed castor oil, opium, and other plant based remedies as treatments (Postell 1951).

European immigrants also introduced a variety of new plants to North America many thought to be effective treatments for illness, such as catnip, feverfew, hound's tongue, celandine, comfrey, mugwort, hollyhock, St. John's wort, elecampane, coltsfoot, wormwood, and others (Meyer 1975; Meyer et al. 1981). The colonials also thought that oatmeal had medicinal value. They sold oatmeal by the ounce for use as a poultice or for use as an internal medicine (Meyer 1975). Meyer (1975) noted the colonial use of sassafras, wild ginger, deer's tongue (plant), and bloodroot by medical practitioners. They also used butternut (*Juglens cinera*) as a cathartic and laxative. In parts of the South, some White physicians used pokeweed (*Phytolaca decantra*) to treat tuberculosis (Haller 1972).

Shryock (1960: 48) noted that some of the plants adopted by White colonists, such as tobacco, sarsaparilla, and Seneca root proved to be useless or worked only as purgatives, expectorants, or emetics. Others, such as the bark of the cinchona tree proved to be useful and effective. In the late eighteenth century, Europeans started to report the value of Peruvian barks for fevers and malaria (Weiner and Weiner 1994). The Peruvian bark of the cinchona tree would become the basis for quinine.

William Postell (1951: 98–99) revealed the contents of some popular medical kits of the times. For example, the medical chest of a widely known nineteenth-century physician, Dr. Ewell, included wine, paregorics, castor oil, rheumatic tincture, tincture of rhubarb, magnesia, jalap, Peruvian bark, prepared calk, gum arabic, laudanum, balsam capivi, syrup of squills, spirits of nitre, nitric acid, sweet oil, camphor, tartar, rust of steel, salt, nitre, sugar of lead, alum, borax, elixir vitriol, essence of peppermint, ether, oil of sassafras, spirits of lavender, solution of arsenic, tincture of fox glove, tincture of myrrh, licorice, anise seeds, Epsom salts, senna, manna, sulphur, arrow root, tincture of asafetida, ammoniac, calomel, opium, aloes, blue vitriol, lunar caustic, toothache drops, red precipitate, and other drugs and substances. Several of the substances in the medical chest were herbal or plant based.

Common to home kits were a variety of potions and tonics that made claims to great healing powers, such as Wright's Indian Vegetable Pills and Swaim's Panacea. Wright's Indian Vegetable Pills claimed to cure fever, ague, purify the blood, aid circulation, and improve general health (Jordan 1950). The popular commercial potion, Swaim's Panacea, claimed to cure "practically everything." It advertised as "Swaim's Panacea for negroes who are confined in large numbers on plantations in hot climates" (Kiple and King 1981: 165). Swaim's Panacea was one of the favorite remedies in the Old South (Keeney 1989). For some planters, it was the only treatment available to treat the enslaved.

Plant-based castor oil, jalap, ipecac, laudanum, opium, camphor, and quinine were common remedies that found their way into homes of the period (Savitt 1978). Materia medica, such as calomel, aconite, strychnine, jalap, and arsenic were used for purging and other effects. Some materials, such as calomel (mercurous chloride), could result in mouth ulcers, tooth loss, and bone decay (Cavender 2003). Works Project Administration references to these and other treatments are common. For example, Stearlin Arnwine (Texas) stated:

> When any of the slaves got sick Massa John an Miss Em was good to see atter 'em. His main medicane was blue mass an epicak but if that wasn't enough he would get a Doctor.

S. B. Adams (Texas) also recalled:

> No'm I nebber did make no money. We jus' had our livin' give to us, for workin' on de farm, by our marster and didn' need no money. We didn' go no where to spend it. He was good to us when we was sick, of we was bad sick he allus had the same doctor wid us he had wid his own folks. Ef we was not bad sick wid somethin' catchin' we took a little blue mass. Sometimes we took bitters, which was made out of a lot of herbs, it was a good spring tonic, kept us from havin' de spring fever.

Formally trained physicians relied heavily on purgatives such as ipecac, tartar emetic, jalap, and castor oil. Fett (2002) observed that given the immediate effect of these powerful purgatives on the patient, it is understandable some patients would resist medical treatment from White physicians. In addition, Fett noted such harsh cathartics and purgatives also were used as punishments on the plantation. The medical use of some of these remedies was not always welcomed by the enslaved. For example, Lizzie Chandler of Louisiana stated:

> Old Miss was a great believer in quinine for 'most everythin'. When she wanted me to make some, I would say, "Quinines all right for white folks but it ain't no good for niggers. Jimson weed [was] for us." (Clayton 1990: 43)

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a number of practitioners claimed success and created a proliferation of herbal and plant remedies. Some of these practitioners published domestic medical guides to help identify and use plants as treatments. Plantation owners had access to numerous domestic medical texts available to them to aid in their practice of folk medicine. These domestic medical manuals served several purposes, such as providing advice on prevention of disease, identification of disease or disorders, treatments, and recommendations on when to call formally trained physicians (Keeney 1989). Every plantation had at least one manual that advised the planter on how to diagnose and treat common ailments (Postell 1951).

Plantation owners and overseers considered these domestic medical manuals to be among their most prized possessions (Morais 1967). For example, John Wesley's *Primitive Physick* (1791) and Thomas Short's *Medicina Britannica* (1746) were well-liked sources of medical knowledge during colonial times. Theobald's *Every Man His Own Physician* (1764) and Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (1774) were designed to be home guides to self-administered health care. Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* offered a variety of treatments and suggestions for health care, such as remedies for kidney stones and yellow jaundice. John C. Gunn's *Domestic Medicine*, considered a medical bible in the nineteenth century, relied heavily on herbal remedies (Genovese 1974). Gunn's manual was an attempt to demystify medicine and diminish the power of formally trained physicians (Cavender 2003). Dr. James Ewell's *The Planter's and Mariner's Medical Companion* (1813) was another widely used guide (Morais 1967). Yet another was Stephenson and Churchill's *Medical Botany* (1836), which relied on herbal treatments.

Agricultural journals of the antebellum South were abundant sources of medical advice for planters and physicians. Southern journals of the antebellum era were full of advice for plantation owners and overseers. For example, *De Bow's Review* and *American Cotton Planter* offered numerous articles on managing the enslaved, including articles on their medical care. These manuals and journals were prepared in the vernacular and preached that self-reliance was an attainable goal of home medicine.

For some ailments and diseases, home treatments found in these manuals and journals worked probably as well, if not better, as some of the treatments used by formally trained physicians, but some had a deleterious effect on patients (Savitt 1978). Postell (1951) concluded more than fifty years ago that many slaves died as a result of "physicking," or relying on these lay medical manuals. Some of the medical treatments found in these guides were useless and were used as placebos. Wes Brady, a native of Texas who was born in 1849, shared his account of a worthless remedy:

> They tended to us good when we was sick. Soon as one got ailing old Master had the Doctor come quick. Lots of them warn't sick when they was sick. They was just playing off to get out of work. The old white Doctor that tended to us helped them get out of work. He took a little flour and meal and water and made pills. Then he say to the Master, "That Nigger is pretty sick." Master would come over most every day to see how you was getting along. He say, "How is the pills doing." The Nigger would say, "Working me nearly to death." Sometime they stay in bed three or four days taking flour pills.

NATIVE AMERICAN INFLUENCES

Whites, in spite of their sense of superiority, were usually open to Native American folk medical practices, at least those based on herbs (Meyer

1975; Meyer et al. 1981), and these remedies crept into the medical practices of Whites. Native American herbs and medicines were critical to the early colonists, as ships from Europe were relatively rare, especially in the winter months. The supply of European pharmaceuticals was scarce and colonists needed to rely on indigenous treatments and materia medica. In response, Native populations sold herbals to settlers and helped them resolve medical concerns when they arose. Native American women sold local botanicals to Whites to fend off or cure illness, such as Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*), which was used in a brew to treat fevers (Meyer 1975).

Native American contributions to American pharmacopoeia are extensive. According to Shryock (1960: 48), more than fifty items used by Native populations found their way into the Western pharmacopoeia. Vogel (1981) found that Native populations in North America and Mexico used 170 substances found in the pharmacopoeia of the United States, although their uses may have been different. Among the plants, Vogel (1981) found used by Native Americans was wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) as a styptic and treatment for diarrhea. In addition, goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*) was used for thrush, sore mouth, or sore eyes; mayapple root (*Podophyllum peltatum*) as a cathartic; and dogwood bark (*Cornus florida*) and boneset (*Eupatorium perperfoliatum*) to treat fevers. To expel worms, they used pinkroot (*Spigelia marilandica*) and wormseed, or Jerusalem oak (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*).

European-trained physicians were also relatively scarce and early colonists turned to Native American folk practitioners for medical care. Some Native American folk practitioners developed sizable reputations as effective healers. For example, Meyer (1975) mentioned the Native American Joe Pye, who introduced a tea for typhoid fever made from a weed that would later be named Joe Pye weed.

Just as they worked with Whites, Native Americans also had extensive contacts and social relations with African Americans. These indigenous groups had extensive knowledge of herbal and other remedies native to North America. Some Native Americans shared their knowledge of herbal remedies with the enslaved. Eric Bailey (2002) concluded that in the process of adjusting to the New World, Africans merged West African with European and Native American traditions. Merging Native American with traditional African medical practices made the most sense because both emphasized the importance of spirituality in the healing process and relied on prevention and the use of natural substances, such as herbs and plants. Native populations would have been infinitely more familiar with the medicinal value of indigenous plants than Whites or Africans. Contemporary African American "secret doctors" attribute much of their knowledge to Native American herbal and plant treatments and remedies. For example, Fontenot (1994: 129) found that secret doctors in Louisiana typically referred to plants having Native American

origin as "Indian" in their interviews. The WPA narratives also include references to "Indians," "Indian grandmothers, aunts, or mothers," and "Indian plants." For example, Harriet Collins (Texas) acknowledged a debt to Native American folk medicine:

> Dere been some queer things white folks can't understand. Dere am folkses can see de spirits, but I can't. My mammy larned me a lots of doctorin', what she larnt from old folkses from Africy, and some de Indians larnt her. If you has rheumatism, jes' take white sassafras root and bile it and drink de tea. You makes lin'ment by boilin' mullein flowers and poke roots and alum and salt. Put red pepper in you shoes and keep de chills off, or string briars round de neck. Make red or black snakeroot tea to cure fever and malaria, but git de roots in de spring when de sap am high.

WHITE PERCEPTIONS OF SLAVES AND THEIR ILLNESSES

White medical care and medical understanding of African Americans was strongly influenced by proslavery and racist ideologies. Many Whites perceived the slaves as biologically different from and inferior to themselves and, hence, requiring different levels of health and medical care. In addition, White physicians found treating African Americans difficult because their skin color made diagnosis difficult. Whites generally viewed African Americans as less, or non-human, because of their darker skin color. They assumed African Americans had different diseases and had different responses to medical interventions (Kiple and King 1981). Whites believed slaves were able to endure more illness and were less tolerant of drugs, and needed less medical attention. The latter perception implied that money for expensive medicines for the enslaved might be saved by the plantation owners.

Proslavery medical experts of the day concluded that slaves had different tolerances and capacities to feel pain (Fett 2002). This belief of high tolerance to pain resulted in the sometimes cruel and inhumane administration of medical care, such as excessive bleeding and purging of slaves (Fontenot 1994). Slave owners assumed that African American women were more robust than White women and therefore needed less treatment and care during childbirth (Gates, Crew, and Goodman 2002). This perception was consistent with their economically based desire to have women back in the fields as soon as possible.

Proslavery Whites viewed slaves as more prone to disease. Unique African American diseases were "Negro Consumption," also called "Struma Africana" or "Negro Poison" (Bankole 1998). Tuberculosis among African Americans manifested itself as a lymphatic disorder and was not always properly diagnosed but was misdiagnosed as Struma Africana, Scrofula, or

Cachexia Africana (Warren 1997). Byrd and Clayton (2000: 300) identified "Negro diseases" of the period as including:

- Drapetomania, a disease that caused slaves to run away;
- Typhoid Pneumonia, a serious form of pneumonia;
- Cachexia Africana, dirt eating;
- Struma Africana, or Negro consumption, a pulmonary disease attacking Africans;
- Dyasthesia Aethiopis, rascality;
- Chronic Leprosy, accounting for dark skin color, big lips, and wooly hair; and
- Furor Sexualis, a sexual disorder.

As political tensions worsened between the North and the South before the Civil War, Southern medical authorities increasingly called for a separate type of Southern medicine tailored for the diseases of slaves (Shryock 1960). Medical literature of the period suggested that Africans were quasi-humans. This belief in medical differences extended beyond the medical community (Jordan 1950). A case in point was the work of Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright. A highly influential Southern physician, Dr. Cartwright (1793–1863) of New Orleans espoused numerous racist and proslavery theories about Africans, such as it was impossible for slavery to cause harm to Africans (Bankole 1998). Dr. Cartwright published numerous articles on the inferiority of Africans, stating that some diseases and ailments were peculiar to slaves. "Negro" diseases, he wrote, included "black vomit," "rascality," "dirt eating (Cachexia Africana)," "vomito negro," "saffron scourge," "black tongue (pellagra), " and "Drapetomania (running away)." Dr. Cartwright concluded that Africans had non-human peculiarities and they should be medically managed differently. Ironically, this conclusion did not deter Dr. Cartwright, Dr. Marion Sims, and other antebellum White physicians from medical experimentation using African American subjects and then generalizing findings to White populations (Savitt 1982).

He also developed a thesis that they had to be given medical treatments that differed from Whites because of racial, emotional, and physical dissimilarities (Morais 1967; Savitt 1989). Dr. Cartwright was joined by other physicians, such as Dr. Fenner and Dr. J. C. Nott of Mobile, in the belief that Africans were not of the same species as Whites (Postell 1951). Dr. Nott argued that Whites and Blacks were of different species. Drs. Nott and Cartwright proposed that masters could whip them because a slave's central nervous system was less developed and they could endure more pain. These central ideas became the crux of White medical treatment of slaves in the South.

THE EXPERIMENTAL USE OF SLAVES

Medical journals and documents reveal that slaves played a significant role in medical education and experimentation of the antebellum south (Fisher 1968; Savitt 1978, 1982). White physicians used slaves for experimental purposes for research they would not have done with White subjects. There is abundant evidence that slaves were exploited by the medical profession in the South. Medical experimentation using slaves illustrated White feelings and perceptions toward using slaves as medical specimens (Savitt 1978). White physicians frequently placed slaves on public display to demonstrate their ailments.

The most often cited example of the misuse of enslaved women in experimentation was the research conducted by Dr. James Marion Sims. Dr. Sims, between 1845 and 1852, conducted experimental surgeries on slave women to treat fistulas and other ailments. Dr. Sims conducted painful experimental procedures on enslaved women without the benefit of anesthesia. His experimental subjects did not consent to these painful surgical episodes. Over a four-year period, he conducted more than thirty surgical operations before achieving success. Although his surgical techniques were a major medical advance for all women having fistulas, his use of enslaved women to perfect his procedures was morally and professionally inappropriate. Although his research was restricted to African American women, all of his medical illustrations were of White women. This suggests that he knew what he was doing was wrong (Byrd and Clayton 2000). While Dr. Sims is considered the "father of gynecology," many have criticized him for operating on slave women.

The narrative of John Brown provides another poignant example of experimentation with the enslaved without regard for their feelings and well-being. John Brown, in his 1855 narrative *Slave Life in Georgia* (Boney 1991), provided an account of a Dr. Hamilton's (1822) medical experimentation of sunstroke using Brown as a subject. Dr. Hamilton had a fire pit dug and placed John in the hot pit, covered him with wet blankets, and measured the effects of certain medications on Mr. Brown's body temperature and health. Hamilton then noted when Brown would faint from heatstroke. He followed these experiments with a series of bleedings and efforts at finding out how deep "my black skin went." Dr. Hamilton's efforts involved blistering Brown's skin. John Brown eventually became too weak to work but survived Hamilton's cruel experiments.

Other examples of medical experimentation include Dr. Francois Prevost's early operations and experiments trying to perfect Cesarean sections using African women as subjects. His first successful birth, named Cesarine, was born in 1831 to a slave woman. According to Bankole (1998), experimentation was not limited to the living. There are references to "night doc-

tors" paying to have the corpses of the enslaved and poor Whites dug up for medical inquiries. The medical practice of using the bodies of deceased African Americans for dissections was rampant throughout the South and the North (Savitt 1982). These postmortem examinations of deceased African Americans represented a serious violation of human dignity. African Americans, enslaved and free, viewed such violations as unholy and degrading (Fett 2002).

THE CONCEPT OF SOUNDNESS

During slavery, Southern Whites referred to the health status of slaves, as it related to their value, as their "soundness." Whites used the concept of soundness to appraise slaves as individual units in relationship to the slave owner's wealth (Fett 2002). They believed the health of slaves directly affected their value to do work and specifically their price at auction. In addition, owners used the notion of soundness to determine the extent and quality of health care they were willing to provide to their slaves. Those slaves viewed as more valuable received more attention than those seen as less valuable. The medical consequences of this concept for the elderly or those with disabilities could be great, as medical conditions were neglected or ignored. At auctions, plantation owners frequently called on physicians to attest to the health soundness of slaves to do work (Fisher 1968; Kiple and King 1981). Ailments such as rheumatism, arthritis, hernias, disabilities, childbearing ability, and other conditions, such as old age, were viewed as reducing a slave's value in market. Those with or having signs of chronic illness or disease were judged to be "unsound" and unworthy of investment.

While many planters were comfortable with allowing African American folk practitioners to cure and treat slaves, they were less inclined when serious diseases afflicted their slaves. Because of the financial risks involved, White physicians were almost always called in to deal with epidemics among enslaved populations (Kiple and King 1981). Kiple and King summarized the role of White physicians on plantations:

> In the normal course of their duties physicians were called upon by the plantation to perform a range of tasks from extracting teeth to delivering babies, but mostly their work seems to have been that of dispensing medicines for routine but chronic complaints. In certain practical areas such as that of setting broken bones or prescribing trusses for hernias (which were plentiful on the plantation) or vaccinating against smallpox, they were at their best; in the face of epidemic they were mostly ineffectual; against everyday ailments then, as now, nature cured, and the physicians took the credit. (Kiple and King 1981: 167)

Slaves often found it necessary to provide their own care. They did so because it was not always provided by White society, they lacked faith in medical practices, or they viewed their own informal system of health care as more effective. Byrd and Clayton (2000) wrote, "Most slaves preferred being seen by their own healers and distrusted Western medicine and the White doctors representing that medical tradition." The lack of confidence was with good reason, as techniques such as "physicking" contributed to the death of many slaves (Postell 1951). White physicians of the period also distrusted and were critical of the practice of physicking. For example in 1845, Dr. H. V. Wooten from Alabama shared his experience of treating a slave named Betty whose owner had been treating her for diarrhea but who had a prolapsed uterus (Fisher 1968). Other examples of antebellum physicians finding misdiagnoses and treatments were recorded (Fisher 1968). Fett (2002) noted a general atmosphere of distrust by slaves of White medical practice. One WPA respondent remarked, "Oh, de people didn't put much faith to de doctors in dem days," and then added, "Mostly, de would use de herbs in de fields for de medicine" (Rawick 1972, vol. 2: 24). Other times self-administered herbal treatments were the only ones available. Griffin Myrax, (Arkansas) noted that the lack of money forced some to use herbs:

> Lots of folks died out of consumption in the spring and pneumonia all winter. There wasn't any doctors seeing after colored folks for they had no money and they used herbs—only medicine they could get.

Slaves sometimes preferred self-treatment and cures by family members or friends over established medical practice (Savitt 1978). There is evidence that some Whites also were drawn to African American folk practitioners, such as the herb doctors (Kiple and King 1981; Bassett 1940; Postell 1951). But this was not true for all slaves. References to not having confidence in herbal and folk remedies are present in the narratives. For example, Granny Cain (South Carolina) commented, "When a slave got sick we sent for the doctor. We never put much store in herb root tea and such like."

THE VALUE OF SLAVES

More than fifty years ago, William Postell (1951) held that Southern plantation owners had a stake in providing health care for slaves. Without question, as long as they were economically productive, overseers and plantation owners viewed slaves as valuable commodities. Goodson (1987: 200) noted that when a valued slave was sick, the planter was expected to get a good physician but when he or she wasn't a good worker, cheap medical care should be provided. Savitt (1978) reported that some owners and

health officials generally tried to clean up slave living areas, regulate food, and vaccinate folks but only when the illness or disease posed a significant risk of mortality to the population (Savitt 1978). However, just how much owners and overseers were willing to invest in the health care of ill, diseased, or injured slaves differed. Slaves received only the medical care that their owners felt was necessary to maintain their productivity and was affordable. Older and less productive individuals were likely to have been medically abandoned. In comparison, free African Americans only received the care they could afford (Warren 1997). While some would go to almost any cost to get good medical care, others either did not or did so at minimal expense. Keeney (1989) shared that one Mississippi planter bragged that in spite of living in an unhealthy climate, his medical bill for 150 slaves was only $50 per year because he relied on domestic medicine over formal medical care.

Fett (2002: 18) noted, "The intersection of medicine with the southern political economy produced a narrow definition of slave health permeated by concerns of slave holder status and wealth." In short, personal relationships, value, and socioeconomic status dictated much of slave health care by Whites. Consequently, slaves and their health status were frequently the subjects of court disputes over hiring and purchasing as they represented an investment.

The economic investment represented by the slave population was the primary reason why they were provided medical care (Fisher 1968). Fontenot (1994: 29) wrote, "Even though there is recorded concern expressed by slaveholders for the well-being of their slaves, for the most part the health condition of slaves was of economic concern for plantation owners." Bankole (1998: 31) also noted, "The extent of medical care was consistent with the slave owner's desire to profit from his investment."

NARRATIVE REFERENCES TO SLAVE MEDICAL TREATMENT BASED ON VALUE

The WPA narratives often noted the role of value in the delivery of medical care. The slaves were keenly aware that the quality of medical care that they received from plantation owners and overseers was dependent on their value. For example, WPA respondent Janey Landrum (Texas) was well aware of the role value played:

> W'en us got sick old Mis' doctored us and if us git too bad they would send for their own doctor. You see, a good slave was worth a lot of money and they didn't let one that got sick die, if they could help it, and they didn't low the overseer to scar them up 'cause that would ruin the sale of a sarbant. Us made

> our own soap with lye dripped from wood ashes and the scraps and skins of meat. Hit was a long way to a doctor and mos' of the women, white and colored, larned to be right good doctors themselves. There was no trained nusses then that I knows about. The neighbors come in and hope nuss when there was sickness in the fambly. Mos' all the slaves wimmin was right good doctors themselves. They git their medicine out of the woods, and the old folks knowed lots of way to cure things.

William Byrd (Texas) made a similar observation:

> When slaves become sick master he would look after them he would first get old negro mamma. . . . If she couldnt get us well then master he would have white doctor, cause we were too valuable to let die. He would lose lots of money iffen he didnt get us well.

Ike Woodward (Mississippi) shared a sense of value:

> When slaves got sick a "Granny" would look after 'em. Us niggers sho' did get good treatment when we was sick. You know white folks sho didn't want a nigger o' theirs to die—they was worth somethin!

Rosie McGillery was enslaved in South Carolina and interviewed in Texas. She noted the role of value and the importance of not letting folks die: "When the slaves become sick the master he always look after them, because he didnt want to lose one." Eli Davison was born in West Virginia and enslaved there and in Texas. He shared, "When a slave was sick Maser would always see that he was taken care of cause we was too valuable to let die or stay sick, they wanted us to work." Eli Coleman of Texas, born in 1846, declared:

> When we got sick Maser he looked after us good and, gave us the best of care as we was too valuable to let stay sick or feeling bad. If we wasn't so sick Maser got an old negro mama to look after us and doctor us. She used herbs that she gathered in the woods such as sasfras roots, cami weeds, and then she gathered leaves off peach trees and made syrup and gave us for chills and fever. If we got very sick Maser would have the best white Doctor he could get to take care of us, and was no fooling then with that negro mama after he got the Doctor, only she would wait on us. As long as he kept her I never did hear of a slave dying cause he took good care of us.

Octavia George was born in Louisiana and observed that the quality of medical care hinged on whether they were seen as good, "When a slave was sick, the master would get a good doctor for him if he was a good slave, but if he wasn't considered a good slave he would be given cheap medical care." Mollie Dawson was born in Texas in 1852. She recalled:

> Dar wasn't very many slaves on our plantation, and we didn't have much sickness among us—bad colds in de winter and malaria in de spring of de year. We does most of de doctoring ourselves. If we got much sick Maser Newman didn't wait very long to get a Doctor out to see about us, and he didn't had de doctor out but a very few times. Just when a bad cold was gettin too bad. Mos of de white folks was pretty good bout dat cause dey had lots of money invested in us slaves. A big stout slave sold for lots of money jest like a good cow or mule does now and de weaker slave was de smaller de price.

For some, the illness or ailment had to be serious before physicians would be called in. For example, Joe Hawkins (Mississippi) recalled:

> Doctors then didn't doctor a person like they does now. No sir, he'd bleed you so many minutes while he watched his big watch which he always carried. Bleed you for most any sickness. A person had to be mighty sick 'fore a doctor was called.

John Proctor Mills (Alabama) stated:

> Marse Jole was one uv der finess white mens der Good Lawd evvah done brunged awn dissearf. Evvy day he camed tew der slave quattahs wid der fambly doctah an quired aftah evvy niggah awn der place kase he done say'd,—er well fed, helthy niggah nex tew er mule is der bess propersition er man can vess his money in. An'us slaves fared juss ez good es twus poss'ble fur ennybuddy ter fare.

Plantation owners and overseers employed a number of tactics to prevent illness and disease. They encouraged the use of soap, "mosquito bars" (nets), vaccinations, and proper clothing. Some owners used quarantine stations, called forts, which required the slave to spend time isloated before entering a new plantation. Some also monitored and knew the importance of diet in preventing illness and disease. Owners tried to be medically self-sufficient by stocking a variety of medicines and remedies to keep medical bills low (Kiple and King 1981). They typically had three general-purpose remedies on hand to treat Whites and the enslaved. These remedies were calomel, or castor oil, vinegar nail (made from soaking rusty nails in containers of vinegar), and pine resin pills (often used with vinegar) (Kiple and King 1981). Others have listed calomel, blue mass pills, ipecac, castor oil, tartar emetic, and assorted tinctures as common plantation remedies (Goodson 1987; Haller 1972). For earaches and toothaches, plantation healers used tar to fill cavities and ear canals. People also used whiskey and rum as general painkillers. Some plantations also stocked commercial medicines, some specifically designed for slaves. For example, the potent Swaim's Panacea was touted as very effective for slave ailments (Kiple and King 1981).

MEDICAL CARE ON THE PLANTATION

Among historians, there has been an ongoing debate over the nature of health care provided slaves. Plantation owners viewed slaves as property and investments and were often economically motivated to provide health care. Some considered the medical care of slaves as a measure of owners' concern for the slave people (Genovese 1974).

Plantation owners, their spouses, and overseers were officially responsible for the medical care of ill or injured slaves. When medical care was provided to slaves, the first level of response by owners and overseers was to rely on plantation remedies based on home manuals on health care. The WPA narratives mention this in several interviews. For example, ex-slave Adele Frost commented, "We ain't had no doctor." She then added, "Our misses and one of the slaves would attend the sick." Pauline Worth of South Carolina remembered being cared for by a plantation owner's spouse:

> I tell you my old Missus was good to us, child, good to us all de time. Come bout en doctor us herself when we get sick. Wouldn' trust nobody else to give us no medicine. I remember she give us castor oil en little salts for some ailments. Didn' give us nothin more den dat only a little sage or catnip sometimes. Dat what was good for colds.

Hector Smith of South Carolina also confirmed the lack of physicians in the provision of medical care with his statement:

> Oh, de peoples didn' never worry bout no doctor den. Dey doctor was in de field in dat day on time. I gwine tell you just like I know it, all de older peoples use to get de herbs out de old fields for dey remedies. My Massa on my Missus was de ones what doctor mostly in dem times.

WHITE PHYSICIANS AND AFRICAN AMERICAN PATIENTS

When home remedies failed, plantation owners and overseers would call White physicians. Bankole (1998: 78) observed, "When the folk medicine of the slave owners failed, they turned to licensed medical practitioners." Some of these physicians were under contract to provide care to the plantation, including slave people (Goodson 1987). Some White physicians even charged lower fees for treating slaves because the high volume of cases compensated for the price differential (Fisher 1968). For many, access to a formally trained physician was only the last resort and many relied solely on African American folk healers for medical treatment (Byrd and Clayton 2000). Because many lived in isolation, it was rare for a White physician to be called on for medical care. Only the most difficult

cases, such as those requiring surgery, were generally treated by White physicians in many areas.

The physician–patient relationship was crucial to the practice of medicine in the antebellum South (Fett 2002). Formal medical theory of the time ascribed to the theory of specificity, which held that disease and illness manifested itself in each individual differently. Factors such as race, gender, status, age, and others played a role in how illness and disease were manifested. Thus, an important element of medical intervention was for the physician to directly observe how the illness or disease affected the patient. Once observed, the physician could then tailor the treatment to the specific individual's needs. The important aspect of this was the requirement that the physician establish a one-on-one relationship with the patient. Naturally, these relationships changed dramatically based on race and socioeconomic status of the physician and patient. As one would expect, slaves entered into these medical relationships at a lower level of power and influence than their White counterparts. Thus, as Fett (2002) noted, medical interventions with slave involved a three-way relationship between the White physician, plantation owner, and slave patient. The latter had little to say about the nature of the medical treatment received. Octavia George's (Louisiana) narrative illustrated that some White physicians were reluctant to serve the enslaved, "Some of the doctors would not go to the cabin where the slaves were, and the slave would have to be carried on his bed to his master's back porch and the doctor would see him there." However, there were exceptions, when some physicians sought consent from the enslaved patient and owners. Frank Gill (Alabama) described his experience:

> De Ol' Marster tuk good keer ob us too, when any ob us got sick he send for de doctor, den when dey order de medicine to be giben at night, he'd see dat us got hit. But nowadays if you git sick, you hab to git de Doctor, an' den pay him yo' se'f.

Randall Lee (Florida), who was born in South Carolina, recounted:

> He indeed was a doctor and practiced his profession in the keeping of his slaves from bodily harm as well as keeping them well. He gave then medicine when they did not feel well and saw to it that they took needed rest if they were sick and tired.

Ahram Sells (Texas) shared:

> Us hab no real doctor at de plantation but 'r' co'se dere was a doctor man at Jasper 'n' one at Newton. A nigger hab to be purty sick befo' dey call de doctor do' [though]. Dere was allus some ol' time' nigger dat knowed lots 'r' rem'dies 'n' knowed all de dif'rent kin's 'r' yarbs 'n' roots 'n' dif'rent t'ings to do w'en any 'r' de chillren git sick.

Reliance on any form of medical intervention always involves a degree of patient confidence in the treatment and abilities of the practitioner. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many people viewed physicians with suspicion and caution. Evidence suggests that these reactions were warranted, as medical practice often did more harm than good. For instance, Duin and Sutcliffe (1992: 46) wrote, "Over the centuries, opium, henbane, and mandrake root were popular choices in attempts to induce general anesthesia (as making patients dead drunk) but it was soon recognized that the effective dose could also be lethal." Byrd and Clayton (2000: 183–84) wrote, "For many accounts neither African Americans [nor] South American Africans, nor Caribbean Africans fully accepted White Western-trained physicians unless they were coerced."

WHITE DISTRUST OF SLAVE ILLNESS

Besides perceiving them as having different illnesses, planters and overseers often viewed illness among slaves as evidence of malingering (Savitt 1989; Kiple and King 1981). Plantation owners and overseers were often concerned with whether slaves feigned illness or malingering. Planters were not particularly skilled at separating the sick from those falsely ill (Savitt 1989). The noted Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright named a disease peculiar to Africans "drapetomania" for the tendency of some to escape their plantation. In addition, plantation owners did not appreciate slaves overusing the plantation infirmary, medicines, or the family doctor (Savitt 1978). Concern for laziness and the feigning of illness promoted the concept of "slave management" on many plantations (Fett 2002). As Bankole (1998) noted, in the eyes of an owner, a nonproductive slave had no value and was equal to a dead one. Often this slave management involved owners and overseers inflicting punishment as a response to illness, feigned or not. In effect, this put them in a position of being lay medical diagnosticians. They undoubtedly erred in many of their diagnoses. The result was, for some enslaved people, punishment during a time of real illness, injury, and disease.

The WPA narratives indicate that some slaves did feign illness to rebel against slavery (Bankole 1998). Fett (2002) referred to this as "strategic illness." The slaves sometimes used strategic illness for their own purposes, such as avoiding demanding work, or receiving additional rations, as was the case for falsely claimed pregnancies. Other reasons, besides rebellion, included to be able to rest and to keep families from being separated through sales (Savitt 1978).

White responses to feigning illness, as one would expect, were punitive. Those caught feigning illness were punished severely. Some owners and overseers, assuming almost all illness was feigned, forced the slave to work

when they were seriously ill (Fett 2002). Isiah Green, a Native American born in 1856 in Georgia shared:

> Slaves did not lack medical treatment and were given the best of attention by the owner's family doctor. Sometimes slaves would pretend illness to escape work in the field. A quick examination, however, revealed the truth.

PLANTATION HOSPITALS/INFIRMARIES/SICKHOUSES

Some of the larger Southern plantations established and maintained infirmaries or hospitals to care for slaves (Postell 1951). These hospitals assured the planter some degree of control over their slaves. Some planters preferred this option to having slave practitioners providing treatment (Savitt 1989). Residents in such facilities were infirm, older, or medical patients. Conditions in these facilities ranged from very poor to adequate for the times.

Some of the WPA narratives reference plantation hospitals and infirmaries. Catherine Cornelius, who was born about 1836 in Louisiana, remembered a plantation hospital. She stated, "What did dey do for us when we was sick? Why we had a nice hospital in de place with a Negro nurse and midwife" (Clayton 1990: 46). Isaac Stier of Mississippi recalled:

> De slaves was well treated when dey got sick. My marster had a standin' docter what he paid by de year. Dey was a horspital building near de quarters an' a good old granny woman to nuss de sick. Dey was five or six beds in a room. One room was for de mens, an' one for de wimmins. Us docter was name Richardson an' he 'tended us long after de Wah. He sho' was a gent-man an a powerful good docter.

Works Project Administration narrative references to plantation sick houses also include Joe Clinton's (Arkansas) comment:

> Ole mars had a house on de place too dat was called de "sick house." Dat was where dem was put dat was sick. It was a place where dey was doctored on cared for till dey either git well or die. It was er sort or hospital like. "Uncle Warner," he had charge of de sick house, on he could sure tell iffen you sick or not, or iffen you jus' tryin' to play off from work.

William Ballard (South Carolina) recalled, "The master had a 'sick-house' where he took sick slaves for treatment, and kept a drug store there." Carter J. Jackson (Texas) stated:

> If we was sick with anything sides chills, Master took us up to the "sick-house" close to where he lived to wait on us. Mistress was a good doctor and nurse and

give us "Blue Mass" and "Quinine." Lots of the darkies wore asfidity bags to keep off measles and sich like.

CLOSING OBSERVATIONS—WHITE MEDICAL CARE

Plantation owners and overseers provided a mixed bag of medical care to their slaves, ranging from adequate to deplorable. Previously, scholars have identified economic motives as playing a critical role in the quality and quantity of medical care given to slaves. While medical care for Southern Whites was never abundant, it was even less available to African American slaves. When it was available, in many instances African Americans were seen as being different in their ailments and corresponding treatments. The scarcity of White formal medical care and its ineffectiveness fuelled the development of alternative medical systems. These systems included plantation-based care (physicking) and informal slave medicine.

3

Slave Folk Practitioners

> An' speakin' of oures, white folks, us niggers had 'em. My grandmammy was a midwife an' she useta gib women cloves an' whiskey to ease de pain. She also gib 'em dried watermelon seeds to git rid of de grabel in de kidneys. For night sweats Grandmammy would put an axe under de bed of de sick pusson wid de blade asittin' straight up. An' iffen yo' is sick an' wants to keep de visitors away, jus' putt a fresh laid aig in front of de do' an' dey won't come in. If you is anxious fo' yo' sweetheart to come back f'un a trip put a pin in de groun' wid de point up an' den put a aig on de point. When all de insides runs outen de aig yo' sweetheart will return.
>
> —Dellie Lewis, Alabama

> W'en us got sick old Mis' doctored us and if us git too bad they would send for their own doctor. You see, a good slave was worth a lot of money and they didn't let one that got sick die, if they could help it, and they didn't low the overseer to scar them up 'cause that would ruin the sale of a sarbant. Us made our own soap with lye dripped from wood ashes and the scraps and skins of meat. Hit was a long way to a doctor and mos' of the women, white and colored, larned to be right good doctors themselves. There was no trained nusses then that I knows about. The neighbors come in and hope nuss when there was sickness in the fambly. Mos' all the slaves wimmin was right good doctors themselves. They git their medicine out of the woods, and the old folks knowed lots of way to cure things.
>
> —Janey Landrum, Texas

Historical sources abound with references to slave midwives, grannies, herb doctors, root doctors, spiritual healers, kitchen physicks, folk healers, spiritualists, conjurer doctors, hoodoo practitioners, and formally trained

African American physicians. Freeborn and freed African American physicians also contributed to the health care in the United States. Slave folk practitioners, consistent with White medical practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, relied on a variety of approaches to medicine. African American folk practitioners embraced medical strategies from a multitude of traditions. They borrowed from the European, Native American, Caribbean, and African medical folklore and incorporated their own ideas on how to address medical concerns. African American folk medicine was a collection of medical dogma, belief, superstition, pragmatic practice, conjecture, insight, and ignorance (Kiple and King 1981).

The ex-slave Janey Landrum (Texas) was born in 1851. She provided a sense of how eclectic slave health care could be. Passages from her WPA narrative reflect medical care that was a combination of herbal, traditional, psychological, and superstitious practices:

> I allus has heard that if you cross pins over a wart and then hide the pins where no one can find 'em the warts will sho' go away. You can git rid of a corn on your foot by rubbin' hit with store bought soap or lemon juice. If a kernel on your body swell up, jes' go to the chimbly git some soot and mark a cross on the kernel with this soot and hit will git all right. May rain water is good for mos' any ailment. W'ite sassafras root tea is good for blindness.

> W'en a sty comes on your eye steal someboddy's dish rag and rub the sty with hit, then throw the rag over your left shoulder at a cross road at midnight, but hit's bes' to throw the rag over your left shoulder over a bridge at midnight. If you git the scrofula and want to cure hit, git a lot of china berry roots and poke roots and some bluestone and boil them all together strain and make a salve to rub on the sores. Then anoint them with a black chicken feather dipped in pure hog lard. This brings the sores to a head and then you can press out the cores and you are cured. Lime water is a fine tonic, especially in the spring of the year.

> I keeps dat penny on a string 'roun' my neck to keep from having indigestion. If you save the inside lining of a chicken gizzard that is good for indigestion too. The old folks say that if you are having hard pains to git some one to put an axe in the bed with you because that will cut the pains. And they say to wash your face in dew for nine mornings to cure the tetter. If you git your heels frost bit, smoke 'em with pine top or rub the heels with a roasted turnip.

Evident in Janey Landrum's comments (and present in almost all narratives) were references to the spiritual aspects of medical care and healing. A consistent feature of all of the African American folk practitioner practices was an underlying spiritual foundation. As Fett (1996: 189) wrote, "Slave healers of the plantation south, in particular, embedded their medicinal practices in a context of sacred power." Spiritualism played an important role

in the medical care they provided. This was also true of other folk medicine, such as that practiced by White Southern colonists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. White folk medicine incorporated notions of the spiritual in medicinal charms, signs, incantations, and spells (Moss 1999).

WHITE CONFIDENCE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN FOLK PRACTITIONERS

During the antebellum period, White medical authorities were reluctant to acknowledge that slaves contributed anything to the field of medicine or to their own medical care (Bankole 1998). However, some Whites registered great confidence in African American folk practitioners. Some slave practitioners even drew praise from White physicians (Kiple and King 1981). Savitt (1978) cited examples of Southern planters recognizing that African American folk practitioners had better results than their White physician counterparts. For example, the practice of inoculation to prevent smallpox can be attributed to a slave who used serum from infected patients to inoculate people. The Reverend Cotton Mather learned of the procedure from a slave named Onesimus and advanced its use in formal medicine. According to Fontenot (1994), the early explorers Du Pratz and Le Page learned the cures for yaws and scurvy from an African American folk practitioner in Louisiana. The Carolina legislature purchased the freedom of a slave named Caesar and added a hundred-pound pension for his demonstrated effectiveness in treating poisoning and snake bites (Meyer 1975).

However, slave medical practices were not always welcomed by the White establishment. For example, in 1749, the South Carolina General Assembly passed a law that prohibited slaves from being employed by physicians to concoct poisons or administer medicines of any kind (Meyer 1975). In addition, some Whites feared they would be poisoned at the hands of African American folk practitioners (Fontenot 1994). One result of this fear and others was that some states passed laws to restrict or prohibit enslaved or free African folk practitioners from providing medical care. As noted previously, elected officials in Virginia passed laws in 1748 designed to limit African Americans from administering medical treatments but evidence suggests that plantation owners continued to tolerate and sometimes relied on slave herbal doctors following the passage of the law. Virginian lawmakers passed this law because of a concern for being poisoned by African American folk practitioners (Crowder 1980; Genovese 1974). In addition, Savitt (1978) noted that plantation owners were concerned and did not want slaves overusing the medicines, family physician, or infirmary. However, they preferred these to reliance on self-administered care. They feared that enslaved people waited too long before applying

treatments, were incompetent, ignorant, and lazy, and were intolerant when ailments got out of hand. An additional concern of planters was that African American attitudes and involvement in healing was a matter of "native" or "negro superstition," which was generally labeled by Whites as voodoo or hoodoo (Bankole 1998). Therefore, Whites were concerned that African spiritual and religious beliefs would spread and, perhaps, compete with Christianity. Racism framed all perceptions and actions of the times.

Some slaves provided medical care in spite of the inherent dangers imposed by the dominant White society. Herbert M. Morais (1967: 5) commented, "Even when slavery disfigured the American scene, there were individual Negro healers and practitioners who braved abuse of all kinds, and on Southern plantations even death itself, to bring medical aid and comfort to their people."

There were a few exceptions. Dr. Benjamin Rush, the most famous and influential American physician of his time, appreciated what slave folk practitioners knew about medical care. In regards to an African American folk practitioner, Dr. Rush proclaimed in 1788, "I have conversed with him upon most of the acute and epidemic diseases of the country where he lives. . . . I expect to have suggested some new medicines to him, but he suggested many more to me" (Morais 1967: 7). The yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793 spread beyond the ability of the medical community to provide care. Rush, who initially believed they were immune to yellow fever, called upon African Americans to provide assistance to afflicted Whites. He later admitted that they did get Yellow Fever and several died (Warren 1997). Nevertheless, their relative immunity from yellow fever led to their being relied on heavily to care for Whites in Philadelphia (Kiple and King 1981). The Philadelphia Free African Society voluntarily aided the afflicted and buried the dead. African Americans were recognized by Rush as being very effective in treating and caring for those with Yellow Fever (Meyer 1975).

Others besides Rush acknowledged the talents of slaves. Lieutenant Governor Gooch of Virginia (1729) stated:

> I met with a negro, a very old man, who has performed many wonderful cures of diseases. For the sake of his freedom, he has revealed the medicine. . . . There is no room to doubt of its being a certain remedy here. (Morais 1967: 7)

White reliance on African American medical care went beyond necessity. Some Whites registered confidence in African folk medicine for other reasons. Some believed that the "Savage African" held powerful healing powers unique to people with dark skin (Cavender 2003). For example, some proposed that the saliva of very dark-skinned people cured thrush, as did

riding a horse with a Black man. According to Appalachian folk medicine, the spit of a dark-skinned woman with "blue gums" could cure ringworm (Cavender 2003). White confidence was so high with some slave practitioners that some were granted freedom for their medical contributions on the plantation (Morais 1967).

WHITE RELIANCE OF SLAVE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE

Southern Whites did not always share the same level of confidence in African American folk practitioners, as did the slaves. Some plantation owners only permitted African American folk medicine after formal medicine had failed. Bankole (1998: 23) wrote, "Records left do not indicate that slave owners took any serious interest in African knowledge of medicine and healing unless African practitioners were usually successful in cases where they had failed."

However, given the scarcity and expense of formal medical care in the south, plantation owners and overseers used African Americans, slave and free, to provide medical services and care. There are countless examples of White reliance on African American folk practitioners outside of the White medical establishment to provide medical treatments and care. Postell (1951) cited one example from 1832 when John Walker, a planter from Virginia, after several failed attempts to help one of his slaves turned to an African American folk practitioner for help:

> My servant Jack has become almost blind its thought from being poisoned he has been under Docr. Moore C. Faunteroy for 4 or 5 weeks and has been growing worse till almost blind. I have this day sent him to an Old Negro named Lewis White decsd. Living at Whites Mill in King Wm City who says he can cure him to see if he can make a cure. O day the Old man Docr. Lewis (a Coloured man) belong to Andrew Stephenson the property of John Whits decsd.—[He] brought my man Jack home he has been under him to be cured of being poisoned and has too all appearances effected a cure Jack went over to him the 5th June I believe almost blind his sight seems as good as ever he is to continue taking decoction of herbs for some weeks yet I paid the old man $8 today and 2 when he first went over to him in all $10.00. (Postell 1951: 108–9)

Evidence indicates that Southern Whites depended on the medical care and assistance of slaves, especially during the Civil War. During the war, Whites often called on slaves to help with medical care on the plantations and, also, to care for war casualties. With the men off at war, many White plantation women became much more involved with the operations of the plantations, including overseeing and directly providing health care. The traditional Southern notions of femininity, privilege, racism, and class consciousness did

not encourage or promote competence among plantation women, especially when it came to medical matters. While many White women worked hard to provide medical care and assistance, the majority of health care was provided by African Americans. According to Faust (1996), although the confederacy's ladies contributed much, it was Southern African Americans who cared for the South's injured.

African American assistance was much broader than simply caring for the casualties of war. Ceceil George gave an account of how her medical intervention in her owner's wife's case of yellow fever made a big difference:

> De yaller fever come along and he sweat. He used to keep his money in a iron chest, and ease out just enough money to run de house on to Mrs. Jerry, dat was his wife and a good woman, den she get sick.
>
> De yaller fever was ragin'; every day coffins [were] goin' to de graveyard. So he sent for a special doctor for Mrs. Jerry. His name was Dr. Levere, and he had a crippled foot. Well, de doctor, he took sick. Mrs. Jerry, she call me to her bed. She say, "Oh, Ceceil, I'm sick, I'm scart, de doctor sick and de medicine don't do no good. My husband must not know, but can't you make me some tea? Do something." But I was scart of Mr. Green, so I just prayed over her, and something said, "Trust God. Make dat tea." I went out, got de grass, got some Indian root, put it on to boil, and I get some whiskey. I say, "For God's sake, I don't want to be killed." I give her de tea and she don't sweat, so I cover her up. I go get de guts out of a puimkin and boil it with whiskey and give it to her and she sweat de fever out. Her clothes were yaller, but wid God's help I got her on her feet. (Clayton 1990: 85-86)

The consequences might have been serious if Ceceil George had been caught by Mr. Green practicing medicine. She could have been beaten or even killed for trying to help, especially if the patient had died. The risks were great. Herbert M. Morais (1967: 5) wrote, "Even when slavery disfigured the American scene, there were individual Negro healers and practitioners who braved abuse of all kinds, and on Southern plantations even death itself, to bring medical aid and comfort to their people." Herbal remedies, self-medication, and folk practitioners often meant the difference between life and death to Whites and slaves living in sparsely populated rural regions or in isolated compounds. These slaves sometimes took great personal risks when practicing folk medicine.

SLAVE FOLK PRACTITIONERS

Slaves played an important role in the health care delivery systems of the antebellum South. They usually were well versed in herbal treatments and various forms of spiritual healing (Crowder 1980). African American folk practitioners typically spent years in the woods and fields studying the me-

dicinal properties of plants and herbs. Folk practitioners orally handed down the folk medical knowledge they possessed. These folk practitioners were quite familiar with the important role belief had in healing and obtaining good results.

The spiritual aspects of healing and curing—as well as the role of the family, spiritual possession, witchcraft, sorcery, herbs and plants, and beliefs—played important roles in traditional West African healing arts. African medical practices were based on ritual and spirituality. Summarizing African medical practices, Ayensu (1991: 194) observed, "In African culture, traditional medical practitioners are always considered to be influential spiritual leaders as well, using magic and religion along with medicines." He later added, "Illness is handled with Man's hidden spiritual powers and with application of plants that have been found especially to contain healing powers."

With notable exceptions, such as surgical amputations and Cesarian sections, West African medical care was more ritualistic than traditional Western medicine. Although some African therapeutics and surgical procedures were effective, they were based more on observation rather than on scientific investigation or evidence. Besides magical amulets, charms, and fetishes, some respected, formally trained African American physicians also relied on herbal and plant treatments. Savitt (1978: 149) observed, "Many depended on Negro herbs and root doctors, or on influential conjurers among the local black population." Thus, formally trained African American physicians, similar to their White counterparts, relied on whatever they could to treat medical concerns.

Semmes (1983) noted that slaves brought with them African knowledge of Cesarean sections, midwifery, a method of small pox inoculation, and other effective medical practices. As noted previously, despite their introduction and use of these effective treatments, Whites generally failed to recognize African contributions to medical and health care in the antebellum South and in the years that followed (Bankole 1998; Goodson 1987; Semmes 1983). This is particularly true for their contributions in plant and herbal remedies that were adopted by White physicians. Bankole (1998: 119) wrote, "There is general consensus that slaves contributed nothing significant to the field of medicine or to the medical care they received as slaves during the antebellum period." Evidence indicates, and Bankole and others would agree, this perception was unjustified.

African American exclusion from the formal health professions and training during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the rule. Records show that there were exceptions and some African American physicians were trained formally as early as 1780 in America (Fontenot 1994). Notable exceptions include the formally trained Dr. John Sweet Rock (1825–1866) and Dr. James McCune Smith (1811–1865) among others. With discrimination being so prevalent in formal medical training and in the delivery of

medical care, many African Americans turned to traditional African and alternative approaches to healing.

Medical treatments in the antebellum South were inadequate at best and slaves had a natural distrust of White medical practices. Many were forced to turn to their own people for medical care that was rooted in West African traditions (Bewell 1999). According to Fett (2002: 2) these, "African philosophies and therapies thus proved central to the development of African American doctoring traditions." Fontenot (1994) concluded that slave folk practitioners were sought because they shared the same cultural belief systems regarding healing and medical practice. Bewell (1999: 199) wrote, "In a context where medical treatment was inadequate and structured by distrust, slaves were more likely to look to black folk medicine for treatments, many of which derived from Africa." Most slaves preferred their own folk practitioners to White physicians (Byrd and Clayton 2000). Slaves often preferred and relied on self-treatment or remedies recommended by relatives or friends (Savitt 1978). Warner Willis (Clayton 1990: 215) of Louisiana commented, "In the old times . . . we're our own druggist and doctor and cured ourself with roots and herbs and homemade remedies."

In would be wrong to conclude that African American practitioners were always better than their White counterparts, who bled, purged, voided, and relied on treatments sometimes worse than the original medical condition. African American folk practitioners could be every bit as rough on the patient as White medical care during the period. Not only did slaves often undergo the bleeding and purging so frequently employed by White doctors, but they also experienced African American efforts to prove that Whites had no monopoly on cures that killed (Genovese 1974). While White physicians bled, purged, vomited, and overused laxatives, African American practitioners also inflicted their share of misery on patients. For example, Henrietta Butler of Lafourche Parish, Louisiana, recalled a folk treatment for lockjaw that seems a bit drastic:

> He would give us pills when we got sick. I rember one day one of the mens had lockjaw. That old woman made a fly blister and put on dat poor nigger and let it stay until it blistered. The [she] too a stiff brush and roughed over that sore place a when she did, dat nigger hollered and his jaws come unlocked. (Clayton 1990: 38)

In spite of West African cultural beliefs and practices to the contrary, some African Americans adopted the Western medical practice of bleeding patients and incorporated it into their folk medicine. Some African American folk practitioners cupped or bled their patients. For example, the WPA narrative of Irena Blocker (born in Texas) detailed the practice of cupping:

> Irena speaks of an aunt, Penny Brashiers, who was an "herb doctor" whose practice it was to use a "horn cup" in the cure of certain "miseries" which would not yield to treatment through the virtues of herb concoctions, such as rheumatism or neuralgia. In some instances she would use a piece of glass to make an abrasion in the skin over the seat of the "misery," then place the horn cup over the abrasion and suck until a vacuum was formed, thus bringing about profuse bleeding of the affected parts and the elimination of the poison which had caused the pain. The horn cup was made from the small end of a cow's horn. The large end would be trimmed until it was made smooth and straight so as to fit snugly and encompass the abrasion, while a small hole would be made in the other and through which air would be extracted and a powerful vacuum created. This treatment together with her famous herb remedies brought ailing people of all races to the door of Aunt Penny, many to die after their arrival and many more through the ministrations of the good old doctor were cured of their ills and enabled to return to their homes to sing the praises of this colored medicine woman.

Other references to bleeding and cupping can be found in the WPA narratives, such as Ducy Key (Arkansas) who stated:

> I had the rheumatism but I cured it. I cupped my knee. Put water in a cup, put a little coal oil (kerosene) on top, strike a match to it and slap the cup to my knee. It drawed a clear blister. I got it well and the rheumatism was gone. I used to rub my legs from my waist down'ards with mule water. They say that is mighty good for rheumatism. I don't have it no more.

There are other examples of misguided African American folk practice. The decision of the freemen on Kate Stone's plantation to eat green figs and salt to cure cholera did not commend itself to prosperity and neither did cat soup, boiled cockroaches, or any number of other pleasantries to which slave practitioners subscribed (Genovese 1974: 227). It would be wrong to be critical of these approaches given our hindsight. Rather, these and other remedies of the period often paralleled the state-of-the-art medical knowledge and practice of the times for Whites and African Americans.

MEDICAL ROLES OF SLAVES

Slaves relied heavily on self-administered medical care, but it did not always require the involvement of slave folk practitioners, grannies, herb doctors, midwives, or conjurers. People often relied on home remedies and self-administered medications, especially those living in sparsely populated areas. Works Project Administration interviewee William Emmons

(Kentucky/Ohio) remembered slaves taking care of themselves with home remedies:

> Dey was doctors in dem days, but not ez many ez now. Folks doctored wid home rem'dies; mullen, catnip, an' elder blossom tea, horehound, sassafras tea, yellow root, an' sasparilla. De, too, dey allus mixt a jar of sorghum molasses an' sulphur fur a blood purifier to be tuk in de spring of de yeah.

Mollie Dawson, born in 1852 in Texas, recalled how folk practitioners did most of the doctoring among their own people:

> Dar wasn't very many slaves on our plantation, and we didn't have much sickness among us—bad colds in de winter and malaria in de spring of de year. We does most of de doctoring ourselves. If we got much sick Maser Newman didn't wait very long to get a Doctor out to see about us, and he didn't had de doctor out but a very few times. Just when a bad cold was gettin too bad.

The slave narrative of John Brown (1855) described efforts at preventing illness and promoting health practiced on a Georgian plantation. John Brown in his narrative *Slave Life in Georgia* wrote:

> Our mistress Betty Moore was an old, big woman, about seventy, who wore spectacles and took snuff. I remember her very well, for she used to call us children up to the big house every morning, and give us a dose of garlic and rue to keep us "wholesome," as she said, and make us "grow likely for market." (Boney 1991: 7)

Goodson (1987) reported that plantation owners were encouraged to find competent slave women to oversee and provide medical care. African American women, free and slave, were primary caretakers of the ill and dying in the antebellum South. They had authority to treat, alter care, modify or ignore prescriptions, or accelerate the patients' demise. While they had notable power over sickness and health, they exercised this power under considerable risk and threat of punishment or death. When folks became more ill, nonproductive, or died, plantation owners and overseers often held African American women responsible. Owners blamed them for poisoning White patients, held them responsible if there was too much illness, or false pregnancies, on the plantation.

GRANNIES AND OLDER WOMEN AS MEDICAL FOLK PRACTITIONERS

The WPA narratives refer to "grannies" and old women as medical care providers. The granny often performed the role of midwife and doctor on

Southern plantations (Close 1997). The granny was often the first person sought for those seeking health care (Bailey 2002) and her medical knowledge was deemed important (Genovese 1976). People registered great confidence in the granny's abilities to cure and treat. Sarah Wilson noted, "Before that when a slave sick the old women give them herbs." Then she added, "I remember granny giving me clabber milk when I was sick." Works Project Administration interviewee Gus Feaster stated:

> On de plantation dar was old womens, too old to do any work and dey would take and study what to do fer de ailments of grown folks and lil' chilluns. Fer de lil' chilluns and babies dey would take and chew up pine needles and den spit it in lil' chilluns mouths and make dem swallow. Den when dey done de food de very same way. Den old wommens made pine rosin pills from de pine trees and give to de folks to take fer de back ache.

Margaret Nickerson (Florida) recalled, "We didn' had no doctors, only de grannies; we mos'ly used hippecat [ipecac] fur medicine." George Fleming (South Carolina) was born in 1854 made the comment:

> When any of de slaves got sick, Marse took good care of 'em till dey got well. If dey bad sick he sont fer de doctor. Some of de women know'd how to bile up herbs and roots and make tea fer colds and fevers, but I don't know what kind dey used. When de chilluns was born, Marse seed to it dat de mammy was rightly took care of. He kept a old granny woman wid dem till dey got up and well.

Sol Walton was born in Mobile, Alabama, and was interviewed in Texas. He recalled:

> Some of the cullud folks on our place could read and write. They larned it theyselves. The white folks didn't larn 'em. All they larned 'em was to work hard. But they took care of us when we was sick and old women made lots of medicine. There was boneset tea and willow tea and shuck tea and cottonseed tea for chills and fever and Jerusalem Oak for worms.

Henry Baker (Texas) stated:

> When one of de slaves git sick Marster Neal sent fur a Doctor. De slave waz good property an' de marster couldn't let 'em die, becuze he would have to buy anuther to tak his place. Der waz some of de ole women on de plantation dat waz jus' as good as de Doctors. Dey could git you well jus' as quick as de Doctor, sometime quicker.

Lizzie Norfleet (Mississippi) commented:

> When the slave got sick, a doctor from Friars Point was sent for to tend them. The old women on the place looked after them till they was up. The old

> women took care of the babies and children too. They had done learned about different herbs and how to make tea out of them for the babies.

Ike Woodward (Mississippi) remembered:

> When slaves got sick a "Granny" would look after 'em. Us niggers sho' did get good treatment when we was sick. You know white folks sho didn't want a nigger o' theirs to die—they was worth somethin!

SLAVE MIDWIVES

African American women served a vital role as midwives. Fontenot (1994: 90) wrote, "As providers of health care, African-American women dominated the field of midwifery in the early history of obstetrics in the United States." Slave midwives frequently served as medical providers on the plantation serving as folk doctors, root women, religious ritualists, healers, herbalists, among other roles. They served both White and African Americans. The narrative of Sampson Willis (Texas) provided an example:

> Aunt Aggie was the mid-wife for the whites and colored. That is, she waited on the po' whites folks who had no slaves. When any of us got sick Marster Jimmey seed to it that we got medicine. He made us gather roots and herbs to keep on hand for making out the medicines. I don't just exactly remember all of it, 'cept I do know what we used for chest colds and sore throat. We gathered jimpson weeds, put them in a pot with some water, and boiled it down to an ooze, then mixed equal parts of lamp-oil, quinine, turpentine and camphor and made a salve of it and with this we would saturate our chest an throat. This is a good medicine till yet.

Being a midwife was more than a medical role. Commenting on the importance of midwives, Martin (2000: 71) wrote,

> It can be assumed that she was a source of information for healing; a source of information about family genealogies, both Black and White; a source of information about events and developments in the surrounding area, gathered as she traveled; and source of moral wisdom for the community.

Delivering children was a hazardous process. Savitt (1978: 117) wrote, "Childbirth was a dangerous procedure for both mother and infant, regardless of race." Childbearing always involved a high degree of risk for the mother, who had to go back into the fields and work almost immediately after giving birth. Millie Barber of South Carolina recalled that women would be in the fields working soon after giving birth:

> De fact is I can't 'member us ever had a doctor on de place; just a granny was enough at child birth. Slave women have a baby one day, up and gwine 'round de next day, singin' at her work lak nothin' unusual had happened.

On plantations, people generally prized midwives for their lifetimes of accumulated wisdom on practical medical matters (Kiple and King 1981). Midwives also stayed with and cared for the newborns and mothers following birth (Martin 2000). Slaves relied on midwifery for a number of reasons. According to Kiple and King (1981), it was more traditional and accepted as a practice, planters were usually not that involved in the daily affairs of their slaves, the cost of White medical care was too high or unavailable, and the timing on birthing was less predictable. Cyntha Jones (Arkansas) recalled:

> When I was twenty-one they had me fixed up for a midwife. Old Dr. Clark was the one started me. I never went to school a minute in my life but the doctors would read to me out of their doctor books till I could get a license. I got so I could read print till my eyes got so bad. Old Dr. Clark was the one learned me most and since he died I ain't never had a doctor mess with me.
>
> In fifteen years I had 299 babies on record right there in Rison. That's where I was fixed up at—under five doctors. And anybody don't believe it, they can go down there and look up the record.

Margaret Bryant (South Carolina) observed:

> My Pa sister, Ritta One had that job. Nuss [nurse] the chillun. Chillun house. One woman nuss [nurse] all the chillun while they ma in the field—rice field. All size chillun. Git the gipsy [gypsum] weed. Beat 'em up for worm. Give 'em when the moon change. Take a bucket and follow dem. And tell the Doctor how much a worm that one make and that one and count dem [them]. When the moon change, do that. I have one born with caul. Loss he caul. Rat carry 'em. Ain't here; he see nothin. [The custom seems to be, to preserve the caul.] Child born feet fore-most see'um too. [See spirit] Talk chillun? Put duh switch. Put you "Bull pen." Hab 'um [have them] a place can't see you hand before you. Can't turn round good in there. Left you in there till morning. Give you fifty lash and send you to work. You ain't done that task, man and woman lick!

Sarah Pittman of Arkansas stated:

> My grandmother had a big old bay horse and she was midwife for the white and the colored folks. She would put her side saddle on the old horse and get up and go, bless her heart; and me and my cousin had to stay there and take care of things.

It was common for plantation owners to hire out slaves, including midwives, to other plantations. Plantation owners viewed this practice as a way to supplement incomes. An example of a midwife being hired out was Aunt Clara Walker (Arkansas), who recalled being hired out and delivering as many White as African American children. She also indicated she was well aware of her limitations and would call in a physician when the delivery went beyond her abilities.

Aunt Clara Walker (Arkansas) who claimed to be 111 when she was interviewed, noted:

> When I was 13 years old my ol' mistress put me wid a doctor who learned me how to be a midwife. Dat was cause so many women on de plantation was catchin' babies. I stayed wid dat doctor, Dr. McGill his name was, for 5 years. I got to be good. Got so he'd sit down an' I'd do all de work.
>
> When I come home, I made a lot o' money for old miss. Lots of times, didn't sleep regular or git my meals on time for three or four days. Cause when dey call, I always went. Brought as many white as culled children. I's brought most 200, white an' black since I's been in Hot Springs. Brought a little white baby—to de Wards it was—dey lived jest down de lane—brought dat baby 'bout 7 year ago.
>
> I's brought lots of 'em an' I ain't never lost a case. You know why. It's cause I used my haid. When I'd go in, I'd take a look at de woman, an' if it was beyond me, I'd say, "Dis is a doctor case. Dis ain't no case for a midwife. You git a doctor." An' dey'd have to get one. I'd jes' stan' before de lookin' glass, an' I wouldn't budge. Dey couldn't make me.

It would be erroneous to conclude that African American midwives didn't have shortcomings (Fisher 1968). Kiple and King (1981) found that in some areas, such as obstetrics, African American practitioners were less successful than their White counterparts. They observed that the African custom of dabbing mud, cow dung, or ash over the umbilical stump promoted neonatal tetanus ("nine day fits") and having women following delivery stand up and shake to deliver the placenta contributed to cases of prolapsed uterus. Overall, African Americans born out of White medical care did endure higher rates of infant mortality, no doubt due partially to improper and unsanitary health care. Only a few had the luxury of being born in more sanitary settings.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Evidence from the WPA narratives and other historical sources indicate that African Americans took very active roles in their own medical care and that of others. They drew on traditions originally brought over from Africa and the Caribbean and what they learned from experimenting with substances in their new environment. They also learned from indigenous and White populations.

When they did provide medical care, social relationships influenced by racism and socioeconomic differences were always at the foundation. It is also clear that White responses to African American medical providers ranged from total rejection and suppression to acceptance. Those finding rejection had to practice medical care subversively and at great personal risk. When African American practitioners were accepted for what they had to offer, they made major contributions to Southern medicine.

4

Conjuring and Hoodoo

Yes, de ole voodoo an conjur doctors was de ones dat had de mos' power hit seemed over de nigger in de days befo' an after dey free. Dey one dat lived in Knoxville befo' freedom I dismember his name, dey talk 'bout him w'en I was little an' tell 'bout de things dat he did. Some times he would have a meetin' place in secret, w'en dey cum ter git him ter work de evil charms on dey enemies. Maybe pretty soon dat enemy take some strange sickness and die. He had a voodoo kettle an' nobody knew jes what he put into hit, maybe snake, spider, human blood, no tell-in' what. Den sometimes de ole doctor hold ceremonies at night on de square, after midnight; folks all cum, hit be de dark ob de moon, ole doctor cum's out an' wave his arms an' de folks all crowd up close; dem dat in de voodoo strip ter de waist. Voodoo docter hol' up his han's an'd dey commence ter dance while de drums beat. Dey dance faster an' still faster; dey chant an' pray 'til dey falls down in er heap.

—Patsy Moses, Texas

I never studied cunjurin', but I knows dat scorripins and things dey conjures with am powerful medicine. Dey uses hair and fingernails and tacks and dry insects and worms and bat wings and sech. Mammy allus tie a leather string round de babies' necks when dey teethin', to make dem have easy time. She used a dry frog or piece nutmeg, too.

Mammy allus tell me to keep from bein' cunjure, I sing:

> Keep 'way from me, hoodoo and witch,
> Lead my path from de poorhouse gate;
> I pines for golden harps and sich,
> Lawd, I'll jes' set down and wait.

Old Satan am a liar and cunjurer, too—
If you don't watch out, he'll cunjure you.

Dem cunjuremen sho' bad. Dey make you have pneumony and boils and bad luck. I carries me a jack all de time. It am de charm wrap in red flannel. Don't know what am in it. A bossman, he fix it for me.

—Willis Easter, Texas

WEST AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE SUPERNATURAL

In the West African cultural traditions, healers and medical practitioners are considered very influential spiritual leaders. Traditional West African healers believed that illness and injury are handled with man's hidden spiritual powers in combination with magic, ceremony, and sometimes plants found to have healing powers (Ayensu 1991). The reliance on the supernatural (spiritual) aspects of healing and West African philosophies, religions, and belief systems transferred to slave doctoring and healing (Fett 2002). This African emphasis on the supernatural aspects to healing and treatment ran at odds with traditional Western medicine that placed less focus on the spiritual and supernatural (Fontenot 1994). The result was that African-based healing practices became hidden from the dominant and oppressive White medical systems (Fontenot 1994; Savitt 1978).

WHAT IS CONJURE?

Conjure is a system of beliefs that was particularly widespread during the early 1800s (Chireau 1996). Semmes (1983: 208) wrote, "Conjure, voodoo, hoodoo, or root doctoring all have to do with the belief that the behavior of others can be controlled through ritual and manipulation of natural objects." Conjure doctors always addressed illness at a spiritual level. According to Chireau (1996: 172) conjure, or its variations, is, "the ritual harnessing of spiritual forces in order to heal, to harm, to predict the future, and to influence individuals or events." Conjurers viewed illnesses as either natural or unnatural. They and their patients believed natural illness is controlled by the way one lives, such as coldness, dampness, and diet, and unnatural illness is caused by someone with magical powers. They also viewed illness as the product of conflict between good and evil.

"Conjuring, also called hoodoo or rootwork," according to Fett (2002: 85), "was, (and is), an African American practice of healing, harming,

and protection performed through the ritual harnessing of spiritual forces." People sometimes used the terms root doctor, hoodoo doctor, two-facer, and wangateur interchangeably with conjurer (Crowder 1980). Conjurer doctors primarily used spiritual forces to cause illness or treat medical problems. They also used trickery, magic, spells, violence, persuasion, intimidation, mystery, gimmicks, fear, and some medical practices to obtain reputations in their communities (Bailey 2002). Many of their techniques were similar to those found prevailing in traditional African practice.

African American scholars believe that the conditions of slavery and the second-class citizenship experienced by slaves helped advance the status of mysticism and magic among African Americans (Harvey 1981). Scholars have interpreted these practices as providing an escape from the oppression of slavery and racism. Crowder (1980) noted the importance of conjurers to slaves, as conjurer doctors provided opportunities to rebel against White oppression. Conjuring, whether effective or not, nevertheless provided slaves with an avenue of control and reaction against the brutality of slavery. Slaves used supernatural ideas to address the oppression and cruelty of slavery. Chireau wrote:

> Slaves resorted to conjure, for example, when they confronted the physical threat of violence. Some slaves carried conjuring charms or amulets; some engaged in rituals that that they believed would deter whippings and other forms of abuse; others wore protective "voodoo bags" on their persons or used powders, roots, and potions that would shield them from unanticipated attacks by cruel slaveholders and slave drivers. (1996: 175)

Slaves, through their spiritual and mystical practices and a corresponding belief in their effectiveness, gained a sense of control and power over their world (Gorn 1989). Some Whites tried to suppress traditional West African and Caribbean emphasis on spiritual (supernatural) forces in the healing process, such as those found in conjure. However, African Americans, slave and free, continued to incorporate this aspect into their folk medical practices.

Conjuring was a mechanism for slaves to get back at their oppressors and it provided some with a sense of justice, meaning, and anger relief when Whites had misfortunate events. Slaves could claim a role in getting back at their White tyrants when they used conjurers.

CONJURE DOCTORS

Fett (2002: 95) noted, "Just as Kongo sufferers enlisted minkisi (sculptures or power figures) for cures because of their healing and harming properties, so

too slaves consulted conjure doctors who dealt in life and death." Conjure doctors based their authority on the perceived power of the "fix." The "fix" was the power to harm and even kill individuals through the application of a spell. Conjure doctors could set or remove spells from victims or clients. Conjure doctors used "left-handed work" to set charms (spells) and "right-handed work" to dispose of or counteract charms for clients. They made charms from a variety of substances that were typically developed in a cloak of secrecy. Typical charms might include combinations of graveyard dust, reptiles, pins, hair, graveyard dirt (gopher dust), reptile parts, herbs, bottles, bones, roots, nail clippings, and personal effects (Crowder 1980; Gorn 1989). Conjurer doctors typically carried standard equipment, such as a crooked cane, assorted charms, "special dirt," and a conjure bag (also called "trick," "hand," "jack," "gris gris," or "mojo"), and a look of filed teeth, red eyes and/or blue gums (Crowder 1980; Fett 2002; Gorn 1989).

To conjure doctors, sickness was the work of evil spirits of a living agent or a dead person's soul. To fend off malignant forces, conjurer doctors used prayers, incantations, healing touches, charms, amulets and other items. Sometimes they also focused on blood, such as purifying it through herbal laxatives, enemas, colonics, or fasting. To a conjure doctor, one might have high blood, thin blood, or too much blood (Semmes 1983).

Successful and effective conjure doctors were keen analysts of plantation life and social relations. They possessed great people skills and the ability to manipulate others, including slaves, free African Americans, and Whites. In addition to medical treatments, people used conjurer doctors to address interpersonal relationships. The narrative of Henry Bibb, published in 1849, referred to his reliance on conjurers to address a cruel owner and improve his love life (Heglar 2001). Bibb recalled that he consulted a conjurer who gave him a concoction composed of fresh cow manure, red pepper, and hair from a White man's head to protect him from additional harm from his master. That Bibb continued to believe in conjuring even after evidence that the protective charms did not work is indicative of how much sway this practice had in the slave community (Rucker 2001). He concluded that the conjurers were of little help with the owner and that escape was the only response. Even with a series of failures, he never lost faith in the power of conjure doctors and concluded they were either incompetent, he had made a mistake, or something simply went wrong.

Successful conjure doctors were well known and had very high status in slave communities (Fett 2002). Conjure doctors could be enslaved or free. Some freemen lived on the margins of a slave community. Conjurer doctors exercised considerable power and influence in the African-American and, in some cases, White communities. Their power and influence were due to the belief that they were effective. Rucker observed:

> Conjurers were often isolated ascetics, living on the margins of the slave community and wrapped in mystery. Their elevated status on the plantation and their mastery over mystical forces made them simultaneously feared and respected. These spiritualists claimed to possess a variety of supernatural powers including the ability to communicate with the spirit world and the power to heal the sick, and many claimed possession of second sight or the ability to foretell future events through interpreting visions and dreams. (2001: 100)

Conjure doctors were believed by some to have the capability to "fix" slaves who had been injured. Whites sometimes solicited conjure doctors when regular medicine didn't work. However, because conjuring was not generally supported or tolerated by plantation owners or the White medical profession, conjure and hoodoo practitioners were often kept secret and hidden from view. Practitioners and patients stored out of sight from Whites the trappings of hoodoo and conjuring, such as charms and amulets.

BELIEF IN CONJURE

Slave belief in the supernatural was a powerful life force. The slave often attributed their ailments to supernatural causes, such as being conjured, charmed, or hexed. Conjure is a belief system people used to explain unknown or mysterious occurrences in life, including illness and accidents. Their beliefs influenced their medical treatment, as they had little to no faith in conventional medical practice. For some, the only recourse was to find a conjure doctor to counteract the spell or illness. A number of people believed that conjuring was the only effective treatment for some illnesses. This belief was not restricted to slaves. Many slaves believed in the power of conjure doctors, so did some Whites. Genovese (1974) provided examples of Whites buying into the power of conjurer doctors and relying on their services.

Conjurers were both male and female and were primary interpreters of supernatural phenomena in the slave community. They also controlled these phenomena through rituals and practices. For example, when illnesses were unresponsive to White medical or herbal interventions, conjurers were sometimes called upon to "fix" ailments. Works Project Administration ex-slave Gus Smith observed that his grandfather could simply blow on a burn and the fire and pain was gone. Abram Sells (Texas) noted his grandfather could stop bleeding and conjure away warts (Genovese 1974).

The WPA narrative of Doc Quinn (Arkansas) provided a testimonial on the role played by conjure, superstition, and the manipulation of objects for

desired outcomes. His belief in a wide variety of superstitions and objects that could be used to shape events is evident:

> Some aged negroes believe that many of the superstitious ideas that are practiced by their race today had their origin in Africa. A practice that was quite common in ante bellum days was for each member of the family to extract all of their teeth, in the belief that in doing so the family would never disagree. Fortunately, this and similar practices of self mutilation have about become extinct.
>
> An old custom practiced to prevent the separation of a husband and wife was to wrap a rabbit's forefoot, a piece of loadstone, and 9 nine hairs from the top of the head in red flannel, and bury it under the front door steps.
>
> As a preventative against being tricked or hoo-dooed, punch a hole through a dime, insert a string through the hole, and tie it around the left ankle. To carry an axe or hoe into the house means bad luck. An itching nose indicates some one is coming to see you, while an itching eye indicates you will cry.

FEAR OF CONJURE DOCTORS

Conjure doctors understood the important role fear played in their power in the community. According to Genovese (1974), when the slave referred to conjure they meant the power of some slaves over others. Conjure doctors exercised considerable sociopsychological control over the slave based on their fear of the supernatural. This fear was most evident and powerful in the night, as spirits moved about more openly in the darkness of night. Overseers and plantation owners viewed this fear of the night and the corresponding superstitions as helping to keep the slaves from running away.

Genovese (1974) concluded that conjurers lived and operated in relative autonomy on the plantation. They were essentially left alone for the most part by other slaves. Fear of their powers operated to isolate them from others.

Hoodoo was and is found mostly in Georgia and South Carolina low country (Fett 2002). It incorporated several beliefs and behaviors including magic, herbalism, and divination among slaves. Hoodoo's origins are linked to traditional African cultural and spiritual practices. "Hoodoo is a practice that causes harm or misfortune to someone by using material elements, for example, poison herbs, hair strands, or clothing worn by the person one wishes to harm" (Fontenot 1994: 37). Although traced back to Africa, the hoodoo practiced in America lacked the formal structure and integration found in African hoodoo (Crowder 1980). Voodoo, found in mostly the Deep South, varies but is close to Hoodoo in its general ap-

proach (Fett 2002). Hattie Matthews (Missouri) provided the following account of hoodoo and its potential power over Whites and African Americans. She also described how it could be used to cause and relieve pain:

> Grandmuthuh said dey had lots ob hoodoo business. I ask her why dey didn't hoedoe de white folks ta get dem out ob de way. She said de negroes couldn't hoodoe de white peoples cause dey had strait hair. It was somethin' bout de oil in de hair. White folks habe ta wash dere hair ta get de oil out, but negroes habe ta put oil on heir hair.
>
> But de slabes sure could hoodoo each other. Somebody who wanted ta hoodoo somebody else wud tak snakes an frogs an pulverize um a put de stuff in a bottle. Dey den dug a hole in de groun under de step anouried de bottle in de hole. When de person [for whom the hoodoo was intended] took a step ober dis spot dey wud habe pains in deir legs. Ma grandmuthuh cud see de an akes come up inside deir legs an dey had to cut a hole in deir legs ta let de snakes out. Sometimes dey ud get a person ta take de snakes an frogs from a person, and den de person who put de hoodoo under de step or proch ud lose deir charm and die. Ma grandmuther say she saw many a frog an snake come out ob a person's mouth. He slabes were turrible ta each other. All such as dis went on in de dose days. This here hoodoo business still goes on down in Mississippi. I'm shure glad I don't live down thar.

Ex-slave Jack Jones (Mississippi), an admitted believer in spiritual forces such as ghosts, shared his thoughts on newborns and how spiritual objects could prevent infant illness. He also referred to the caul which is a part of the amnion (sac) that covering the head of the newborn. For some, a caul superstitiously was supposed to bring good luck. His WPA narrative read:

> Jack is a firm believer of ghosts, haunts, and spirits. He has seen quite a few of them and is sure that it takes persons of special qualities to see them. . . . He stated that if the seventh son of the family would blow into the mouth of a new-born baby seven times, the child would not have hives; the four feet of a mole strung on a string and tied around the neck of a child, would make cutting teeth easy and unpainful. Sow buds tied in a cloth and tied around the child's neck, would make teething easy. If one were born with a caul over his face, he would be endowed with a supernaturel power of seeing spirits or ghosts that appeared in various forms, but always behind the individual. He could hear them jump the fence; they were able to run but never left tracks; they could even throw coal or pebbles at one.

Joseph William Carter (Indiana), who was born before 1836, recalled how his cousin used trickery to practice voodoo:

> I had a cousin that was a full blooded Indian and a voo doo dector. He got me to help him with his Voo doo work. A lot of people both white and black sent

> for the Indian when they were sick. I told him I would do the best I could, if it would help sick people to get well. The woman was sick with rhumatism and he was going to see her. He sent me into the woods to dig up poke roots to boil. He then took the brew to the house where the sick woman lived. Had her to put both feet in a tub filled with warm water, into which he had placed the poke root brew. He told the woman she had lizards in her body and he was going to bring them out of her. He covered the woman with a heavy blanket and made her sit for a long time, possibly an hour, with her feet in the tub of poke root brew and water. He had me slip a good many lizards into the tub and when the woman removed her feet, there were the lizards. She was soon well and believed the lizards had come out of her legs. I was disgusted and would not practice with any cousin again.

Henry Barnes (Alabama) proclaimed his belief in hoodoo, spells, and the power of the practitioner to control life and death:

> Lady, you ax me iffen us knowed anyt'ng 'bout hoodoo? Yes, ma'am dere sho' was folkses what could put spells on you. I sho' was skeered o' dem kin' too. Atter I was nearly growed, dere was a gal name Penny what been down sick a long time an' dere was a cunjer doctor wukkin' on her tryin' cure her, but her wan't 'greeable, so he let her die. Den a boy, name Ed, he had a mis'ry in he foot, an' it went up he leg an' he cripple. Dere was a hoodoo doctor in de forks o' Bigbee River come tend on him, an' he tol' ever'body git outten de house 'cep'n' him an' Ed an' de Devil. He cured Ed smack well.

DESCRIPTIONS OF CONJURE DOCTORS IN THE WPA NARRATIVES

Conjuring is mentioned in the WPA narratives as it related to medical care. Bankole (1998: 23), observed, "Slave narratives highlight the use of Voodoo and the African materia medica used to effect cures for illness." The narratives provide many first person accounts of conjuring and medical care within the time frame of slavery. Several of the WPA narratives refer to conjure or socially based causes of illness. For example, the narratives of Ellen Dorsey (Georgia), Fred Jones (Georgia), Alex Johnson (Georgia), and Mrs. Rush (Georgia) refer to the practice of conjuring. Conjuring can be thought of as the spiritual level of illness. For example, Austin Grant (Texas), who was originally from Mississippi, shared an account on how conjure could be used to cause pain:

> No, I never knowed nothing 'bout charms. I've seen 'em have a rabbit heel or coon heel for good luck. I seen a woman one time that was tricked, or what I'd call poisoned. A place on her let, it was jes' the shape of these little old striped

lizards. It was somethin' they called "trickin it," and a person that knowed to trick you would put it there to make you suffer the balance of your days. It would go 'round your leg clear to the hip and be between the skin and the flesh. They called it the devil's work.

Louis Evans, who was born a slave in 1853 in Louisiana, recalled how conjuring caused and cured an illness:

I never pay no 'tention to hoo-doo, but I tell you what I saw. One of my sisters was a working girl. A good-for-nothing feller name Bob Schraff seem like he got jealous of her. Her husband went and got friendly to him to try to find out what he up to. She say a cunjur man 'vite her to his house but she wouldn't go. Bob Schraff say she ought to go for to be polite if she didn't go for nothing else. He put something in a chair and she sit in de chair. After while she fall sick. She say she b'lieve Bob put something on her. After six months she took to de bed complaining of pain in her side. After a time she git up but four months later she take to her bed again. I sent for a old Injun and he come and put a plaster on her. It draw it to a head and it bust after a week or two. A lizard come out when it bust but de lizard only had t'ree feet. De other foot come out after t'ree or four hours. It seem like it start twixt her thigh and knee and work sorter on her side close de middle of her back. It stay wid de skin and bone.

Den dere was a feller sick. Right here in de side of his head was a little black bug. It do him so bad he turn de mule and plow loose right dere in de field and come hollering to de house. My Injun taught me what to do to draw it out. What you reckon it take? De white of t'ree egg and gunpowder. Dat de strongest poultice I know to put on a sore or swelling. I put it on dat nigger and it bring it out no longer dan de next day.

Lorenza Ezell, born in 1850, in South Carolina, shared:

Every time I tells dose niggers I's from South Carolina day all say, "O, he bound to make a heap." I could be a conjure doctor and make plenty money, but dat ain't good. In slavery time day's men like dat 'garded as bein' dangerous. Day make charms and put bad mouth on you. De old folks years de rabbit foot or coon foot and sometime a silver dime on a fishin' string to keep off de witches. Some de old conjure people make lots of money for charm 'gainst ruin or cripplin' or dry up de blood. But I don't take up no truck with things like dat.

Rosana Frazier, who was born a slave on the Frasier plantation in Mississippi, provided a detailed account of conjuring:

Some try tell me snow or sweat or smoke de reason. Dat ain't de reason. Dey a old, old, slew footed somethin' from Louisiana and dey say he de conjure man, one dem old hoodoo niggers. He git mad at me de last plum-ripenin' time and

he make up powdered rattlesnake dust and pass dat through my hair and I she' ain't seed no more.

Dat not de onliest thing de old conjurs men do. Dey powder up de rattle offen de snake and tie it up in de little old rag bag and dey do devilment with it. Dey git old scorpion and make bad medicine. Dey git dirt out de graveyard and dat dirt, after dey speak on it, would make you go crazy.

When dey wants conjure you, dey sneak round and git de hair combin' or de finger or toenail, or anything natural 'bout your body, and works de hoodoo on it.

Dey make de straw man or de clay man and dey puts de pin in he leg and you leg gwinter git hurt or sore jus' where dey puts de pin. Iffen dey puts de pin through de heart you gwinter die and ain't nothin' kin save you.

Dey make de charm to wear round de neck or de ankle and day make de love powder, too, out de love vine, what grow in de woods. Dey biles de leaves and powders 'em. Day she' works, I done try 'em.

Patsy Moses, was born a slave in 1863 in Texas, told of charms and "conjure," many learned from ex-slaves. She would have been too young to remember life under slavery, but shared what she had heard:

Yes, de ole voodoo an conjur doctors was de ones dat had de mos' power hit seemed over de nigger in de days befo' an after dey free. Dey one dat lived in Knoxville befo' freedom I dismember his name, dey talk 'bout him w'en I was little an' tell 'bout de things dat he did. Some times he would have a meetin' place in secret, w'en dey cum ter git him ter work de evil charms on dey enemies. Maybe pretty soon dat enemy take some strange sickness and die. He had a voodoo kettle an' nobody knew jes what he put into hit, maybe snake, spider, human blood, no tell-in' what. Den sometimes de ole doctor hold ceremonies at night on de square, after midnight; folks all cum, hit be de dark ob de moon, ole doctor cum's out an' wave his arms an' de folks all crowd up close; dem dat in de voodoo strip ter de waist. Voodoo docter hol' up his han's an'd dey commence ter dance while de drums beat. Dey dance faster an' still faster; dey chant an' pray 'til dey falls down in er heap.

De armour bearer's hold de candles high ter light dem up, an' w'en dey swayed, chanted, an' shouted, dey was seized wid power dat sent dem leapin' an' whirlin'; den is de time dat de ole docter work his spell on whoever he wants ter conjur. An' many is de spells dat he casts in dem days; many is de schems dat is worked ter put a spell on some one dey wants maybe ter win dey love, git out ob de way, or what he has been paid ter do. An' effn he could not work hit one way he would 'nuther, an' w'en he died, does yer think dat he stay buried? No, sir! He walks de street or de square whar he held dose ceremonies w'en he gits ready; an' many is de one dat has seen him after he died, his ghost a wavin' his arms an all like he did afore; an' dey was all skeered ter go ter de square after midnight.

In de days jes' befo' de war I kin 'member hearin' my dad an' gran-dad tell 'bout ole Dr. Jones, who conjured folks too. He walk 'bout de streets like he in

a deep study, an' he wears a black coat like de preachers wear; he wears side burns fer whisk-ers, an' he uses roots an' sich fer his medicine. He learns 'bout de medicine w'en he was a slave boy in de piney woods from his ole granny, befo' he went ter live in de city an' be a conjur doctor. Dis ole doctor used roots an' herbs fer his medicine an' did not cast de spells like de Voodoo doctor did, fer smallpox he used poke root; fer mumps de rind ob de bacon; fer whoopin' cough he used sheep-wool tea; fer snake bite he used alum, saltpeter an' blue-stone mixed wid brandy or de bes' whiskey.

Ter break de conjur spells, he gives dem broth ter drink He takes his kettle an' puts in splinters ob pine or hickory jes' so dey has bark on dem ter make de steam; cover dem wid water; put in de conjur salt; de broth widout de salt would break de charm, and dis was a sure cure fer de conjur spells cast on de patient.

He could tell fortunes an' talk wid de ones dat have done gone ter hebben. He charges small fee, maybe fifty cents, but dat time done gone on, de conjur doctor pass away mos' wid free-dom, but de luck charms stay on wid de nigger, as a matter of fact de mos' ob dem wearin' dem today 'specially effn hit be de ones dat was livin' in de days ob slavery. Effn yer'll look on dey necks, I speck yer find a luck charm or two now.

A favorite charm bag is a red flannel cloth wid some bones ob a frog, a piece ob snake skin, some horse hairs, an' a spoonful ob ashes, dis bag was used ter proteck one from his enemy. Effn hit was left anywhere aroun' de place ob de person ter be affected mos'ly under de doorstep, hit caused all kind ob misfortunes, sickness, blindness, fits and other diseases. De remedies de doctors sold ter break de charm was de way he made his livin', but what he took fer his pay.

Mos' ob de slave wore de charms ter guard against sickness, bad luck or accident, other charms was worn fer good luck. Fer instance, a big black nigger in de corn fiel' an' look at his neck, he mos' allers wore as many as three charms aroun' his neck ter make him fortunate in love, nuther ter keep him well, an' nuther fer Lady Luck at dice ter be wid him. An' de way de charms acted ter keep dem well! Of course dey take de medicine by de conjur doctor too. Fer instance, take indigestion, a penny worn 'round de neck will kill hit. Den dar is rheumatism, dat ole debble dat creeps inter de jints, a flannel strap aroun' de arm or leg will stop de pain.

Cindy Wright, a midwife from Georgia, recalled a successful intervention by a conjurer:

See dis scar on my neck? Well, dat was one time I had to have a doctor. Let me tell you about it. A long time ago, when I was just as peart and hearty as I could be, a little bump come on my shoulder. For a long time, hit warn't no size a'-tall, den hit started off to growin'. Hit growed 'til hit hung plumb down over my shoulder. I warn't sick none, and hit didn't hurt a'tall, but I was scared it would keep on growin'.

I went to see Miz Lora Fant. She's a colored woman dat knows things. Atter she had done 'zamined dat thing growin' on my shoulder, she run through her

cyards and said, "Miz Wright, you'se been witched, but I'se glad I can tell you dat you hain't been pizened. You was witched by a 'oman dat lives right nigh whar you stays. She has a grudge 'ginst you 'cause hit seems lak to her you gits 'long so much better and has so much more dan she does, so dat's de grudge she is beholdin' 'ginst you."

Miss Lora said for me to come to town and git a certain kind of 'bacco and she 'splained just how I was to fix it up. She said she was gwine to do all she could for me, but I would be in bed and would have two more of dem same kind of places to start growin' on me. She said dat 'oman what had done witched me wouldn't come nigh me 'til de last of dem places was gone, but den she would ax and 'quire 'bout me evvy day. Would you b'lieve it? She done dat very thing. She sho did.

When dat place started on my neck I got scared and went to see a man dat knowed how to do things. I didn't tell him a word 'bout me gwine to see Miss Lora, and dat man told me word for word pre-zackly what Miss Lora had done told me, even 'bout dat 'oman. Dat he did! Den I knowed for sho dat I had done been witched. Den dat old 'oman dat had witched me started comin' to my neighbors evvy day to 'quire 'bout how Miz Wright was, 'til dey axed her why she didn't come see for herself how I was. I sho was havin' me a time den, 'cause one of dem things commenced growin' under my arm, and I just had to lie in bed whilst dey growed and growed. I sont for Miss Lora again, and she said dey was ready to be lanced by a sho 'nough doctor. I warn't real sure so I sont for de old man I told you 'bout a little while ago. He 'zamined me and said dem places was ready to be lanced, and he 'lowed I would git well atter dat, and den dat 'oman would come evvy day to see how I was. When a doctor had cut open dem places, dat witch 'oman did start right out comin' to see me, but I didn't care, for she had done lost her power over me, and I got well.

THE GIFT OF CONJURE—HAVING THE POWER

People believed that some people were born with special powers that helped them become conjurers. Not everyone had these special powers or realized that they possessed these powers from the start. For example, the conjurer William Adams (Texas) had to discover he had special powers. Sometimes the power of conjure was revealed through signs to the individual and others. Adams linked his power to heal to the faith (Christian) of the patient and the struggle between good and evil. Adams told his story of becoming aware of his powers that he believed were a gift from God. His account also revealed the dualistic nature of having the power. It could be used for evil or good purposes:

How I larnt sich? Well, I's done larn it. It come to me. When de Lawd gives sich power to a person, it jus' comes to 'em. It am 40 years ago now when

I's fust fully realize' dat I has de power. However, I's allus int'rested in de workin's of de signs. When I's a little picceninny, my mammy and other folks used to talk about de signs. I hears dem talk about what happent to folks 'cause a spell was put on 'em. De old folks in dem days knows more about de signs dat de Lawd uses to reveal His laws dan de folks of today. It is also true of de cullud folks in Africa, dey native land. Some of de folks laughs at their beliefs and says it am superstition. But it am knowin' how de Lawd reveals His laws.

Now, let me tell yous of something I's seen. What am seen, can't be doubted. It happens when I's a young man and befo' I's realized' dat I's one dat am chosen for to show de power. A mule had cut his leg no bad dat him an bleedin' to death and dey couldn't stop it. An old cullud man live near there dat day turns to. He comes over and passes his hand over de cut. Befo' long de bleedin' stop and dat's de power of de Lawd workin' through dat nigger, dat's all it am.

I knows about a woman dat had lost her mind. De doctor say it was caused from a tumor in de head. Dey took an ex-ray picture, but dere's no tumor. Dey gives up and says its a peculiar case. Dat woman was took to one with de power of de good spirit and he say its a peculiar case for dem dat don't understand. Dis am a case of de evil spell. Two days after, de woman have her mind back.

Dey's lots of dose kind of cases de ordinary person never hear about. Yous hear of de case de doctors can't understand, nor will dey 'spend to treatment. Dat am 'cause of de evil spell dat am on de persons.

LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN CONJURE DOCTORS

In the WPA narratives, some slaves doubted conjure and proclaimed their disbelief. Works Project Administration interviewee Aunt Silva Durant of South Carolina declared her disbelief in conjure. She proclaimed:

Oh, my God, some people believe in dat thing call conjurin, but I didn' never believe in nothin like dat. Never didn' understand nothin like dat. Hear say people could make you leave home en all dat, but I never couldn' see into it. Never didn' believe in it.

Yes, mam, I see plenty people wear dem dimes round dey ankle on all kind of things on dey body, but never didn' see my mother do nothin like dat. I gwine tell you it just like I got it. Hear talk dat some would wear dem for luck on some tote dem to keep people from hurtin dem. I got a silver dime in de house dere in my trunk right to dis same day dat I used to wear on a string of beads, but I took it off. No, mam, couldn' stand nothin like dat. Den some peoples keeps a bag of asafetida tied round dey neck to keep off sickness. Folks put it on dey chillun to keep dem from havin worms. I never didn' wear none in my life, but I know it been a good thing

> for people, especially chillun. Let me see, dere a heap of other things dat I learn bout been good for people to wear for sickness. Dere been nutmeg dat some people make a hole in en wear it round dey neck. I forget whether it been good for neuralgia or some of dem other body ailments, but I know it won' for no conjurin.

Along a similar vein, Aunt Clussey (Alabama) shared:

> I don't believe in conjurin', but some folks does. I heered about a women who always chewed de bark of a tree while she was a walkin' along under dem trees, an' when she got sick, she was conjured and flying antses come out de pores of her skin.

Octavia George (Oklahoma), who was born in Louisiana in 1852, commented,

> I used to hear quite a bit about voodoo, but that something I never believed in, therefore, I didn't pay any attention to it.

Henry Garry's (Alabama) narrative at first discounts conjuring and signs and then proceeds to outline a few superstitions of his mammy:

> Nawsuh, folks down 'roun' Gainesville didn' pay much min' to signs an' conju' an' all dat stuff. My mammy wouldn' let us tote a axe on our shoulder th'ough de house, an' she wouldn' 'low umbrella to be opened in de house, say hit bring bad luck. She neber fail to hab cown-fiel' peas an hawg-jowl for dinner on New Yeah's Dey. She say hit a sign you hab plenty to eat balance of de yeah. She put a ball of azzifittity on a string an' make all us chillun wear it 'roun' our neck to keep off sickness. If a owl begin to hoot ober in Tombigbee bottom too close to de house, she put de shovel in de fire to make him stop.

Mandy Jones (Mississippi) declared her disbelief in hoodoo:

> No chile, I has heered of hoodoos, but I don' believe in 'em. I ain' skeered of any sich. We wasn't raised to be skeered of 'em at our place. When any of us was sick, our white folkses doctor come an' looked atter us.

RESPONDING TO CONJURE

Some WPA narratives indicate that slaves took steps to counter or rid themselves of unwanted conjure doctors. They would use counterspells, charms, plants, and other means. For example, the WPA narrative of Wash Wilson, who was born into slavery in Louisiana and was sold to a plantation owner in Texas, stated:

De ole folks (slaves) allus tell me to make a cross inside my shoe ebery mornin' 'fore lebin' de house, den ain't no conjurer gwine git he conjure 'gin my foots. An' effen you wear your under clothes wrong side out den ain't noboddy gwine conjure you. Anodder way is ter put saltpeter in de soles ob your shoes. Effen you wear er little piece of de "peace plant" root in your pocket er in your shoe dat's pow'ful strong ergin' de conjure. Er piece of de Betsy bug's heart wid some silver money is good. Den effen you cain't git none ob dese, jes take er piece ob newspaper an' cut hit der size ob your shoe sole an' sprinkle nine grains ob red pepper on hit. Dar ain't no hoodoo gwine ebber ha'am you case he would hab to stop an' count ebery letter on dat paper, an' by dat time, you gwine be gone erway from dar. Effen you want to find de tricks what hab been sot, you jes' kill you er fat chicken an' sprinkle some ob de blood in de conjure doctor's lef' pa'am.

Den take your forefinger an' hit dat blood till hit splatter. An' hit gwine splatter in de direction whar dat trick is hid. Den w'en you fin' de trick, sprinkle er little quicksilver ober er piece ob paper an' put de paper on de fire, an' dat trick gwine be laid forebber.

Ole folks tole me how ter make er conjurer lebe town. Make up a hickory fire and let hit burn down to coals. Den you take up two live coals. One ob dese is gwine be you; an' de odder libe coal dat's gwine be de luck; an' de dead coal, dat's gwine be you enemy. Den you jes' keep awake till de rooster crows fer midnight. Dat am de end ob de day. Now you chunk de live coal, dat am you, torrds de south, dat's de warm country; den throw de odder live coal to de east. Now you knows dat noddin' cain't gi obber fia'h. Den throw de dead coal, dat's your enemy, torrerds de norf', dat's de cole country. Now, 'fore de week be out, dat conjurer, he'll be a-leabin' dar fer anodder place.

Dar was er ole Injun who uset to hang 'roun Marse Bill's place er lot. He say de bes' way ter git de bes' ob de conjurer was ter git de clay from around de mouf' ob er crawfish hole, an some dirt from er red ant's hole. Mix dese an' wet hit wid whiskey er camphor. Den git some angle worms an' boil dem den add de worm water to de clay an' dirt. Effen you rub de conjured pusson wid dis he trubble done gwine erway.

WHITE RESPONSE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN CONJURE DOCTORS

Plantation owners often detested, dismissed, and/or feared conjure doctors, in part because they represented a threat to their control (Bailey 2002). According to Genovese (1974), plantation papers mention voodoo, conjure, and superstition as things to abhorred and punished. Fett (2002) reported on the dangers of being a conjurer in the antebellum south. She noted instances of conjure doctors being hanged for harming or killing their patients. Conjure doctors were frequently accused of poisoning Whites in the antebellum south, whether they were

involved or not. The same was true of slaves who had direct access to Whites on the plantation, such as those working in the big house. While some Whites discounted conjurers as superstitious and unfounded, others were quick to blame them for unexplainable deaths and illnesses in the south. Many people associated conjuring with poisoning. At times, conjurers promoted this association because it formed part of their power in the community. Regarding medical treatments, White plantation owners often had a distrust of conjure doctors and slaves likewise of White doctors. The result, according to Fett, was a climate of distrust for medical and healing encounters on plantations.

CONJURE—CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

It is inaccurate to think of African beliefs in and reliance on conjure, voodoo, hoodoo, and root doctoring as representing a significant departure from European-based folk medicine tradition. While the specifics may vary, what really matters is how these West African-based and Caribbean-based practices were morally interpreted by those (Whites) in power. In general, Whites interpreted such practices in a negative, moralistic, and un-Christian. It should be noted that supernatural explanations and treatments found in conjure were consistent with European-based folk medicine. European folk medicine also divided illness and medicine into natural and supernatural domains. European-based folk medicine, similar to West African and Caribbean, operated in the supernatural domain. For example, several of the White folk-medicine practices found by Cavender (2003) in Southern Appalachia are based on a belief in supernatural forces. Specifically, one folk practice was to pass an infant with colic from father to mother around a table leg three times. A cure for warts involved placing a corresponding number of stones to warts in a bag and whoever picks up the bag inherits the warts from the patient. In the context of White-dominated society, such White folk medicine was not negatively interpreted. However, if it were practiced by African Americans, it would be labeled conjure, voodoo, or hoodoo and judged in a negative light.

White society generally viewed its folk medicine as acceptable or at least tolerable compared to how it perceived African American conjurers and hoodoo/voodoo doctors. White views of conjurers were influenced by racism and a Protestant rejection of traditional African and Caribbean spiritualism, both of which lay at the core of these folk practices.

Slavery created an environment that promoted slaves to rebel and express control over their lives. Conjure was one way the enslaved could control their lives and respond to oppression. With the passing of slav-

ery, conjure doctors may have declined in social influence and power. However, vestiges of this power remain in many African American communities today. For example, Wonda Fontenot (1994) found "secret doctors" to be a vital force in modern Louisiana and Eric Bailey (2002) reported similar findings.

5

Slave Herbal and Plant Treatments

Throughout history, every culture has used herbs for medical treatments. The early colonists were no exception and brought with them a thorough knowledge of herbal treatments. Exchanges between early colonists and Native Americans promoted the use of local and European herbal remedies. The Native Americans had extensive knowledge of the healing power of herbs, which they shared with early settlers. Early colonists soon adopted mullein, boneset, goldenseal, and jack-in-the-pulpit as medical remedies (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Slaves also brought their knowledge of plant and herbal treatments from Africa and the Caribbean. They also adopted many of the plants used by indigenous North American populations.

THE USE OF HERBS AND PLANTS IN MEDICAL HISTORY TEXTS

Medical history books describing the antebellum south often refer to slave use of herbs and plants. For example, Kiple and King (1981) reported that slave children on the first sunny day after winter lined up for a dose of garlic rum called "spring tonic." People assumed that this tonic would prevent illness and energize the children. Kiple and King (1981: 170) compiled a list of plant and herbal remedies used by folk practitioners of the time that included: lion's tongue (wintergreen) tea, red oak bark, life everlasting (rabbit tobacco), garlic, chinaberry tea, Jerusalem oak, dogwood, tansy leaves, peach tree leaves, catnip, snakeroot, sage,

raspberry leaves, pine needles, elephant tongue, comfrey, sea myrtle, orange milkweed, wild cherry bark, poke root, mustard weed, Peter's root, mayapple, and sweet William roots. Medical historians have identified other herbs used by slaves. These herbs include Indian hemp or General Marion's weed (*Apocynum cannabium*), sore throat root (*Caulophyllum thalictrodes*), sweat root (*Polemonium reptans*), backache root (*Liatris spicata*), and *Agave virginica* (Goodson 1987). Slave uses of these and other herbs and plants varied with region. Fett (2002: 7) wrote, "Herbal practices, for example, changed with varying ecosystems." She added that certain regions, such as the Georgia and South Carolina Sea Islands area, "offered more concentrated evidence of African cultural retentions."

OTHER "MEDICAL" USES OF HERBS

While slaves consumed or ingested most herb and plant remedies, they also used them in other ways. For example, some wore herbs like garlic around their necks or put vegetables, such as potatoes, in their pockets for medical reasons. One of the most frequently mentioned practices was the wearing of asafetida, or nutmeg, around their necks to ward off illness and promote health. For example, Rawick (1967, vol. 2: 242) contains a narrative reference to asafetida being worn to ward off diphtheria. Many of the WPA narratives refer to wearing asafetida around the neck to ward off children's diseases and prevent illnesses such as asthma, colic, headaches, measles, whooping cough, and mumps, fever, small pox, chickenpox, and diphtheria. Sometimes it was combined with camphor or tar water or dipped in turpentine and used as a general preventive measure.

Tyler (1985) noted that the offensive odor of wearing this plant asafetida, also known as devil's dung, had no power to prevent illness but because of its strong smell tended to keep people with colds at a distance and, hence, harmful germs away. As was the case with wearing herbs and plants, not everyone bought into asafetida's effectiveness. For example, ex-slave Harry Johnson (Arkansas) commented: "I never did carry no charms or even wear asafoetida but I tell you what I did carry. I carried an Irish potato in my pocket for rheumatism till it petrified." "It never did do no good."

In addition to wearing plants or herbs, some slaves would place herbs in strategic locations in their living quarters. For instance, some used saw palmetto leaves as crosses over their doorways to remove curses or hexes so as to protect households (Fontenot 1994). Because many people associated illness with curses and hexes, some believed that correct placement of herbs and plants was effective in treating and preventing illness and injury.

SLAVE HERB DOCTORS

Slave herb doctors were specialists in folk medicine and the use of medicinal plants. They relied less on spiritual forces than conjurers but valued the power of faith and belief in the healing process. Slave herb doctors used plants to heal just as the conjurer used spiritual forces in his or her practice. Some medical practitioners practiced combinations of both herbal and conjure medicine.

Ralph Crowder (1980: 7) wrote, "Slave medical practice and the role of herb doctors represent a neglected theme in the history of medicine and of persistent African cultural survival." He added, "Plantation practitioners endured abuse and violence to share their skills and provide relief to the slave community." Some slaves placed more confidence in herb doctors than formally trained physicians. For example, Josephine Bacchus (South Carolina) expressed the sentiments of some, "Oh, de people never didn't put much faith to de doctors in dem days." She then said, "Mostly, dey would use de herbs in de fields for dey medicine."

Examples of successful herb doctors that served both slaves and Whites alike are numerous in the narratives. For example, Eugenia Martin (Georgia) shared how both African American and Whites relied on her father for herbal medicine:

> Father was a prosperous farmer. He was successful and accumulated very rapidly. Of course, he didn't have the handicap of most slaves, that is, starting out without anything at all. Instead his master, being quite fond of him, gave him a start and being industrious and energetic father made good. He knew all the herbs of the forest and their medicinal value. He spent quite a bit of his time, aside from his regular routine, compounding herbs into medicine. Both white and black came to him for his medicines.

George and Bessie Derrick (Florida) recalled heavy reliance on herb medicine:

> All of us have good health . . . we never had a doctor. When the kids were born we had midwives to [?]. There are plenty of things growing out there in the field that will cure anything. Back in my country we used lots of herb medicine.

Undoubtedly, slave herbal doctors were successful with many of the remedies they used because some plants and herbs have been found to be effective when correctly matched with the appropriate medical condition. In addition, as is true with all efforts at healing, the effects of confidence and belief in the medical practitioner, and remedies, promoted the actual healing or at least the perception that medical benefits were resulting. Also, much of the herb doctors' success was due to the rituals involved

with providing care, which undoubtedly had a touch of mystery and ceremony for the patient.

HOW DID HERB DOCTORS LEARN THEIR CRAFT?

Slaves, in most instances, were not encouraged to read or write. Some overcame social barriers and oppression and learned to read and write; most slaves did not. Consequently, most slave herb doctors would have shared their medical practices and plants orally, passing on their knowledge through word of mouth. For example, Annie Whitley Ware (Texas), who was born in 1857, remembered when she and her mammy were trained in herbal medicine:

> Mammy was trained ter be a doctor. In dem days dey git deir medecine from de woods an' made deir salves, liniment an' sech. Mammy larned me what she knowed 'bout doctorin'. Ole Mis' was mighty good ter de sick an' she went far an' wide ter see ter de sick folks. Ebery night, come ebery boddy in bed an' she gwine slip outten de big house an' make de 'rouns ob de quarters ter see effen eny body be sick an' she think Mammy got ter go erlong too.

Ex-slave Martha Patton (Alabama) commented in her interview:

> Twa'n't no use to send fo' a docta, no'm, 'cause dey didn't have no medicine. My grandmother got out in de woods and got 'erbs. She made sage bam (balm). One thing I recommember, she would take co'n shucks—de butt end of de shucks—and boil 'em and make tea. 'Twould break de chills and fever. De Lo'd fixed a way. We used roots for medicine too.

Harriet Collins (Texas) noted how Native Americans and older folks taught her about herb doctoring:

> My mammy larned me a lot of doctoring what she larnt from old folks from Africy, and some de Indians larnt her. . . . All dese doctorin' things come clear from Africy, and dey allus worked for mammy and for me, too.

Melinda of Louisiana provided an example of how knowledge was passed from one generation to another:

> My ma and pa left early in the morning' to work in the fields, and I remained with my grandma from sunrise to sunset. So it is that I was very fond of her and learned many useful things, for she knew the value of herbs and how to prepare remedies for almost every evil. (Clayton 1990: 165)

Joe Hawkins (Mississippi) also learned the secrets of herbal medicine from his mammy. He stated:

> I goes to the woods now and gets 'erbs to make me tea. I learnt dis from my Mammy. I'se ain't gwine to tell you what 'erbs I gits 'cause dat's a secret but I knows 'erbs.

Some of the narratives, such as the previous one, indicate that herb doctoring was a secretive endeavor. Three reasons for this secrecy include the fear of punishment by plantation owners and overseers for failed cures, repression from trained physicians, and self-interest. Secrecy also was important because of White oppression and protecting secrets ensured some with modest material gains, social status, and influence in the community. For example, Sylvia Cannon (South Carolina) noted her experience of being repressed by a physician:

> De people used herb medicines for dey cures in dem days dey get out de woods. I make herb medicine dat good for anything out de roots of the herbs mix together. Couldn't tell you how I make it cuase dat would ruin me. Town people try to buy de remedy from me, but Dr. McLeod tell me not to sell it.

GATHERING HERBS

To carry out their craft, herb doctors needed to retrieve plants and herbs from Southern gardens, fields, swamps, and forests. The WPA narratives refer to the harvesting of plants and herbs for medical uses. For example, Ella Lassiter (Florida) described the collection of herbs for medical use:

> Sometimes my Mammy she go out in de woods in dig de yurbs an she bile em up on we all take dat. Hit such a bittah dose but hit help us. Wouldn't be so ailin mahself now could I git to de woods an fine dem yurbs an fix em up. Whut kind e yurbs wuz dey? Well now I cant zacly remember ceptin de sassafras root. But dey wuz others an my Mammy she bile em all up together.
>
> Some ob de niggahs allus hab de haid-ache. Nothin much to do bout that cause dey done throwed out dey [hair?] where de birds fine hit an line a nest, no wunder dem niggahs haids ache, Deno nevah do dat, Mistis, "Maw said dat dey used all ole nigger remdeies on de missus dat dey knowed and fer dat reason dey brung her through."

Dulcinda Baker Martin (Kentucky), born in 1859, recalled the act of gathering plants and herbs:

> When us was chillun, us went root en herb gatherin', ter git things fer de winters medicine. Us uster gather wild cherry bark, horseradish root, dand'line root, hickory bark, mullen, penny-royal, poke root, en poke berries, en de Lord knows what—things I clear fergit. Chicken gizzard skin was saved fer medicine, en I reckon goose grease is still used fer lots of things, even en dis day en time.

Works Project Administration respondent Rachel Perkins (Arkansas) described the family garden that harbored a number of plants and herbs used for medical purposes, "We had flower gardens. We had mint, rosemary, tansy, sage, mullen, catnip, horseradish, artichokes, hoarhound—all good home remedies."

HERBS AND PLANTS IDENTIFIED BY OTHER HISTORIANS

Scholars have identified a number of plants and herbs used by slaves that were not identified in the WPA narratives. Wonda Fontenot (1994) compiled a list of thirty four plants used for medical purposes, including the following:

- Arrowhead (*Sagittaria platyphylla*) was a swamp plant made into necklaces to be worn by teething babies to draw pain and fever out.
- Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) leaves were made into a health tonic.
- Baume (*Monarda punctata*) is a mint-flavored plant that was made into a tea for colds, colic, and dysentery.
- Bay tree (*Persea borbonia*) bark was made into a tea for liver problems and colds. The leaves were sometimes made into crosses and hung over doors to ward off evil.
- Carenco plant (*Lindera benzoin*)—the leaves from this mint-like bush, also called the spice bush, were used for arthritis and were also mixed with sassafras and corn shucks for children's skin.
- Courtableau (*Catalpa bignonioides*) bark was made into a tea for purging.
- Goat Plant or Goatweed (*Croton capitatus*) was a popular plant that was used to make a tea for influenza.
- Hackberry tree (*Celtis laevigata*) bark was used to make tea and reportedly was good for kidney ailments.
- Indian turnip (*Arisaema triphyllum*) root, also known as jack-in-the-pulpit, was boiled and used for kidney, liver, and ulcer problems.
- Iron leaf/ironweed (*Veronia missturica*) leaves were made into a tea for weak bladders.
- Le Mamou (*Erythrina herbacea*), or coral bean's roots, were used to make a cough syrup or as a simple tea for colds.
- Le Monguiler (*Baccharis halimifolia*), or groundsel bush, was made into a tea for colds and fevers.
- Saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) was used as a health tonic.
- Tea grass/teaweed (*Sida rhombibolia*) this grass was made into a tea for fevers.

- Wild plum (*Prunus americana*)—the bark of from this tree was made into a tea for asthma.
- Wisdom vine (*Muskedine*) was boiled to make tea that was thought to be good for kidney problems and dropsy (water retention).
- Yam (*Dioscorea alata*) was used for bowel problems.

HERB AND PLANT TOXICITY

Herb doctors and folk practitioners used plants and herbs that could be toxic. Given how toxic and poisonous some of the plants and herbs were, it is surprising that many patients did not get worse or die from herbal treatments. For example, popular plants such as mandrake, castor beans, and lobelia are poisonous and may lead to death if improperly used. Contemporary herbalists caution and sometimes ban altogether the use of some of these herbal remedies used in the past because of their toxic effects. Undoubtedly, some well-intentioned herbal doctors harmed their patients and probably killed some. The number of patients that died or suffered from the inappropriate use of toxic plants and herbs will never be known. What is true is that those who successfully worked with such toxic plants must have been well trained in herbal and plant cures because the line between poisoning a patient and curing them can be very fine. For example, black cohosh has been used for centuries as a treatment for menstrual cramps. However, overdoses of black cohosh can result in liver damage and possible death. All of this implies that competent slave herb doctors had informal but detailed systems of training on herbal remedies. These systems had to be exacting at times but also below the purview of established White medical practice.

PLANTS AND HERBS AS MEDICAL REMEDIES

Slaves relied more on some plants and herbs than others for medical purposes. The WPA interviews contain several references to herbal and plant materia medica. The use of plants and herbs raises many questions. What herbs and plants did slaves most often use? How did they use the plants and herbs? What plant or herb remedies did they use for specific medical concerns? What plants and herbs did they mix together and for what purposes? Were any of these treatments effective or not? Did these treatments really work, do nothing, or make patients worse?

This chapter identifies selected plant and herbal treatments mentioned in the WPA narratives as being used in the period of slavery. The plant and herb material medica are listed alphabetically with reference materials on

how these material medica were used. In addition, modern scientific and medical evidence to the effectiveness of the plant or herb as remedies is presented to answer the question, Were the substances used actually effective treatments?

The plants and herbs identified in the WPA narratives are more fully presented in appendix A, which also presents a comprehensive listing of all of the uses of the plants and herbs, including plant mixtures. Appendix A identifies the name of the plant or herb, name of the WPA respondent, summary of how it was used and for what purposes, and the state in which the interview was conducted. Appendix B presents those plants and herbs mentioned by ex-slaves but difficult to verify the exact plant being referenced. It should be noted, WPA respondents were frequently slaves in states other than where they were interviewed.

Apple (*Pyrus malus*)

People have long thought of apples as being good for health. As the saying goes, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." The acids contained in an apple make the fruit digestible and aid in digestion of other foods. The apple also acts as an excellent dentifrice, being a food that is not only cleansing to the teeth on account of its juices, but just hard enough to mechanically push back the gums so that the borders are cleared of deposits. In the second century, Galen, the famous court physician to the Roman emperors and the gladiators, prescribed apple wine as a cure-all for nearly every ailment. Depending on how apples are used, they can relieve both constipation and diarrhea. Apples are also rich in soluble fiber, a substance that helps regulate blood sugar, preventing a sudden increase, or drop, in serum sugar levels. Pectin, a type of soluble fiber found in apples, has received much attention lately because of its ability to lower blood cholesterol levels, thus reducing the risk of heart disease. Apples also are a traditional remedy for rheumatism. Although apples were not frequently mentioned in the WPA narratives as medical remedies, respondent Nan Stewart (Ohio) used apples for an unspecified medical purpose.

Asa foetida/Asafetida/Assafoetida (*Ferula asafetida*)

Slaves used asa foetida, also known as devil's dung, as a preventive measure and treatment for illnesses and diseases. Herbalists have used it for whooping cough and other chest problems (Chevallier 2000). Late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Southern folk practitioners employed the plant as a treatment for hysteria and nervous complaints (Moss 1999). In Southern Appalachian, people wore it around their necks to ward off smallpox (Cavender 2003). According to the *Physician's*

Desk Reference for Herbal Medicines (hereafter referred to as the *PDR for Herbal Medicines*), the medicinal element is the oily gum resin that is extracted from the plant. According to modern research, the ingestion of preparations with asa foetida has a mild intestinal disinfection effect (Fleming 2000). In some cases, asa foetida has been linked to the spread of hepatitis (Youngkin and Israel 1996).

The slaves' primary medical use of asa foetida was to wear it around their necks as a preventative measure. Works Project Administration respondents frequently mentioned the wearing of the plant asafetida in bags around the neck to ward off illness. The fruit of the plant has a strong odor, which might account for people's belief that it would ward off illness. Ex-slaves Florence Lee and Henrietta McCarthy (Ohio) provided one of several narrative references to asa foetida as a medical preventive:

> They had doctors only in the greatest emergency and were always well dosed with pennyroyal, catnip, elderbroom tea was used for babies and the only charms or things of that sort she remembers was a little bag of asafetida, which was supposed to ward off children's diseases.

Lizzie Norfleet (Mississippi) provided a vivid picture of how the plant was worn and how older women on the plantation promoted its use in this manner. She also referenced the use of sweet molasses to improve the taste of medicine:

> When the slaves got sick, a doctor from Friars Point was sent for to tend them. The old women on the place looked after them till they was up. The old women took care of the babies and children too. They had done learned about different herbs and how to make tea out of them for the babies. The older children had their worm medicine put in molasses so they wouldn't mind eating it. Every child wore an asafetida bag round the neck to keep from ketching diseases. For in them days they did not know nothing bout no charms or nothin' of the kind. The asafetida bag was the only dependence.

Hannah Jones (Alabama) also referred to wearing the plant and offered:

> We useta have a doctor dat'd come roun' eve'y two weeks to see how de slaves was doin' an' iffen we was sick he would give us some medicine. Some of de women would tie assfedity 'roun' de chilluns necks to keep de sickness away.

John Davenport (South Carolina) described how the plant was used by children: "Little bags of asfetida was used to hang around de little chilluns necks to ward off fever or diphtheria." L. B. Barner (Oklahoma) linked wearing the bags too ward off "hooping-cough" and Aunt Silva Durant (South Carolina) noted that they "put it on dey chillun to keep dem from havin worms." Angie Garrett (Alabama) stated, "Us wo' asfedity 'roun' us

neck keep off de small pox and measles." In addition to wearing this plant around the neck, slaves also ingested the plant for conditions such as asthma, whooping cough, and colic (Goodson 1987).

Balmony (*Chelone glabra*)

The herb "barmonia" likely is a reference to balmony that herbalists have used to treat gallstones, expel worms, relieve nausea, and deal with colic (Chevallier 2000). Herbalists also have used it to make a bitter tea. Homeopaths currently use the plant to treat liver disorders, digestive disorders, and worm infestations (Fleming 2000). It is likely that the following reference by Mollie Dawson was to balmony. Mollie Dawson was born in Texas in 1852. She recalled the use of a plant called "Barmonia weed":

> We always used de Barmonia weed ter make a tea and drink dat fer chills and fever and it sho was good fer it. It would always cure it if you didn't wait too long and den it would helps ter break it up. Dar was several weeds and bark of some roots dat dey would gits and let it dry and dem boils it down ter a strong tea and make it fer different kinds of ailment. I was young den and didn't pay much attention ter it, but I sho members dat Barmonia weed. I bet I have drunk a barrelful of dat tea.

Bittersweet Nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*)

Bittersweet nightshade is known by a variety of names including bittersweet, fever twig, and woody nightshade, among others. Herbalists have used it for a variety of skin irritations, bruises, and eruptions and it is reportedly beneficial for rheumatism (Weiner and Weiner 1994). In folk medicine, the plant has been used to treat nosebleeds, rheumatic conditions, asthma, and bronchitis (Fleming 2000). The plant is poisonous to some and use during pregnancy is not recommended. WPA respondent Samuel Lyons (Ohio) was born in Kentucky and recalled bittersweet being used to treat rheumatism, "Dey uster take bittersweet en put in en er pan with er little grease, an atter it was het up pour off de grease en use it fer sa've ter cure rheumatism." This slave use for rheumatism would be consistent with folk medicine. John Bates (Texas) was born in Arkansas in 1852. He remembered "bittercrest weeds" or "bitter weeds" being used:

> When de slaves gits sick dey would gets de bittercrest weeds er bark dey could find and makes a tea outen it and takes it cause if dey gits too sick dey would gets a doctor. I aint had no doctor in twenty-five years, when I gets ter feelin bad I goes out and gets some of dese ole bitter weeds we calls em, de kind dat makes your cows milk bitter, and boils it, makin a tea and takes it and in a few

> days I am all right. I got some layin over there now dat I went out in de pasture dis mornin and got. It is better den de patten medicine dat you buys.

Rose Williams (Texas) remembered a general use of the tea for ailments:

> When de slaves got sick dey was given de bitterest medicine a doctor could git, er dey would go out and git some ole big bitter weeds and makes a tea outen it and makes em drink it. Guess it was good fer dem though, dey generally allus got well.

Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosis*)

In Southern Appalachian folk medicine, practitioners made blackberry root or bark into tea for diarrhea (Cavender 2003). Late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Southern folk practitioners used blackberry to treat old sores, kidney, stomach problems, and other ailments (Moss 1999). Chevallier (2000) reported that blackberry is an effective diuretic. Because it has astringent properties, blackberry leaves are somewhat useful for diarrhea (Fleming 2000). Josephine Hyles "Mama Honey" was born a slave in Texas. She noted the use of the roots but didn't specify a purpose, saying, "My mother used to send me and my brother out in de woods for de blackberry roots and she make medicine out of dem." She added, "You jes' take de few draps at de time."

Black Haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*)

The medicinal parts of this plant are the bark and the root. The tree is also known by stag bush, snowball tree, cramp bark, rose elder, red elder, and other names. Little is known about the efficacy of black haw in treating medical conditions. The plant does contain a close chemical relative to aspirin, salicin. Research on its effectiveness as a painkiller is absent but its astringent properties and subsequent use in folk medicine to treat diarrhea is understandable (Peirce 1999). Folk practitioners have used it to prevent miscarriage, help decrease bleeding after childbirth, and to treat bronchitis, asthma, and other lung problems. The WPA narratives contain references to black haw use as a general purgative, tea for colds, and component of potions for other ailments.

Black Pepper (*Piper nigrum*)

The medicinal part of the black pepper plant are the berries that are usually dried. The plant increases the production of saliva and has antimicrobial effects. Folk medicine has used black pepper to treat digestive problems, scabies, and stomach disorders (Fleming 2000). Curley Mcgade (Texas) claimed that it was useful for menstrual headaches.

Black Snake Root (*Polygala senga*)

The medicinal part of black snake root is the flowering plant with the root. Black snake root was used in Southern Appalachia as a treatment for colds and coughs and as a blood cleaner (Cavender 2003). Modern herbalists use the plant as a tea for respiratory conditions, cough, and bronchitis (Fleming 2000). It also serves as a mild expectorant. Several of the WPA narratives identified this as a medical use such as, Harriet Collins (Texas), George Taylor (Alabama), Ned Meridan Chaney (Mississippi), Green Willbanks (Georgia), and Dosia Harris (Georgia). Griffin Myrax (Arkansas) also noted a the use of black snake root to settle a sick stomach. George Pretty (Florida) used it for "blood trouble." Robert Bryant (Missouri) used it for constipation.

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)

The WPA narratives do not specifically refer to bloodroot but to the alternative name of coon root. Folk practitioners have historically used the plant as a mouthwash, possibly because it has an antiplaque agent and may be effective for gingivitis (Fleming 2000). Contemporary medical applications include its use as an expectorant, treatment for respiratory problems and asthma, and gargle for sore throats. Modern science reports that bloodroot operates as an expectorant, mild antiseptic, and anesthetic (Chevallier 2000). Harriet Collins was born in Texas in 1870. She referred to her mother, who was a slave, using coon root to address leg cramps:

> Dat dime on de string roun' my ankle keeps de cramps outten my leg. Mammy allers did dat an' hits sho' good. Tea from red coon-root is good fer dat too.

Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*)

Native Americans and folk practitioners used boneset extensively in the nineteenth century as a medicinal. The plant is also named ague weed, crosswort, feverwort, teasel, Indian sage, sweating plant, and wood boneset (Youngkin and Israel 1996). Native Americans used the plant for fevers and colds. In the South, indigenous groups, such as the Alabama tribes, used it for upset stomachs (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Folk practitioners named the plant boneset, ague weed, feverwort, or sweating plant because of its use as a treatment for breakbone fever or dengue (Moss 1999). Historically, folk practitioners used boneset as folk remedy for colds in Southern Appalachia (Cavender 2003). The consumption of boneset, which has a bitter taste, produces perspiration and can result in vomiting, purging, and the expectoration (emetic) of phlegm (Chevallier 2000; Meyer 1975; Meyer et al.

1981). According to the scientific evidence, the plant contains few compounds known to have therapeutic value, but is it does appear to increase sweating (Youngkin and Israel 1996). The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* noted that the plant stimulates the immune system (Fleming 2000). People also used boneset to treat in influenza. Works Project Administration respondent John Davenport (South Carolina) mentioned the use of boneset to treat chills and fevers:

> Some of de folks had remedies for curing like making hot tea from a wed called "bone-set." Dat weed grows wild in de woods. It was good for chills and fever. De tea is awful bitter.

Ellen Payne (Texas) observed that boneset was terrible tasting when she stated, "They give us 'Boneset' and other 'got-up' medicine." She then commented, "That nasty 'Boneset' was bad enough to kill a mule." Rev. Wade Owens (Alabama) accurately noted the ability of the plant to induce sweating:

> When us 'ud git sick, dey would bleed you, stick somp'n in your arm and draw de blood. Den dey would giv' us scurry grass and fever weed. Bone-set was use'as teas for colds an' fever to sweat you. An' hit sho' would sweat you, too.

Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*) or Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)

The WPA narratives do not specify which type of buckeye was being referenced but chances are the respondents were referring to red buckeye, which is a bush that produces hard black seeds called buckeyes. African American folk practitioners sometimes used buckeye as a cure for rheumatism (Pyatt and Johns 1999). Vinnie Brunson of Texas shared that two buckeyes carried in the pocket would ward off joint misery. Harriet Miller (Georgia) thought that buckeyes carried in the pocket prevented cramps and colic. Slaves also mixed buckeye with other herbs to treat sickness.

Burdock (*Articum lappa*)

People have referred to burdock as burr seed, cockle buttons, lappa, and thorny burr, among others. Modern science indicates that the roots of this weed have demonstrated antibacterial and antifungal properties. Folk practitioners have used this plant to treat gout, rheumatism, and dropsy (edema—retention of fluid). In Southern Appalachia, folk doctors used burdock as a blood purifier (Cavender 2003; Wichtl 2004). Southern folk practitioners of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used burdock as a treatment for dropsy (Moss 1999). Modern scientific evidence indicates

burdock has some medical value for fungal infections and diabetes (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Research also has found burdock has antibiotic properties, is a diuretic, and is an anti-inflammatory (Chevallier 2000; Fleming 2000; Peirce 1999; Wichtl 2004). Some folk practitioners believe burdock helps with the symptoms of arthritis; however, there is no evidence to support this use (Tyler 1985).

Ex-slave Victoria Adams (South Carolina) remembered the burdock roots being soaked in whiskey to treat unspecified illnesses. Easter Sudie Campbell (Kansas) recalled the root being mixed with citrate of potash for scrofula. Mark Oliver (Mississippi) remembered a possible use of a plant he called "Bur Vine," which probably referred to burdock. He stated:

> Sometime the old folks did the doctoring with the medicine they made out of herbs. Their snake root tonic was mighty fine. Nothing better for the cramps than bur vine tea.

Butterfly Root (*Asclepias syriaca*)

Butterfly root's other names include pleurisy root, Canada root, flux root, swallow-wort, tuber root, white root, wind root, and orange milkweed (Fleming 2000). Native Americans used butterfly weed as a laxative, for pleurisy, stomach problems, fevers, rheumatism, and for the lungs (Chevallier 2000; Heatherley 1998). Modern herbalists have used the plant to treat respiratory problems, cough, tuberculosis, and infant colic (Weiner and Weiner 1994). In American folk medicine, butterfly root it has been considered a cure all. Modern research indicates that it acts as an expectorant, tonic, and antispasmodic (Fleming 2000). When taken in large amounts, the plant and its derivatives can be poisonous (Fleming 2000; Heatherley 1998).

Harvey (1981) reported the use of butterfly root by African American folk healers to induce vomiting. A few of the WPA narratives refer to the use of butterfly root for chills, worms, and pleurisy. Folk practitioners gave it the name pleurisy root because of its perceived effectiveness in addressing pleurisy.

Calamus/Sweet Flag (*Acornus calamus*)

Calamus, also known as rat root, sweet myrtle, flagroot, sweet root, and other names has been a common folk remedy for digestive disorders, colic, fever, upset stomach, and other ailments (Peirce 1999). Native Americans chewed calamus or sweet flag for toothaches. Folk practitioners used it for worms (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Southern Appalachian folk doctors made calamus tea or chewed the leaves as a treatment for indigestion, colic,

and gas (Cavender 2003; Chevallier 2000). The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* reported that calamus stimulates appetite and digestion and has carminative and sedative effects (Fleming 2000). Peirce (1999) reported there is scientific evidence for its value as a sedative, but more research is needed. WPA respondent George Taylor (Alabama) noted an unspecified use of calamus root:

> I also 'members de ole time remedies dat dey used in de ole days, Dey used red oak bark for fever an' colds, an' den dere was horehound, an' black snake root dat de ol' Marster put whiskey on. Ol' Marster made his own whiskey. An' oh! yes, de calomus root growed in de woods whar dey lived. I neber seed dem send to no store for medicine.

Mary Thompson (Texas) was born into slavery in Alabama. She referred to calamus as a treatment for colic, "Calamus root, looks like an onion, was good for de chillens' colic."

Cami Weeds/Cami Roots (unknown)

The WPA narratives make several references to the use of a plant called cami-weed. It is unclear whether the respondents are referring to chamomile, calamus, or some other plant. People use chamomile in modern society to treat colds and fevers similar to how it is mentioned in the narratives. It is likely that the respondents were referring to chamomile given the variety of chamomile plants, that it is mentioned in the narratives from Texas, and its presence in much of the South, along with its similar sounding name. Eli Coleman, born in Texas in 1846 and of Texas recalled the use of "cami-weed":

> If we wasn't so sick Maser got an old negro mama to look after us and doctor us. She used herbs that she gathered in the woods such as sasfras roots, cami weeds, and then she gathered leaves off peach trees and made syrup and gave us for chills and fever.

Eli Davison (Texas), who was born into slavery in West Virginia and enslaved there, shared:

> They used all kinds of herbs and roots out of the woods, such as cami weed roots and red oak bark to make tea out of for chills and fever.

Camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*)

Marco Polo reported the Chinese used the oil from the camphor tree as a medicine. Southern folk practitioners in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries used camphor as a remedy for fevers (Moss 1999). The leaves of this tree were used by slaves to make teas for colds (Fontenot 1994). Today, people use camphor in liniments for arthritic and body pains, skin problems, cold sores, and to treat respiratory infections (Fleming 2000). Modern research has found that a white crystalline substance produced from the stems, roots, and other parts of the tree has antiseptic, stimulant, and antispasmodic properties (Chevallier 2000). Camphor is extremely poisonous and should never be ingested (Peirce 1999). William Byrd (Texas), was born a slave, noted wearing camphor:

> When slaves become sick master he would look after them he would first get old negro mamma. She would give us tea made from red oak bark for chills and fevers then she would tie camphor string around our neck.

Castor Beans (*Ricinus communis*)

The medicinal parts of this castor plant are the oil extracted from the seeds, fat from the oil, and the ripe and dried seeds. Castor beans are highly poisonous and have a long history of success as a cathartic and purgative. Two castor beans are sufficient to kill an adult but the poisonous toxins are not passed into the oil. Castor beans are toxic because they contain ricin. There is no antidote for ricin poisoning. The castor bean oil has been used as a laxative and topical treatment for ringworm or other skin diseases (Heatherley 1998). Southern folk medicine of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries routinely relied on castor oil as a cathartic and to treat stomach ailments (Moss 1999). Castor oil is a laxative and has a long history of success as a cathartic and purgative. Modern research supports its efficacy as a laxative and use to clear the digestive tract of poisons (Chevallier 2000). Castor oil, made from the castor bean, is a powerful cathartic that has been used to relieve stomachaches. Tyler (1985) noted that it is useful for relieving stomachaches due to constipation.

Ex-slave Amy Perry reported castor oil was mixed with dogwood bark and whiskey to keep the blood good (Bankole 1998). The WPA respondent Milton Hammond (Georgia) mentioned castor oil as a general remedy, "When we got sick we were not allowed to suffer through negligence on the part of our owner." Hammond then said, "Castor oil was the favorite home remedy used in those days and it could always be found on the family shelf." Emmaline Heard (Georgia) shared how castor oil was used as a cure-all in some homes:

> Slaves were given treatment by the doctor when they became ill, but if the doctor stated that the slave was well enough to work, they had to go to the fields. Sick babies were left at home while the parents were at work in the field. No matter what sickness the child suffered, castor oil was the only remedy ever given.

George Eason (Georgia) recalled the frequent reliance of castor oil to treat the slaves, "The usual treatment for sick slaves was castor oil, which was given in large doses, salts and a type of pill known as hippocat (ipecac)." Everett Ingram (Alabama) described what might have been an awful-tasting cure for worms, "Gran'mammy was a great doctor; useta give us turpentine an' castor oil an' Jerusalem oak fer worms." Finally, John Cole (Georgia) provided another description of how castor oil was used:

> You usually weren't sick, but if you were sick, it afforded you the luxury of tea. Turpentine and caster oil composed the entire materia medica. Turpentine was used for sore throats, cuts and bruises. Caster oil was used for everything else except a major fracture which called for the master sending in a doctor to the quarters.

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*)

The herb catnip also was referred to as catmint, catswort, and field balm. Native Americans used catnip leaves for infant colic and to treat colds (Fontenot 1994; Heatherley 1998). Southern Appalachian folk used catnip tea to treat indigestion (Cavender 2003). Catnip has been used as a domestic remedy for infant colic, teething, fever, boils, and colds. Modern research indicates that catnip is effective for anemia (iron deficiency) and toothaches (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Scientific evidence has found no support for claims that catnip is effective against bronchitis, digestive problems, or other ailments (Youngkin and Israel 1996). However, according to the *PDR for Herbal Medicines*, catnip does have antispasmodic and sedative effects (Fleming 2000). The WPA narratives state that people used catnip to treat a wide range of medical ailments. Mary Thompson was born enslaved in Alabama and remembered:

> When we was sick de marster would sen' for de doctor and we made teas outta herbs and sich. Alabama was full of chills and fevers in dam days and we drunk catnip tea for fevers and blue and white sage.

Pauline Worth (South Carolina) also commented:

> I tell you my old Missus was good to us, child, good to us all de time. Come bout en doctor us herself when we get sick. Wouldn' trust nobody else to give us no medicine. I remember she give us castor oil en little salts for some ailments. Didn' give us nothin more den dat only a little sage or catnip sometimes. Dat what was good for colds.

Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*/*Matricaria recutia*)

Chamomile has been used since at least the first century for digestive problems (Chevallier 2000). Modern American folk medicine practioners

use chamomile to ease abdominal pain because it helps relax muscles (Maiscott 2000). Prior to the antebellum period, Southern folk medicine incorporated chamomile as a treatment for skin eruptions (Moss 1999). People have used this plant as a sedative to treat anxiety, nausea, indigestion, diarrhea, sleep problems, itching, abdominal pain (relaxes muscles), and infections (Maiscott 2000), and for its effect as a sedative. Chamomile has carminative (expels gas), antispasmodic (relaxes smooth muscles), and anti-inflammatory characteristics and has been used for stomachaches (Tyler 1985). Scientific evidence has found that chamomile has anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic effects (Youngkin and Israel 1996). Weiner and Weiner (1994) reported that chamomile can be used as a safe sedative, operates as an antihistamine, and can be used as a treatment for conjunctivitis. Modern science also has found that the plant works as an antihistamine, sedative, eye wash for conjunctivitis, and treating wounds (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Gus Smith (Missouri) referred to a plant he called "camamile" as a medicinal tea. Lou Williams (Texas) recalled it being mixed with sage for illness.

Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach L.*)

Modern herbalists consider chinaberry a toxic plant because of its poisonous berries. The toxicity of the berries varies due to environmental conditions. People who ingest chinaberry may experience vomiting, irregular respiration, weakness, and increased salivation (University of Georgia 2005). Reference in the narratives in the use of chinaberry to avoid worms was noted by Rawick (1972). Esther Green (Alabama) mentioned, "Bout de only thing I remembers ever takin' was tea made from de root of de china berry tree." She added, "It made good tea for us, but was to be used only at certain times of de moon." Alonzo Power (Georgia) commented about its use for stomachache:

> Old Miss would never consult a doctor. She was as good as any of them. When we got sick we didn't say stomach. We would holler Old Mistess and she would come a running and ask, "What is the matter with my little niggers now?" My belly hurts, I'd say. She always kept some medicine made of chinaberry roots. "Now take this and Mistess will give you some candy."

Janey Landrum (Texas), born in 1851, recalled:

> If you git the scrofula and want to cure hit, git a lot of china berry roots and poke roots and some bluestone and boil them all together, strain, and make a salve to rub on the sores. Then anoint them with a black chicken feather dipped in pure hog lard. This brings the sores to a head and then you can press out the cores and you are cured. Lime water is a fine tonic, especially in the spring of the year.

Cinchona (*Cinchona ledgeriana*/*Cinchona pubescens*)

The Incas used cinchona bark, also called Peruvian bark, red bark, or simply "the Bark," to treat malaria and fevers. Named after the Peruvian Countess of Chinchon (1640), the bark, when boiled, is a source of quinine. The Inca use of cinchona bark for treating malaria rapidly spread across the colonies and Europe at the end of the seventeenth century. The influential English physician Sydenham encouraged the use of the bark for that purpose in the seventeenth century (Kiple and King 1981). Southern folk medicine assumed that the bark and roots of dogwood and yellow poplar were equal substitutes to cinchona (Moss 1999). The bark has antiseptic and astringent properties making it effective for malaria but not for all fevers, such as yellow fever. According to Wichtl (2004), modern research indicates that the bark promotes the secretion of gastric juices, serves as an antiseptic, and has astringent properties. It is accepted today as an effective antimalarial treatment.

Ex-slaves Darcus Barnett (Texas) used cinchona bark for malaria and common ailments. Katie Arbony (Arkansas), Lavinia Lewis (Texas), Bill Thomas (Texas), and Louis Davis (Mississippi) used the bark for general chills and fevers. Others used it for unspecified purposes. Slave use of cinchona for malaria and other fevers is consistent with modern understandings of the medical value of the plant.

Clove (*Syzgium aromaticum*)

Folk practitioners have used clove oil for toothaches and as an anti-inflammatory, to alleviate nausea, and stop vomiting (Maiscott 2000; Moss 1999). Modern science has verified that clove does have some anti-inflammatory effects (Weiner and Weiner 1994). The plant has been used in dentistry because of its antiseptic effect (Peirce 1999; Wichtl 2004). Dellie Lewis (Alabama) remembered it as a cure for kidney stones and as a cleanser after birth:

> An' speakin' of oures, white folks, us niggers had 'em. My grandmammy was a midwife an' she useta gib women cloves an' whiskey to ease de pain.

She later described her grandmother always making a tea of made of spice and cloves, putting in a little whiskey, and giving it to a woman after childbirth, as this always brought out all the "bruised blood."

Collard (*Brassica oleracea L.*)

Collard is a green leafy plant with cabbage-like leaves. It is a common vegetable in Southern states. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century White folk

practitioners made poultices out of the leaves to treat pleurisy (Moss 1999). Warner Willis (Clayton 1990: 215) identified the use of collard leaves as a medical remedy. He shared, "Collard leaves we put on head for misery and again we made a poultice with them for boils." Then he recalled another use, "Once when I had a carbuncle on the back of my neck, and they said I was goin' to die, I cured myself with it."

Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)

Comfrey is also called blackwort, brusiewort, knitbone, gum plant, healing herb, and slippery root. Comfrey was used in Southern Appalachian folk medicine as a treatment for coughs and sprains (Cavender 2003). Folk practitioners have used comfrey ointments to treat bruises and sprains (Fleming 2000; Maiscott 2000). Wichtl (2004) reported folk use of comfrey for rheumatism, bronchitis, and pleurisy. The medicinal parts of the plant are the fresh roots and leaves. Comfrey has been assumed to heal bone, hence the name knitbone. There are mixed results of the efficacy of the plant in treating muscular-skeletal disorders (Fleming 2000). Comfrey tea has been a popular drink for its assumed healing properties; however, when consumed in excessive amounts, it may damage the liver and has been dropped by many modern herbal suppliers (Peirce 1999; Youngkin and Israel 1996). Comfrey has the ability to aid in the healing of tissues but can cause severe or even fatal liver damage in rare instances and even death (Chevallier 2000; Fleming 2000). Works Project Administration narrative respondent Emma Hurley (Georgia) used comfrey in a tea for unspecified medical purposes.

Corn (*Zea mays*)

Native Americans used corn oil in poultices for boils, burns, and inflammations (Weiner and Weiner 1994). The shucks were boiled to make a tea for colds and influenza (Fontenot 1994). Corn silk has a history of use as a treatment for urinary conditions. Eastern Native American tribes used corn oil in poultices to treat boils, burns, and inflammations (Chevallier 2000; Weiner and Weiner 1994). In contemporary herbal practice, some African American secret doctors (folk practitioners) believe that corn should not be eaten by pregnant women because of resulting medical complications (Fontenot 1994). Modern research suggests corn silk is a useful diuretic, helps resolve urinary problems, and may have a beneficial effect on kidney stones (Beard 2003; Chevallier 2000; Wichtl 2004). The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* noted that corn stimulates cardiac muscles, increases blood pressure, acts as a diuretic, and sedates the digestive tract (Fleming 2000). Corn shucks are not generally used by modern herbalists

or folk medicine practitioners, but were used by slaves. For example, Zenia Culp (Arkansas) recalled:

> I member bein' down at the quarters one time and one of the women had the side ache and they put poultices on her made out of shucks and hot ashes and that sho'ly did ease the pain.

Rachel Hankins (Arkansas) made a couple of references to the use of corn shucks:

> My feet never saw a shoe until I was fourteen. I went barefooted in ice and snow. They was tough. I did not feel the cold. I never had a cold when I was young. If we had ep-p-zu-dit we used different things to make tea out of, such as shucks, cow chips, hog hoofs, cow hoofs. Ep-p-zu-dit then is what people call flu now.

Sol Walton was born in Alabama and was interviewed in Texas. Sol identified corn shucks as a cure for worms, "There was boneset tea and willow tea and shuck tea and cottonseed tea for chills and fever and Jerusalem oak for worms."

Cotton (*Gossypium herbaceum*)

Native populations in Alabama used cotton roots to ease labor pains (Vogel 1981; Weiner and Weiner 1994). Folk practitioners used cotton root bark, inner root bark, and seeds, which they believe were the medicinal parts of the cotton plant. In folk medicine, practitioners have used cotton plants to treat nausea, fever, headache, and diarrhea, expel afterbirths, and treat poor lactation, hemorrhages, dysentery, and other medical conditions (Fleming 2000). Folk practitioners made tea out of cotton roots to ease labor. The root bark and seeds also cause uterine contractions. Chinese medicine uses the plant as a male contraceptive (Fleming 2000). Modern medicine has concluded that cotton root bark does, in fact, promote abortion or the onset of menstruation and the seeds lower sperm production (Chevallier 2000).

In general, slaves found limited medical use for cotton. However, some used it as an abortifacient (Goodson 1987). In the nineteenth century, some slaves used the plant to induce uterine contractions and hence abortions (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Doc Quinn (Arkansas) shared a recipe and later explained how it was used to treat a group of ill individuals:

> One mornin' when about forty of us niggers had reported sick, de Mahster came down to de qua'ters. "Whut ailin' ye' lazy neggers?" he asked. Dem niggers los' about fifty pounds of weight apiece, and didn' feel like doin' anything. "Mahster," I say. "Iffen you'll have de wimmen folks make us a pot full of dat

cotton-seed and corn-meal, we'll be ready to go to work." And as long as I work fo' Colonel Harvey, one uv de bes' men whut ever lived, we always had cotton-seed and corn-meal to eat.

Dogwood (*Cornus florida*)

Native American groups made a tea from dogwood for fevers (Weiner and Weiner 1994). In folk medicine, practitioners used flowering dogwood as a substitute for cinchona or quinine to treat the symptoms of malaria (Meyer 1975; Vogel 1981). According to the *PDR for Herbal Medicines* (1998), the plant does have positive effects on malaria in fowl but results are tentative, and it kills a type of snail known to carry worms that infect humans. The *PDR* notes bark of the plant works as a tonic and stimulant, and astringent. Fontenot (1994) found that slaves made a dogwood tea for body cleansing and inflammations. The WPA narratives refer to several uses of dogwood including mixing it with black haw root and cherry bark to make a general purpose tonic (Sam Bush, Texas). Gus Smith of Missouri used it to make a tea for colds. Phil Town (Georgia) made a dogwood tea for worms.

Echinacea (*Echinacea angustifolia*)

Echinacea is also known as Sampson root, black Sampson root, or cone flower. The plant echinacea has an immune-stimulant effect (Youngkin and Israel 1996). Native Americans used the plant externally for burns, swollen lymph nodes, and insect bites. Other folk medicine uses include its use for headaches, rattlesnake bites, measles, stomachaches, and other ailments. The efficacy of these treatments has not been established. Echinacea has been approved for treatment of common colds, coughs, bronchitis, fevers, infections, wounds, burns, urinary tract infections, and immunity to infection (Fleming 2000; Wichtl 2004).

Echinacea, or as it was more commonly referred to by slaves as Sampson root, found many uses as illustrated in the WPA narratives. For instance, Phil Town (Georgia) recalled it being used as a tea for cramps. Annie Ware (Texas) remembered it was mixed with camphor or whiskey and red coon (bloodroot) for joint pain. Pierce Harper (Texas) and Fannie Moore (North Carolina) used it for stomach pains.

Elder/Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis, Sambuscus racemosa, and Sambuscus nigra*)

Elder has considerable history as a source of medical remedies. Native Americans used elder flowers to reduce fevers, to treat headaches, and to reduce inflammations. Elderberry extract is a folk remedy for colds and in-

fluenza (Maiscott 2000). Modern herbalists use elder as a purgative, in a tea as a laxative, and for rheumatism, gout, and syphilis (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Chevallier (2000) reported that it can effectively be used to treat hay fever and can reduce the duration of the flu. Fontenot (1994) found slaves used it for bladder infections. WPA Respondent Rachel Goings (Missouri) recollected, "I'd a took elder leaves en boiled em to make a tea—den I'd a poured dat in de sore en it ud got well." Harriet Collins (Texas) recalled infants wearing elder around their necks to help with teething. Henry Barnes (Alabama) made an elderberry tea for fevers.

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

The ancients used fennel, as also known as yellow weed or dog fennel, for visual problems. In folk medicine, fennel is a popular remedy for tooth and earaches. In Southern folk medicine, folk practitioners used it for its assumed positive effects on the stomach (Moss 1999). Fennel has been used for colic in infants and for gas and indigestion (Maiscott 2000; Youngkin and Israel 1996). Modern science indicates that fennel has anti-inflammatory effects. It also has antibacterial and antifungal properties, and lowers blood pressure (Weiner and Weiner 1994). It has been approved for cough, bronchitis, and dyspeptic complaints (Fleming 2000).

Works Project Administration respondents referred to fennel as dog fennel in their narratives. The WPA narratives and they indicate that fennel was used as a tea for a variety of common ailments. For example, Lou Smith used fennel in a tea for chills and malaria. Other slaves used it as a treatment for fevers and whooping cough.

Feverfew (*Tanacethum parthenium or Chrysanthemum partenium*)

The herb feverfew, also known as fever weed or fever grass, is used mostly for migraine headaches, arthritis, rheumatic diseases, and allergies (Baldwin et al. 1987; Fleming 2000). Folk practitioners used it to treat fevers, migraine headaches (Chevallier 2000; Weiner and Weiner 1994), and gas and indigestion (Maiscott 2000). Peirce (1999) noted that there is no research that indicates that the plant reduces fevers but more research is needed. Works Project Administration respondent Rev. Wade Owens (Alabama) shared, "When us 'ud git sick, dey would bleed you, stick somp'n in your arm and draw de blood." He added, "Den dey would giv' us scurry grass and fever weed."

Flax (*Linum usitatissimum*)

Flax seed, also known as linseed, is referred to in the WPA narratives. Flax seeds are the only part of the plant that is used for medical purposes.

According to Heatherley (1998), current medical interest is in flax is in its properties for as preventing blood clots, removing heavy metals from body tissue, and dealing with lowering cholesterol. Chevallier (2000) reported its use as an effective laxative, treatment of cough, urinary problems, and other medical uses. Peirce (1999) noted modern evidence of flax's value as a soother of mucous membranes and intestinal disorders. According to modern research, flax seed contains ingredients that have cancer-fighting qualities (Chevallier 2000). Slaves used flax tea as a remedy, but only for mild ailments (Morias 1967). Ex-slave Griffin Myrax, (Arkansas) used it as a tea for "disordered stomach."

Garlic (*Allium sativum*)

Garlic has thousands of years of medicinal use. Herbalists have used garlic to treat earaches, fungal skin infections, urinary tract infections, warts, pinworms, insect stings, and several bacteria and viral infections (Maiscott 2000). Early Southern folk medicine used garlic placed in the ear as a treatment for deafness (Moss 1999). Herbalists have used garlic in one form or another to treat ache, colic, gout, sore throat (called "quinsy"), typhus, asthma, bronchitis, and a variety of other ailments (Heatherley 1998).

Garlic contains selenium, which is known to lower blood pressure, and it has antibacterial and diuretic qualities (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Besides improving circulation, garlic has also been used in modern science to address high cholesterol and as a treatment for blood disorders (Chevallier 2000; Heatherley 1998). Modern research indicates that garlic has medicinal value for lowering blood pressure, reducing cholesterol, as a mild antiseptic, and has other benefits (Chevallier 2000, Fleming 2000; Peirce 1999; Wichtl 2004; Youngkin and Israel 1996).

Slaves used garlic in a wide variety of ways. According to Kiple and King (1981: 164), slave children, on the first day of sunshine following the winter, received a dose of spring tonic to ward off illness. One tonic was a combination of garlic and rum. Garlic was also worn around the neck as a prevention measure. Fontenot (1994) reported child slaves wore small bags of garlic around their waists to ward off worms and stomach infections. She added that garlic tea was used by adults to clean the bowels. Mother Duffy of Louisiana (Clayton 1990: 64) recalled that garlic wrapped in cotton and put in an ear was good for treating earaches. Eva Martin (Texas) reminisced, "Dey uster wear a li'l bag wid garlic and dat other t'ing what smell strong, 'roun' dey neck so dey don't ketch no disease." Harriett Robinson (Oklahoma), who was born in 1842 in Texas, stated, "We had the same doctors the white folks had and we wore asafetida and garlic and onions to keep from taking all them ailments." Chency Cross (Alabama) recalled,

"Then us chillun got tuck wid any kind of sickness or zeezes, us tuk azzifizzity an' garlit." He added, "You know, garlit what smell lack onions. Den we wore some roun' us necks. Dat kep' off flu-anz." Some of the WPA narratives, including those of Ella Harris (Alabama) and Mary Colbert (Georgia), referred to mixing garlic with other plants or substances to treat worms.

Golden Rod (*Solidago virgaurea*)

The *PDR of Herbal Medicines* (1998) reported that golden rod is a diuretic, and mildly antispasmodic. Herbalists report that the herb is anti-catarrhal, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, astringent, diaphoretic, carminative, and a diuretic. Chevallier (2000) observed the plant's value in treating yeast infections, fungus, sore throat, chronic nasal congestion, and other ailments. George Pretty (Florida) used golden rod for fevers. Other WPA narrative references to golden rod mention it as a treatment for fever and unspecified medical purposes.

Grape (*Vitis vinifera*)

Herbalists report that grape leaves are anti-inflammatory and astringent and can be taken for diarrhea, heavy menstrual bleeding, and as a medicinal douche (Chevallier 2000). Grapes, when transformed into raisins, juice, or wine, have also found some medical value. The *PDR of Herbal Medicines* (1998) noted that grapes do have an anti-inflammatory effect and may have value for blood circulation disorders. Other researchers have found grapes to contain antioxidants and be of value to the circulatory system (Peirce 1999). Works Project Administration respondent Henry Lewis (Texas) reported the use of grape root for swollen feet. Della Fountain (Oklahoma) mixed grape root with other herbs as a blood treatment.

Grey Beard (*Chionanthus virginicus*)

Grey beard is also referred to as fringe tree, old man's beard, fringe tree, poison ash, and snowflower, among others. Folk practitioners have used the grey beard tree to treat jaundice, wounds, and liver or gallbladder conditions (Fleming 2000). The efficacy of these treatments has not been established, but the tree may have medical value as a diuretic, according to Fleming. George Briggs (South Carolina) made a reference to "grey beard leaves" as a treatment for chills. He stated, "Me and Mr. Sexton made tea from 'grance grey beard leaves to bust up chills." Then he added, "It act and taste jest like quinine."

Hickory/Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*)

Hickory is a common tree in the South. Hickory nuts were a staple food source for Native Americans. Modern herbalists and researchers typically do not consider hickory as having value as medical treatment. However, ex-slave Dulcinda Baker (Kentucky) recalled hickory bark being used in a tea for unspecified medical purposes. Henry Brown (South Carolina) remembered hickory leaves being used to generate perspiration.

Hops (*Humulus lupulus*)

Native Americans used hops for toothaches, as a sedative, for digestive pains, and so on. (Weiner and Weiner 1994; Wichtl 2004). The *PDR of Herbal Medicines* lists hops as a sedative and sleep inducting (Fleming 2000). According to modern research, the ingestion of preparations with hops in some cases has been linked to hepatitis and claims of therapeutic value have not been confirmed (Youngkin and Israel 1996). Hops have also demonstrated some effectiveness in fighting tumors and in serving as a digestive aide (Peirce 1999). Sarah Lousie Augustus (North Carolina) mentioned the use of hops as a treatment for rheumatism, though there is no modern evidence of its efficacy in treating rheumatism.

Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*)

Folk practitioners used horehound as an expectorant for respiratory problems (Weiner and Weiner 1994). It is an expectorant because it contains marrubium. Horehound continues to be used today as a treatment for sore throats and other illnesses (Heatherley 1998). Horehound is a popular folk remedy as a tonic and laxative, and folk practitioners have used it to treat bronchitis, respiratory infections, diarrhea, whooping cough, asthma, tuberculosis, jaundice, painful menstruation, skin damage, and other ailments (Fleming 2000). It has been used for sore throats, asthma, and cough (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Modern research has noted its ability to stimulate gastric juice secretion (Fleming 2000). Horehound extracts are still found in some cough drops. Modern research indicates it does function as an expectorant and cough suppressant (Peirce 1999).

Consistent with what modern research has found, slaves used horehound as a favorite remedy for coughs and sore throats. Works Project Administration respondent R. C. Smith (Oklahoma) recalled using horehound to treat his kidney ailments, "I used to get a weed called hoarhound, it grows everywhere wild." Then he specified, "I'd make a tea and drink it and it would cure the worst kind of kidney ailment." Sally Murphy (Alabama) recalled using horehound as a treatment that is similar to contemporary use of horehound, "When any of us got sick, we was give horehound tea and rock

candy." She noted that, "Sometimes effen dey wasn't looking and us got a chance us spit it out." George Taylor (Alabama) mentioned an unspecified use of horehound, "I also 'members de ole time remedies dat dey used in de ole days, Dey used red oak bark for fever an' colds, an' den dere was horehound, an' black snake root dat de ol' Marster put whiskey on."

Horsemint (*Monarda punctata*)

Native Americans used horsemint for a variety of medical ailments. Contemporary authorities believe it reduces fevers, promotes menstruation, relieves nausea, and has value for upper respiratory problems (Chevallier 2000). Slave folk practitioners used horsemint in teas for a variety of ailments, such as sickness, swelling, and others. Carrie Davis (Alabama) referred to using horsemint but didn't specify a purpose, "When us got sick Mistus' give horse-wint, life-everlasting, an' holly tea, yessum."

Horseradish (*Armoracia rusticana*)

Folk practitioners used the horseradish roots of the plant to treat a number of respiratory ailments, digestive problems, gout, influenza, and other medical ailments. Horseradish has antibiotic properties and practitioners have used it to treat infections of the urinary tract, cough, and bronchitis (Fleming 1998). Chevallier (2000) reported that modern research supports its efficacy as it is a diuretic, increases digestive secretions, promotes perspiration, and has a variety of other medical applications. Harriet Collins (Texas) identified its roots being used as a poultice for headaches.

Indian Root or Indian Pink Root (worm grass) (*Spigelia marilandica*)

Fontenot (1994) found that the leaves of this plant were used to make tea for worms. The narratives mention it as a treatment for yellow fever. Cecil George (Louisiana) recalled:

> I went out, got de grass, got some Indian root, put it on to boil, and I get some whiskey. I say, "For God's sake, I don't want to be killed; I give her de tea and she don't sweat, so I cover her up. I go gets de guts out of a pumkin and boil it with whiskey and give it to her and she sweat de fever out. Her clothes were yaller, but wid God's help I got her on her feet.

Ipecac (*Cephaelis ipecacuanha*)

This herb grows mainly in Brazil, is not native to North America, and was introduced to Europe in 1672. The medicinal part of the plant is the pulverized root. It induces vomiting and is used today for that purpose.

It has served as an expectorant for chronic bronchitis (Wichtl 2004). Folk practitioners use ipecac as a folk remedy for constipation and as syrup for dysentery (Meyer 1975; Weiner and Weiner 1994). It has been used as a laxative and emetic for centuries (Vogel 1981). Modern pharmacies stock and sell ipecac syrup to induce vomiting for some poisoning cases. It operates as an expectorant and has some efficacy in treating amoebic dysentery (Fleming 2000). The WPA narratives of John Crawford (Texas), Ellen Betts (Texas), and others mention the use of ipecac for general illness.

Jerusalem Oak (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*)

Although Jerusalem oak sounds as if it were Middle Eastern in origin, it is really native to North America. Native Americans and Southern folk practitioners used it as a treatment for worms (Moss 1999; Vogel 1981). The WPA narratives also mention its being given as a tea or syrup to children for worms. They also made it into tea, candy, or syrup for chills and fevers. They sometimes boiled it down to a syrup with other plants, such as red oak bark and privet roots, for malaria, fever, and chills. Some herb doctors mixed it with sorghum for worms. Others used Jerusalem oak as a spring tonic to build up children's immunity. They used the seeds for worms and mixed it with sugar to make a candy for colds. For example, Esther Green (Alabama) recalled, "My man also used Jerusalem oak seed for worms." Everett Ingram (Alabama) also recalled its use for worms, "Gran'mammy was a great doctor; useta give us turpentine an' castor oil an' Jerusalem oak fer worms." Julia Athens Cole (Georgia) remembered the use of the plant as a syrup for worms over a nine-day span, "In de springtime, dey give us Jerusalem oak seed in syrup for nine mornin's and by den us was allus rid of de worms."

Jimson Weed/Thorn Apple (*Datura stramonium*)

Jimson weed, also known as thorn apple, devil's trumpet, Jamestown weed, mad-apple, nightshade, stinkweed, thorn apple, and datura has a narcotic effect and finds some modern use to relieve the symptoms for asthma (Wiener and Wiener 1994). Southern folk practitioners of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used the plant for worms (Moss 1999). Folk practitioners use the leaves of the plant as a treatment not only for asthma, but also for convulsive cough, pertussis, and other respiratory problems (Fleming 2000). The flowers are fragrant but poisonous. It has been smoked as a traditional treatment for asthma in Southern Appalachia (Cavender 2003).

Jimson weed works because it has alkaloids, which relieve spasms of the trachea that make breathing difficult during asthma attacks, and it also re-

duces respiratory secretions (Tyler 1985). Some of the WPA respondents used Jimson weed in a manner consistent with modern scientific evidence for congestion, colds, and other respiratory ailments. Jimson weed is now considered a dangerous poisonous plant and should not be taken internally (Heatherley 1998). The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* does not recommend use of the plant, due to its toxicity (Fleming 2000). But ex-slave Ellen Broomfield recalled:

> Children in my day were never 'lowed' round grown folks when they was talkin'. We played and were happy. Seems like we didn't get sick much then. In [the] Spring they give us sulphur and molasses to purify our blood. And candy was made out of Jimson weed and sugar, and that was good for worms. (Clayton 1990: 32)

Lemon (*Citrus limon*)

In herbal medicine, folk practitioners have used lemons for corns, fever, indigestion, and for sore throats (Maiscott 2000). Others have noted the use of lemon for circulation, ringworm, and other medical purposes (Chevallier 2000). Lemons have anti-inflammatory properties, are diuretic, and are a good source of vitamin C (Fleming 2000). Modern research supports the positive effects of lemon on venous conditions (Wichtl 2004). The WPA narrative of Janey Landrum (Texas) made a reference to the use of lemons for corn removal.

Life-Everlasting/Everlasting/Cudweed
(*Gnaphalium obtusifolium or Anaphalis margaritacea*)

Southern folk medicine employed the use of life-everlasting or everlasting root to induce sweating before the antebellum period (Moss 1999). The medicinal part of this plant is the flower. In folk medicine, life-everlasting, also known as cat's foot, has been used as a diuretic, for diarrhea, and to treat respiratory and intestinal diseases (Fleming 2000). It was mentioned in the narratives as a treatment for colds, a bath for a sore leg, and mixed with other plants for sickness. Modern science has not found these uses to be effective. Works Project Administration respondent Carrie Davis (Alabama) shared, "When us got sick Mistus' give horse-wint, life-everlasting, an' holly tea, yessum." She then added, "And us wore asafoetide and poppy seed."

Lobelia (*Lobelia inflate*)

Also known as Indian tobacco, pukeweed, asthma weed, emetic herb, emetic weed, vomitwort, eyebright, wild tobacco, or comfort root, folk

practitioners used this plant as a muscle relaxant. Samuel Thomson (1769–1843) used the herb to induce vomiting in his controversial alternative medical system. Lobelia induces vomiting and fever and was used as a folk remedy for a number of illnesses under the Thomsonian system. Folk practitioners believed it was effective for bronchitis, asthma, diphtheria, epilepsy, tetanus, treatment of boils, and other ailments (Weiner and Weiner 1994). It works as a strong antispasmodic. The plant does have a stimulating effect on the respiratory system (Fleming 2000). Lobelia also serves as an emetic (Tyler 1985). Lobelia works as a muscle relaxant and midwives have used it to help the birthing mother to relax (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Today, it is in banned in the United States as a treatment because of its toxicity in high doses. Ex-slave Margaret Slack mentioned its use as a treatment for boils (Postell 1951). Works Project Administration respondent Amanda McDaniel (Georgia) reported the use of lobelia oil for unspecified medical purposes.

Mandrake or Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*)

Mandrake, Satan's apple, duck's foot, wild mandrake, or mayapple was used as a cure for chronic constipation and treatment for worms. The human shape of the root contributed to the many legends over the centuries regarding its use as a cure-all. The plant has narcotic properties and has been used for centuries to treat mental illness. Native American groups ate the fruit of the plant and used the leaves to make poison (Meyer 1975) or as a cathartic (Vogel 1981). It was the most common folk remedy for constipation and worms in Southern Appalachian folk medicine (Cavender 2003). The root of the mayapple is a powerful purgative that may induce abortion (Tyler 1985). According to Weiner and Weiner (1994), modern research has found that it has some value as a treatment for arthritis, constipation, and as a purgative or narcotic. Meyer (1975) noted that mandrake is a powerful cathartic. It is not generally used now and is considered toxic. Works Project Administration respondent Oliver Bell (Alabama) recalled, "An' may-apple root would he'p you same as castor oil." This use as a purgative is consistent with our modern understanding of mandrake.

Mullein/Mullen (*Verbascum densiflorum*)

Mullein, also known as candlewick, Aaron's rod, shepherd's staff, or Jacob's staff, has a long history as a treatment for respiratory problems, such as asthma, bronchitis, and throat irritations. Native Americans mixed mullein with molasses to make a cough remedy (Weiner and Weiner 1994). People smoked mullein leaves as a folk remedy for asthma in Southern Appalachia (Cavender 2003). Mullein soothes irritated mucous

membranes. Modern research indicates this feature would make it effective in treating sore throats and coughs (Peirce 1999). Modern scientific research also suggests that mullein has substances that inhibit tuberculosis (Heatherley 1998). However, contrary to folk medicinal medicine claims, mullein is not useful as a treatment for asthma (Tyler 1985). Mullein was and still is also used as a tea for coughs (Maiscott 2000). Chevallier (2000) and Blumenthal et al. (2000) reported that it is useful as a treatment of coughs and congestion. Wichtl (2004) also noted its efficacy as a mild expectorant and value in treating coughs. The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* notes that the plant does act as an expectorant effect and alleviates irritation (Fleming 2000).

Postell (1951) found it mentioned as a slave treatment for kidney diseases. Several of the WPA narratives referred to the use of mullein as a preventative tonic and as a treatment for congestion, colds, dropsy, and other ailments. Its uses are consistent with modern understandings of the medicinal properties of the plant. Works Project Administration respondent Thomas Anderson of South Carolina recalled:

> Younguns on de plantation was bathed two or three time a week. Mullin leaves and salt was boiled in great big pot to put in de babies wash water and also in de chilluns' water. Dis would keep 'em from gitting sick. Den dey was allus greased after de washing to keep de skin from busting open. Mosely dey was greased wid tallow from de mutton.

Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*)

Southern folk practitioners used nutmeg, or mace, as a medicinal before the antebellum period (Moss 1999). The medicinal part of this plant is the seed. Folk practitioners have used nutmeg to stimulate digestion and treat infections in the digestive tract. Fleming (2000) reported nutmeg's use in folk medicine for diarrhea, cramps, dysentery, rheumatism, and upper respiratory disorders. The modern research community has not drawn any firm conclusions about the medical value of nutmeg (Peirce 1999). What is known is that nutmeg can be toxic in high doses. Human consumption of two whole nutmegs has been linked to death.

A primary slave medical use of nutmeg was not to ingest it but to wear it around the neck. For example, Sylvia Durant (South Carolina) described wearing nutmeg to ward off medical problems, "Dere been nutmeg dat some people make a hole in en wear it round dey neck." Willis Easter (Texas) noted a similar use of nutmeg, "Mammy allus tie a leather string round de babies' necks when dey teethin', to make dem have easy time." He added, "She used a dry frog or piece nutmeg, too." Sim Greely (South Carolina), born in 1855, provided another example, "For de neuralgia, take and tie two or three nutmegs around yo' neck."

Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*)

In the cotton family (*Malvaceae*), okra originated in West Africa and was brought to the Americas with the slave trade. Okra is related to cotton and hibiscus. People cultivated it for the pods, which are harvested in the immature stage and used in salads and soups. It is a prime ingredient of the gumbos and stews of Louisiana. Current indications are that a diet containing okra has value in reducing cholesterol levels. Katie Arbony (Arkansas) made a broth of okra mixed with chicken and used for chills. George Pretty (Florida) recalled using soaking dried blossoms in water and applying them to boils.

Onion (*Allium cepa*)

Folk practitioners have used onion for its medicinal properties for centuries. Onions have anti-inflammatory properties and have been used for upper respiratory problems, gas, insect bites, worms, and warts (Maiscott 2000; Moss 1999; Peirce 1999). Onion is claimed to be a diuretic, antibiotic, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, expectorant, and helps with blood circulation (Chevallier 2000). The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* notes that onion does have antimicrobial effects and is effective against certain bacteria (Fleming 2000). It has other medical benefits and has been approved for the treatment of loss of appetite, cough, bronchitis, hypertension, fevers, colds, and tendency to infection, among others (Fleming 2000).

Slaves used it for medical purposes. For example, Lewis Jenkins (Alabama), who was born in 1844, referred to onions being used to treat tuberculosis:

> We used onions to keep off consumption. They was a family taken the black disease an' they all died but one an' he was ready to die. They tuck him out to burn the house up to keep that disease f'om spreadin'. They put the nigger in a house full of onions an' he got sho' 'nuf well. The doctor said the onions had cured him. We sho' b'lieved in our onions and do tell today. Eben the next mawnin' after he was put in the house an' coulden talk, he axe for some milk.

There is no medical support for efficacy of onions as a treatment for tuberculosis.

Peach Tree (*Prunus persica*)

Peach tree leaves are not identified in any modern herbal books as having any medical value. Peach tree leaves were frequently mentioned in the WPA narratives as a plant cure. Herb doctors boiled the leaves and made

into a tea for female problems and other ailments. Charity Jones (Mississippi) recalled its use as a treatment for inflammation, "When any of us niggers got sick . . . she made peach tree leaf poltice ter take out inflammation on de sides pain in de back, an' she mix grease an' soap an' put it on boils, an' dat hurt." Eli Coleman (Texas) was born in 1846 and recalled "she gathered leaves off peach trees and made syrup and gave us for chills and fever." Anne Rice (South Carolina) stated, "When we got sick all the medicine we took was turpentine—dat would cure almost any ailment." She then added, "Some of the niggers used Sampson snake weed or peach leaves boiled and tea drunk." Works Project Administration respondent R. C. Smith (Oklahoma) remembered, "Peach tree leaves tea and sumac seed tea also were good kidney medicines."

Pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*/*Hedeona pulegioides*)

In folk medicine, practitioners use pennyroyal, also labeled mosquito plant, tickweed, squawmint, or hedeoma, as a tea for headaches and to promote menstruation. It was called mosquito plant because it repels the insect. In modern herbal medicine, it is used to stimulate menstrual flow, as a tea for colds, alleviating upset stomachs, and other uses (Peirce 1999; Weiner and Weiner 1994). The medical benefits of pennyroyal have not been substantiated (Fleming 2000). The essential oil of this plant can be toxic in high doses. A highly toxic substance called pulegone is present in high levels in the plant and can cause poisoning (Peirce 1999). Works Project Administration respondents Florence Lee and Henrietta McCarthy (Ohio) recalled the plant being used for emergencies:

> They had doctors only in the greatest emergency and were always well dosed with pennyroyal, catnip, elderbroom tea was used for babies and the only charms or things of that sort she remembers was a little bag of asafetida, which was supposed to ward off children's diseases.

Peppergrass (*Lepidium virginicum*)

This herb contains high levels of vitamin C. Native Americans used it as a topical lotion for poison ivy. It has been used for worms, diabetes, rheumatic pain, and other ailments (Chevallier 2000). Vina Moore was born a slave in Mississippi in 1845. Her parents died when she was just a child and she was raised by what she terms as her "White folks." She shared her confidence in the medical value of peppergrass:

> When de slaves got sick marster Smiley, would have a doctor iffen dey was bad enough. Sometimes when dey jest had a little ailment, we would make a tea of peppergrass. It was a good medicine.

Pine/Scotch Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)

Modern researchers report that pine has a mild antiseptic effect and has value for arthritic and rheumatic problems (Chevallier 2000). Pine, also known as lightwood, was a tree that slave herb doctors found multiple uses for as medical remedies. They used pine in teas, chewed it, transformed it into turpentine, and made it into a variety of medical remedies. Works Project Administration respondent Thomas Anderson (South Carolina) mentioned three uses of pine including chewing pine needles for colic. He also stated, "Dem old Carlisle wimmens made pine rosin pills from de pine rosin what dropped for back ache." Finally he mentioned, "Fer de lil' chillins and babies dey would take and chaw up on pine needles and den spit it in de lil' chilluns mouths and make dem swallow." Marion Johnson (Arkansas) recalled its use before going to bed:

> Hears like you got a cold. Now let me tell you what to do for it. Make a tea out of pine straw and mullein leaves an' when you gets ready for bed tonight take a big drink of it an' take some tallow and mix snuff with it an' grease the bottom of your feets and under your arms an' behind your ears and you'll be well in the morning.

A slave referred to as Aunt Margaret made a salve for carbuncles out of a mixture of pine resin, sweet gum, beeswax, mutton suet, and turpentine (Postell 1951: 110).

Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*/*Phytolacca decandra*)

Pokeweed is also referred to as American hellebore, American nightshade, jalap, crowberry, red weed, red ink plant, cancer root, pigeon berry, itch weed, and swamp hellebore, to name a few. All parts of the plant are poisonous if taken in sufficient quantities. The medicinal parts of the plant are the dried root and berries. Folk practitioners have used the plant as a sedative, treatment for gout, pneumonia, rheumatism, and typhoid fever. Native Americans used it as a poultice for skin diseases, sores, ulcers, and tumors (Chevallier 2000). Southern Appalachian folk medicine used pokeberry juice to treat hemorrhoids (Cavender 2003).

It has some modern use to treat high blood pressure (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Pokeberries may stimulate the immune system and may have some beneficial effects (Tyler 1985). Eating raw pokeweed may cause stomachache, vomiting, and cramping. The plant can be highly toxic.

Thomas Carlisle (South Carolina) described how the plant affected the gastric system: "Poke salad was et in dem days to clean a feller out. Hit cum up tender every spring and when it cut deep down in sand, it looked white.

It's a herb." Oliver Bell (Alabama) mentioned its use for fever, "Us didn't have no bought medicine in dem days; jes' whut us got cutta de woods lak slippery elm fer fever an' poke salad root; dey he'p a lot."

Poppy (*Papaver somniferum*)

Few plants have a greater ability to cure pain than the poppy, but its addictive properties are well established (Peirce 1999). The unripe seeds and pods are the source of opium. The ripened seeds and pods do not contain any of the powerful and potentially harmful alkaloids that lead to addiction or a state of euphoria. Carrie Davis (Alabama) did not ingest the plant but simply wore the seeds to ward off illness, "And us wore asafoetide and poppy seed."

Potato (*Solanum tuberosum*)

To herb doctors, potatoes were not generally taken internally as a medicine but were thought to have some medical value. Slaves were known to carry potatoes to relieve pain and cure aches. A number of the WPA respondents including Harry Johnson (Arkansas), Aunt Ann Stokes (Missouri), and Mary Edwards (South Carolina) reported potatoes were carried in pockets for rheumatism. There is no evidence that wearing potatoes or carrying them, other than the power of belief, would have had any medical value.

Prickly Ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum or Zanthoxylum clava-herculis*)

Prickly ash was also known as the toothache tree. Slave herb doctors used the bark and sometimes the berries of this tree as medicine. Several Native American tribes valued prickly ash as a remedy for stomachaches, sore throats, aching muscles, skin infections, and various other conditions. Native Americans and others have used the root bark of this tree to numb and kill gum and tooth pain, hence the name toothache tree (Fontenot 1994). They also used the plant to treat headaches, fever, and other ailments. At the end of the nineteenth century, White eclectic physicians used prickly ash primarily as a digestive aid, to strengthen the nervous system, and for cholera. The bark was used by folk practitioners to treat rheumatic conditions. Prickly ash has been used to stimulate circulation, to treat arthritis, and for digestive problems (Chevallier 2000). Modern science has not established any beneficial medical effects for the use of prickly ash (Fleming 2000). WPA respondent William Henry Towns (Alabama) remembered prickly ash being taken to clean the blood. Henry Lewis (Texas) mentioned the bark being used for swollen feet.

Privet Weed (*Ligustrum sinense*)

Privet is native to China and was introduced to in the United States as a scrub in 1852. Found throughout the South, Chinese privet forms dense thickets along roadsides, fencerows, fields, rights-of-way, and in forested creek bottoms. A member of the olive family, privet produces seeds abundantly and regenerates by root sprouts, quickly forming dense stands. Privet's leaves and berries are poisonous to people and animals, and its pollen may cause breathing problems for some. Works Project Administration respondent John Mosley (Texas) mentioned its use as a treatment for tuberculosis. Other respondents mixed the plant with others to control fever, chills, and malaria.

Pumpkin (*Cucurbita pepo*)

The medicinal part of the pumpkin is the seed. Bankole (1998) found that slaves used pumpkin seed with Indian hemp to treat yellow fever. Pumpkin seeds in modern thinking are an effective vermifuge for worms (Peirce 1999; Tyler 1985), although its use for this purpose is now rare (Wichtl 2004). The *PDR for Herbs* noted it has been approved for irritable bladder and prostrate complaints (Fleming 2000). Henry Lewis (Texas) indicated it was used it to treat the heart.

Rabbit Foot Weed (*Polypodium aurem* [Fern] or *Polypogon monspeliensis* [Grass])

Rabbit foot weed could refer to a fern or grass or even a variation of clover. According to WPA respondent Toby Jones (Texas), rabbit foot weed was boiled with sassafras to make a cough syrup. Because the fern is common in swamplands and the WPA comments were made in Texas, it is more likely the respondent was referring to a grass. There is no modern research reference to rabbit foot weed being useful as a medical remedy.

Rat Vein (*Chimaphila maculate*)

This plant is also called spotted wintergreen, striped pipsissewa, rheumatism root, or dragon's tongue. The name "pipsissewa" is derived from a Cree Indian word referring to the diuretic properties of the leaves when eaten. The tapering leaves have white spots along the veins and are arranged in whorls on the stem. The fragrant, five-petaled, nodding, waxy flowers may be white or pale pink. George Briggs (South Carolina) shared how it was used for dental pain:

> I has de gift of understanding. Years ago I had de toothache; went to de woods in my misery. Something told me to git some rats-vein (wild arsenic weed) and make some tea and drink it. It soon rid me of dat misery in my tooth. Every since dat, my teeth is been hard, kaise I drinks rat-vein tea. It kills de nerve, hardens de gums and keeps my teeth strong. Den it busts a gum-bile when one comes up. De gift of understanding is better fer you dan a college education, kaise dem dat has dat ain't got no understanding sometimes.

Red Oak/Swamp Red Oak (*Quercus shumardis* or *Quercus rubra*)

Red oak is a common plant used in the South to treat a variety of ailments. The leaves and the bark of the tree are used to make a tea. There is some evidence, according to Tyler (1985) that broth made from red oak bark has some medicinal value when applied to blisters because it promotes the formation of protective coatings. Fontenot (1994) reported slaves made a red oak tea for diabetes. Charity Jones (Mississippi) remembered:

> When any of us niggers got sick old Granny doctored us. She would give us red oak bark tea for runnin' off at de bowels an' for young girls when dey re'ch a certain age.

George Taylor (Alabama) stated, "I also 'members de ole time remedies dat dey used in de ole days. Dey used red oak bark for fever an' colds." Anthony Christopher, who was born a slave in Texas in 1851, used red oak bark tea for the stomach. He shared:

> But Christmas was de time for chillen and grown-ups, too. We has de barbecue and lots of sweetenin' and Marse Patton let de niggers have a dance in de sugar house. We chillen eat so much we 'bout bust and den Grandmammy Judy make up a mess of red oak bark tea, what am sho' good for de stomach.

Red Pepper (*Capsicum frutescens*)

Robert Collins (Kiple and King 1981: 164) wrote in 1854, "For the child and adult alike red pepper (particularly in the cotton south) was an important weapon of prevention, believed to keep at bay that langor and apathy of the system which renders it so susceptible to chills and fevers." Folk practitioners use it to treat arthritis, sore throats, colic, some types of diarrhea, and other medical ailments. Red pepper is now believed to act on circulation, affect digestion, and has significant antimicrobial properties (Chevallier 2000). Wechtl (2004) reported that the plant has demonstrated some efficacy in treating rheumatic diseases. Peirce (1999) reported that the burning sensation of red pepper does reduce the sensation of pain. The

WPA narratives mention red pepper as placed in the shoes to prevent the chills (Harriet Collins, Texas), as a tea for the flu (Vinnie Brunson, Texas), and for pain (Georgia Smith, Georgia).

Rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum*)

Wichtl (2004) indicated rhubarb's value as a laxative, anti-inflammatory, and astringent. Modern science has found that rhubarb does serve as a laxative (Peirce 1999). Works Project Administration respondent Govan Littlejohn (South Carolina) reported the use of rhubarb to treat foot swelling. Respondent Alec Bostwick (Georgia) indicated that rhubarb tea was used to treat children with worms. Rhubarb's effect as a laxative may have helped to expel worms.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

Sage plant was used as a cure-all during the Middle Ages (Chevallier 2000). The botanical name for sage, "salvia" means "to cure" in Latin. Native Americans applied sage to sores (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Folk practitioners have used sage to treat loss of appetite, gastric disorders, diarrhea, bleeding gums, flatulence, and other ailments. Research dating back to the nineteenth century has found that sage reduces sweating (Peirce 1999).

Modern science has found that sage has a tranquilizing effect and may be effective useful against yeast and other infections (Heatherley 1998; Weiner and Weiner 1994). Other scientific evidence has found that sage has antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties (Wichtl 2004; Youngkin and Israel 1996), reduces mucous secretions, increases breast milk production, and has tranquilizing properties (Chevallier 2000). The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* reported that sage has been approved for loss of appetite, inflammation of the mouth, and excessive perspiration. It also noted that sage has antibacterial, astringent, and other medical properties (Fleming 2000). Works Project Administration respondent Smith Simmons (Mississippi) recalled:

> When a slave got sick a white doctor was sent for to cure him, and they always did it. If they was just a little sick the old women what nursed them could cure them with tea made from the bark of a dog wood tree or with wild sage tea. They didn't use no charms that came out in later years. The asafitida bags that was worn was different. They could keep off sickness and they would sure do it.

Mrs. Mary Kincheon Edwards (Texas), who said she was 127 years old and born a slave in 1810, proclaimed its general use:

> We would boil wild sage and make a tea. Dis tea sho smells good. I use a little sugar wid it but I gets mo'e good out ob it without de sugah. It's good fo' fe-

> vah and chills. Some people use it fo' almost anything. When day feels bad. Yo' jes' pull up de whole sage weed, let de leaves dry—lay 'em up somewheahs in de shade and den make yo' tea.

Sarsaparilla (*Smilax aristolochiae folia*/*Smilax medica officinalis*)

Folk practitioners used the sarsaparilla root for rheumatism and scrofula (a tuberculosis infection of the lymph nodes, esp. the neck) (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Native American groups mixed sarsaparilla with other herbs to make cough remedies, treat fevers, and other ailments. In the nineteenth century, sarsaparilla was added to a variety of drinks not only because of its pleasant taste but also because people thought it purified the blood (Peirce 1999). There is some scientific evidence that the plant works as a mild diuretic, expectorant, and laxative (Weiner and Weiner 1994; Youngkin and Israel 1996). However, many of the claims of the medicinal value of sarsaparilla are unfounded (Peirce 1999). The WPA narratives of William Emmons (Ohio) and Gus Smith (Missouri) mentioned the root being used for unspecified medical purposes.

Sassafras (*Sassafras albidium*)

Sassafras is also known as ague tree, cinnamon wood, saloop, and saxifras. Slave herb doctors relied on sassafras root and bark as treatments for colic, venereal disease, pain, fevers, high blood pressure, rheumatism, scrofula, and other ailments (See appendix A). Modern researchers have found that the plant has some antiseptic qualities (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Sassafras has no known therapeutic useful properties and in fact can be dangerous because the root contains safrole, which has proven to be carcinogenic in lab animals (Fleming 2000; Peirce 1999; Tyler 1985; Wichtl 2004). Weiner and Weiner (1994) also reported that sassafras has limited value. Fontenot (1994) identified sassafras as being used by slaves in a general purpose tea for medical ailments including gallstones, clearing sinuses, and blood cleansing (Wichtl 2004). Works Project Administration respondent Jeff Calhoun (Alabama) mentioned sassafras as a treatment for malaria. Eli Coleman (Texas) was born in 1846 and recalled the harvesting of sassafras roots for a number of medical uses:

> She used herbs that she gathered in the woods such as sasfras roots, cami weeds, and then she gathered leaves off peach trees and made a syrup and gave us for chills, and fevers, and malaria.

Eli then added,

> I dont know much bout roots and herbs, but I'se drink lots ob sasfras tea fer malaria.

Carrie Nancy Fryer (Georgia) recalled using it for measles:

> When us had de mumps mother git sardines and take de oil out and rub us jaws and dat cure us good. Sassafax for meesles, to run de numor (humor) out de blood.

Apart from its minor antiseptic qualities, no modern research supports the efficacy of sassafras for any of the medical ailments mentioned in the WPA narratives.

Scurvy Grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*)

The leaves are the medicinal part of scurvy grass. The flowers of the plant have a strong taste. The plant obtains its name from its use to treat scurvy, as it contains vitamin C. The plant can be an irritant to the skin and mucous membranes. Its efficacy as a medical treatment has not been established (Fleming 2000). However, WPA respondent Rev. Wade Owens (Alabama) recalled being given the plant for sickness. Rhodus Walton (Georgia) remembered it being used as a tea for many ailments.

Seneca Snake Root (*Polygala senega*)

Seneca root is also known as senega snake root, milkwort, mountain flax, rattlesnake root, Seneca, and snake root. The medicinal part of this plant is the root. Folk practitioners used this plant for snake bites. Modern folk practitioners continue to use senega root to treat bronchitis (Wichtl 2004). Modern research indicates that the root acts as an expectorant but has no proven value for treating poisonous snake bites (Fleming 2000; Peirce 1999; Weiner and Weiner 1994).

Slave herb doctors used it as a folk remedy for snake bites. Fontenot (1994) found that slaves boiled the roots of this plant into a tea. She reported it was thought by slaves to be very good for infections, liver and kidney problems, infections, and viruses. Mark Oliver (Mississippi) recalled its value as a tonic:

> Whenever a slave got sick, he was cared for mighty nice. The white doctor 'tended him and the old folks nursed him. Sometime the old folks did the doctoring with the medicine they made out of herbs. Their snake root tonic was mighty fine.

Slippery Elm (*Ulmas rubra*/*Ulmas fulva*)

Slippery elm is also known as red elm, Indian elm, moose elm, or sweet elm. The medicinal part of the slippery elm is the inner bark. Native Americans used

this tree for sore throats and constipation and as an ointment (Weiner and Weiner 1994). They also used the plant as a general purpose poultice. Folk practitioners used it for indigestion and splinters (Maiscott 2000).

In modern use, herbalists use slippery elm constipation, for indigestion (Maiscott 2000), as an ointment, and for sore throats (Weiner and Weiner 1994). The FDA has determined use of this plant is safe and effective as an oral demulcent (Peirce 1999; Youngkin and Israel 1996). Chevallier (2000) also reported slippery elm's value as a soother of the mucous membranes and stomach. The plant, when in contact with inflamed wounds, boils, or ulcers, has a soothing effect. The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* noted slippery elm's effectiveness as an external treatment for wounds, burns, and infections and internally as a treatment for gastric problems (Fleming 2000).

Ex-slave Oliver Bell (Alabama) recalled using it for fevers and said, "Us didn't have no bought medicine in dem days; jes' whut us got cutta de woods lak slippery elm fer fever." Mrs. Mary Kincheon Edwards (Texas), who said she was 127 years old, was born into slavery in 1810. She remembered that slippery elm was good for many ailments:

> People would go to de bottoms and cut out a piece ob slippery elm, and dan chew it. Dis was good fo' a lot ob things. Slippery elm was slimey lak chewin' wax. Most ob de folks used it to cure bad feelings. And others would jes' chew it to be chewin'.

Many of the herb doctor and slave uses of slippery elm appear to be consistent with what is known about the plant. They used it to treat constipation, sooth wounds, and sore throats. The slippery texture of the plant probably led to other medical uses.

Snakeroot/Black Snakeroot (*Sanicula L.*)

Southern folk medicine employed the use of snake root to induce sweating before the antebellum period (Moss 1999). Uncle George used snakeroot (long root) for fevers and claimed it worked as well as quinine when mixed with whiskey (Postell 1951: 110). Anne Rice (South Carolina) recalled its use as a medicinal tea, "When we got sick all the medicine we took was turpentine—dat would cure almost any ailment. Some of the niggers used Sampson snake weed . . . boiled and tea drunk."

Sorghum (*Sorghum vulgare*)

People have used sorghum to make molasses. Molasses has a slippery texture and sweet flavor that makes it attractive as an ingredient in syrups. Works Project Administration respondent Joanna Thompson

Isom (Mississippi) recalled that sorghum molasses was mixed with other plants and hog hoof to make a tea for tuberculosis. John Crawford (Texas) noted sorghum syrup mixed with Jerusalem oak for worms. Herb doctors have used molasses as a general sweetener for many of the herbal remedies they employed.

Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)

Tansy is also called stinking Willie, bitter buttons, and parsley fern. The medicinal part of this plant is the dried flowering herb. Historically, tansy has been used to kill intestinal worms and encourage menstrual bleeding (Peirce 1999). Tansy was once used in England to induce menstruation and to expel worms from the intestines. It is not used generally by modern herbalists (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Modern science supports the application of tansy to fight intestinal worms, but the plant is too toxic to be considered a useful internal treatment (Peirce 1999).

The WPA narratives identified tansy being used as a tea for minor sickness and for unspecified medical purposes. The WPA narrative of Emma Hurley (Georgia) identified it being made into a poultice for colds. Matilda McKinney (Georgia) made it into a tea for colds.

Tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*)

Tobacco has no current medical use and it is well established that the nicotine is highly addictive and causes cancer. Some Native Americans used tobacco to treat toothaches, mosquito bites, and bee stings (Fleming 2000). Eighteenth and nineteenth century Southern folk medicine included tobacco as a medica remedy (Moss 1999). Alice Fairweather of Florida declared its value in addressing pain in the gums:

> "We been in right good fortune with our health, I guess," remarked Alice when I mentioned how well the little boys looked, "none o' this whole passle been sick much. Sometimes one o' 'em has a hurtin tooth and some folks say they oughter have these tooths fixed up but we never did that. When them tooths get loose and ready they come out alright and it did seem agin nature to fool with 'em. [Just?] pack a hurtin' tooth with snuff, if it get a hollow in hit, or if hit just hurt without no bad place pack the snuff on the gum and hit'll soon stop a hurtin'. Sometimes chewin' tobacco, that's been chewed some till its kiner soft does better ['an?] the snuff, specially to pack on the gum."

Trailing Arbutus (*Epigaea repens*)

The WPA narratives referred to a plant called the mayflower but the correct name for mayflower is trailing arbutus. It is also named gravel plant,

ground laurel, shad flower, mountain pink, or winter pink. It is a ground hugging plant with white flowers. Folk practitioners made it into a diuretic tea and tonic. Native Americans also used the plant for medicinal purposes. There is little to no information about the current medical value of trailing arbutus. Ex-slave Alice Cole (Texas) used mayflower (trailing arbutus) with "cami weed," privet roots, and peach tree leaves and made syrup for chills, malaria, and typhoid fever. Other WPA narratives identified mayflower as a treatment for fevers.

Walnut (*Juglans regia*)

Wichtl (2004) noted walnut's value as an astringent for skin conditions. He also shared that in folk medicine, walnut has been used as a "blood purifying remedy." Black walnut bark, including the kernel and the green hull, have been used to expel various kinds of worms by the Asians, as well as by some Native American tribes. The Chinese have used it to kill tapeworm with success.

The fruit, leaves, and bark of the black walnut tree offer many benefits. Taken internally, black walnut helps relieve constipation, and is also useful against fungal and parasitic infections. It may also help eliminate warts. Rubbed on the skin, black walnut extract is reputed to be beneficial for eczema, herpes, psoriasis, and skin parasites. External applications have been known to kill ringworm. Today, authorities know that black walnut oxygenates the blood to kill parasites. The brown stain found in the green husk contains organic iodine, which has antiseptic and healing properties. Black walnut is also used to balance sugar levels and burn up excessive toxins and fatty materials. The use of this plant has also been shown to exhibit anticancer properties due to its content of both strong and weak acids, and alkaloids. Black walnut has the ability to fight against fungal infections and acts with an antiseptic property which helps fight bacterial infection. Other benefits are that it promotes bowel regularity and acts an antiparasitic. Works Project Administration respondent John Crawford (Texas) made walnut tea for unspecified medical purposes.

Watermelon (*Citrullus vulgaris*)

Over the centuries, watermelon has been used for medicinal purposes. Folk practitioners have used the mashed seeds to expel worms (Chevallier 2000). Dellie Lewis (Alabama) and Lu Lee (Texas) recalled it being used offered another folk cure for kidney stones using watermelon seeds, "She also gib 'em dried watermelon seeds to git rid of de grabel in de kidneys."

Wild Cherry (*Prunus serotina*/*Prunus virginiana*)

Wild cherry bark frequently was used in Southern Appalachian folk medicine as an ingredient in cough syrups (Cavender 2003). Folk practitioners used wild cherry to make a tea, also known as Cherokee tea, which was used to relieve pain during the early stages of labor. The tea, made from boiling the bark, had sedative properties. Modern research indicates that the plant does have sedative properties and could be effective as a cough sedative. The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* reported that wild cherry bark is an astringent, antitussive, and sedative (Fleming 2000). Slaves used wild cherry in a variety of medical ways including as a blood tonic (Lina Anne Pendergrass, South Carolina), for bad colds (Hector Smith, South Carolina), and mixed with other herbs and materia medica for medical ailments (Morgan Scurry, South Carolina; Fannie Moore, North Carolina; and Rachel Adams, Georgia).

Willow (*Salix alba*)

In 1758, the Reverend Edward Stone was suffering from another bout of rheumatism when he accidentally discovered that by chewing a twig of the white willow tree, his pain was relieved (Duin and Sutcliffe 1992). Since this early discovery, over the centuries the compounds found in the white willow would be refined into what we now know as aspirin. For centuries, white willow has been used as a safe pain reliever and fever reducer. Modern herbalists use willow bark for inflammation (Maiscott 2000). German health authorities endorse the use of willow for fevers, headaches, and rheumatic complaints (Peirce 1999). Works Project Administration respondents Hector Smith (South Carolina), George Womble (Georgia), and Sol Walton (Texas) all reported willow being used for fevers and chills.

Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*)

Also known as lion's tongue, boxberry, and teaberry, wintergreen was a popular Native American remedy for rheumatism, back pain, headaches, toothaches, sore throats, and other conditions (Chevallier 2000). The leaves have been made into medicinal teas for years. Wintergreen oil should not be taken internally because it is toxic, but small amounts are used as a flavoring (Peirce 1999). It was used by WPA respondent Pierce Harper (Texas) for stomach problems. Hector Smith (South Carolina) used it for rheumatism.

Yellow Dock (*Rumex crispus*)

Herbalists use the crushed leaves of yellow dock to treat burns (Maiscott 2000) and anemia (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Pre-antebellum folk medi-

cine found yellow dock to be a popular remedy for a wide variety of external ailments and injuries (Moss 1999). Yellow dock is a laxative and purgative, though eating the leaves has been known to cause death (Chevallier 2000). Modern science indicates that yellow dock operates as an effective laxative and has some value in treating skin wounds (Peirce 1999). George Henderson (Kentucky) recalled using leaves as a poultice for sickness. Hal Hutson (Tennessee) remembered the root being used as a tea for sickness.

Yellowroot (*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*)

Native Americans used yellowroot as a tea for stomach ulcers and ulcers in the mouth. It may have also been used as a tonic and externally on sores. Southern folk practitioners used yellowroot as a remedy for diabetes and high blood pressure (Moss 1999). Works Project Administration respondents Toy Hawkins (Georgia), George Womble (Georgia), and Emeline Stepney (Georgia) recalled it being made into a tea for colds.

ADDITIONAL HERBS AND PLANTS IDENTIFIED IN THE SLAVE NARRATIVES

The WPA narratives contain additional references to plants and herbs that have not been identified in the previous paragraphs that nevertheless are worth noting. In some cases, it is almost impossible to determine the plant or herb to which the WPA respondent was referring. These unknown plants and herbs are presented in the table in appendix B.

Some of the additional plants and herbs mentioned in the WPA narratives include Della Fountain's (Oklahoma) use of bear grass (*Xerophyllum tenax*), also known as Indian basket grass, soap grass, or squaw grass. Della blended the plant with others to make a blood medicine. William Mcwhorter (Georgia) made a tea from black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) for illness.

Slaves used blackjack vine (*Sagittaria platyphylla*) as a tea to purify the blood (Fontenot 1994) and for fevers (Lu Lee, Texas). Solomon Caldwell's (South Carolina) narrative refers to branch elder (*Ruscus aculeatus*) being used to treat chills. Elder flowers have shown efficacy in increasing bronchial secretions and as a flavor enhancer to laxatives (Wichtl 2004). Della Fountain (Oklahoma) boiled bull nettle (*Cnidoscoius texanus*) root with other herbs to make a blood treatment. Rhodus Walton (Georgia) made a tea from bull tongue (*Sagittaria lancifolia*) root to treat several ailments. Simon Hare's (Mississippi) referenced to bulrush (*Scirpus cyperinus* or *Typha latifola*) as a tea for sore throat. Fannie Moore (North Carolina) described cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) leaves being used for fevers.

Cabbage leaves were used to make poultices for bruises (Maiscott 2000). Modern medicine has reported that cabbage leaves can help protect the lining of the stomach (Fleming 2000). Harriett Barrett (Texas) referred to the use of cactus (unspecified) roots as a tea for fever, chills, and colic. Joanna Thompson Isom (Mississippi) used the inside bark of the chestnut tree (unspecified) to make a tea for coughs. Respondent Julia Brown (Georgia) reported the leaves could be used to treat asthma. Some, such as Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus (Texas) identified the use of coffee (*Coffea Arabica, Coffea Robusta, or Coffea Liberica*) for hay fever. They smoked the coffee in a pipe.

The additional plants and herbs do not stop with coffee. For example, people have used dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) for constipation (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Southern folk practitioners of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used dandelion to treat fevers and scurvy (Moss 1999). Modern evidence suggests that this plant slightly benefits digestion but there is little evidence to support its therapeutic properties (Youngkin and Israel 1996). Works Project Administration respondent Dulcinda Baker Martin (Kentucky) reported using dandelion roots for unspecified medical purposes. For example, slaves used the stems and leaves of the dewberry (*Rubus trivialis*) into a tea for bladder infections and edema (Fontenot 1994). Georgia Smith (Georgia) mentioned using dewberry as a treatment for stomachache. It is difficult to determine which plant was being referred to as dollar leaf or snout bean (*Desmodium rotundifolium or Rhyncosia reniformis*). There are two general plants, both labeled dollar leaf, that might have been referred to in the WPA narratives. Annie Ware (Texas) mentioned its leaves being used as a tea for bad breath.

The fruit of the fig tree (*Ficus carica*) is well known as a general laxative and mild expectorant (Chevallier 2000). Only one of the WPA narratives mentions the fig as a remedy. George Pretty (Florida) used fig to draw out boils, treat rash, and treat fevers. Flea weed (*Galium verum*) is also known as lady's bedstraw. Herbalists report that the plant has been used to treat skin problems, kidney stones, and other urinary conditions (Chevallier 2000) but the *PDR for Herbs* (Fleming 1998) notes the efficacy of the plant has not been established (PDR 1998). Works Project Administration respondent Henry Lewis (Texas) used it for toothaches and neuralgia.

Goose grass (*Eleusine indica*) is native to Africa. Its name comes from the shape of the spikes on this grass that look like geese feet. Robert Bryant (Missouri) recalled its use as a tea for stomachache. Davis Mose (Georgia) mentioned a plant labeled heart leaf (*Philodendron scandens*) as a component of a tea for unspecified illness. Heart leaf is another term for philodendron. Known as Butcher's Broom, holly (*Ruscus aculeatus*) has established its value as a treatment for veins (Wichtl 2004). Carrie

Davis (Alabama) used holly with horsemint and life-everlasting as a tea to treat illness.

Jacob Branch of Texas stated that larkspur (*Delphinium consolida*) was used for medical purposes but did not indicate for what. Lime (*Citrus aurantifolia*) is well known as a great source of vitamin C. Janey Landrum (Texas) recalled the use of lime as a health tonic, "Lime water is a fine tonic, especially in the spring of the year." Fred Forbes (Nebraska) recalled that maple (*Acer rubrum*) sap was mixed with the roots of wild lettuce, cider beans, and other herbs for sore throats and colds. Ex-slave Jacob Branch (Texas) recalled using marshroot or marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*). Modern research indicates the medicinal value of marshroot, including its soothing qualities (Peirce 1999). Tildy Collins (Ohio) shared that mint (*Mentha aquatica or Mentha piperica*) was used for rheumatism. William Mcwhorter (Georgia) used it for unspecified illnesses. Annie Ware (Texas) used moss (unspecified) for unidentified medical purposes.

Henry Lewis (Texas) mentioned mulberry (*Morus alba L./Morus. nigra L./ Morus. rubra L.*) as a treatment for kidney trouble. Even olives found folk medical use among some slaves. Morgan Scurry (South Carolina) recalled making an olive (*Olea europaea*) tea with dogwood and cherry tree for sickness. Wichtl (2004) reported that orange stimulates the secretion of gastric juices. Rose Mosley (Arkansas) reported mixing orange (*Citrus aurantium*) brushes and leaves with whiskey to make a tea for yellow fever. There are no scientific indications that orange would be useful in treating yellow fever, however, it is well established that orange is a good source of vitamin C. Works Project Administration respondent Charlie Cooper (Texas) reported prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia phaeacantha*) was made into a tea for cholera. There is no scientific evidence of prickly pear cactus being an effective treatment for cholera.

Gus Smith (Missouri) used spicewood (*Calyptranthes pallens)* as a medicinal tea.

Janey Landrum (Texas) recalled using turnip (*Brassica rapa*) for frostbite, "If you git your heels frost bit, smoke 'em with pine top or rub the heels with a roasted turnip." Vinnie Brunson (Texas) remembered violet (*Viola odorata*) leaves being used to heal foot sores. Wes Brady (Texas) used wheat (unspecified) flour mixed with cornmeal to make pills for general illness. Dosia Harris (Georgia) identified wild aster (*Machaeranthera tanacetifolia or Aster tanacetifolius*) as used in a tea for unspecified medical purposes. Vinnie Brunson (Texas) recalled a tea made from yucca (*Yucca L.*) was used for foot sores.

The WPA narratives mentioned the use of poplar (*Populus* species). Today poplar is not recognized as a plant medical remedy. It was mentioned by WPA respondents as mixed with other plants to treat colds, sore throats,

fevers, stomachaches, and other illnesses (Georgia Smith, Georgia). Respondent Jacob Branch (Texas) referred to red root (*Amaranthus retroflexus*), also called common amaranth, careless weed, pigweed, redroot pigweed, rough amaranth, rough pigweed, or wild-beet amaranth, as being used for medical purposes. Rhodus Walton (Georgia) and Dosia Harris (Georgia) identified red shank root (*Persicaria maculosa*) as a useful tea for a variety of medical ailments. Phil Town (Georgia) referred to redwood (*Sequoia semperviren*) being used as a tea for worms. It is unlikely he was referring to the same redwood trees found on the west coast. Gus Smith (Missouri) recalled making a spicewood (*Calyptranthes pallens*) tea for medical problems.

Aunt Margaret made a salve for carbuncles out of a mixture of sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), pine resin, beeswax, mutton suet, and turpentine (Postell 1951: 110). Works Project Administration respondent Gus Feaster (South Carolina) recalled sweet gum was chewed for indigestion and "toofies?"

Some ex-slaves, Janey Landrum (Texas) and Robert Bryant (Missouri) recalled the use of turnips (*Brassica rapa*) as treatments for frostbite. Others indicated some medical uses for turnips. Sweet Violet (*Viola odorata*) has been used by folk practitioners historically to treat coughs and bronchial infections. They have also made syrups from the flowers to treat eye inflammations, jaundice, and throat pain. Works Project Administration respondent Vinnie Brunson (Texas) used the plants violet (*Viola odorata*) and yucca (*Yucca L.*) to treat foot sores. Dosia Harris (Georgia) identified wild aster (*Machaeranthera tanacetifolia* or *Aster tanacetifolius*) as a treatment but did not specify for what ailment.

PLANTS AND HERBS NOT MENTIONED IN THE WPA NARRATIVES BUT POSSIBLY USED BY SLAVES

Slave herb doctors had available to them numerous plants and herbs that were not specifically identified in the WPA narratives but were likely used. As mentioned previously, Fontenot (1994) identified plants and herbs not mentioned in the narratives. Some of the plants and herbs that are highly likely to have been used follow.

Black Cohosh/Squawroot (*Cimicifuga racemosa*)

Black cohosh is also known as black snakeroot, cimicifuga, bugbane, rattleweed, and squawroot (Youngkin and Israel 1996). Folk practitioners have used it as a folk cure for, pain, menstrual cramps, and menopausal problems (Maiscott 2000). The medicinal part of the plant is the root. For

centuries, Native Americans used it for "women's problems," hence the alternative name "squawroot." Folk practitioners also used it as a relaxant, sedative, and treatment for chorea. In the contemporary United States, it is used as a sedative, treatment for rheumatism, and to promote menstruation and reduce discomfort. The antibacterial and antiyeast activity of the plant supports its use as a treatment for "women's complaints" (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Chevallier (2000) reported modern research has found black cohosh to be effective for menopausal problems. It has also been found to reduce blood pressure and reduces hyperactivity (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Black cohosh can be dangerous and made may lead to serious liver problems and failure if overdosed. Although the WPA narratives do not specifically refer to black cohosh, it is extremely likely given the popularity of this plant among Native American and White populations that slaves incorporated it into their practices.

Ginger (*Zingiber Officinale*)

The ancients used ginger for gastrointestinal upsets and indigestion. Folk use includes using ginger for colds, fever, indigestion, nausea, menstrual cramps, and poor circulation (Maiscott 2000). In Southern Appalachia, folk practitioners used ginger for fevers, colds, and menstruation (Cavender 2003). A Dr. Thomson writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century recommended keeping a piece of ginger root in one's pocket to fend off yellow fever by chewing it like tobacco when exposed to the disease (Meyer 1975).

Modern use of ginger includes as an anti-inflammatory agent, and for toothaches, and it may reduce the risk of heart attack (Weiner and Weiner 1994). As a tea, it has been used for encouraging menstruation. The chemical compound borneol found in ginger is an anti-inflammatory and can relieve pain and has been used for toothaches and headaches (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Ginger does promote salivary and gastric secretions (Youngkin and Israel 1996). Modern science indicates it also may reduce the risk of heart attack (Weiner and Weiner 1994). The *PDR for Herbal Medicines* noted anti-emetic, anti-inflammatory, and other positive effects of ginger on humans (Fleming 2000). Although not specifically identified in the WPA narratives, it is likely some herb doctors relied on ginger as a treatment.

Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*)

Ginseng was not native to North America and had to be imported. Although used by Asian medical practitioners that used the plant for around seven thousand years, ginseng only was only introduced to the West in the eighteenth century. Herbalists report that ginseng root has been proven to

be good for stress and immunity building (Chevallier 2000). The *PDR of Herbal Medicines* (1998) reported some evidence that ginseng did in fact reduce stress and improve resistance in animal lab tests. The ex-slaves in the narratives did not report using ginseng for these purposes, but likely did use the leaves as a wrap for fevers.

Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*)

Goldenseal is also called eye balm, eye root, Indian plant, yellow root, and jaundice root (Youngkin and Israel 1996). Native Americans used it as eyewash and for skin diseases (Vogel 1981; Weiner and Weiner 1994). Southern Appalachian folk practitioners used goldenseal root as a treatment for indigestion (Cavender 2003). It can be used to treat canker sores in the mouth. According to scientific evidence, this plant might have some astringent and weak antiseptic properties but there is no scientific evidence to support all of its medical claims (Tyler 1985; Youngkin and Israel 1996). Although not directly referenced in the WPA narratives, it might have been used by slave practitioners.

Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)

The medicinal parts of the licorice plant, also known as sweet root, are the roots and runners. Licorice is both an expectorant and demulcent (Tyler 1985). Native Americans used licorice roots for sore throats and coughs. Modern science has found that the plant has expectorant, anti-tussive, anti-cough, and anti-inflammatory properties (Youngkin and Israel 1996). According to the *PDR for Herbal Medicines*, contemporary research indicates that the plant does have anti-inflammatory, anti-ulcer, antiviral/antifungal, and other positive effects and it has been approved as a treatment for cough, bronchitis, and gastritis (Fleming 2000). The WPA narratives do not specifically identify any use of licorice, but it was likely part of the herb doctor materia medica.

Peppermint (*Menthe piperita*)

Southern Appalachian folk practitioners used peppermint to treat indigestion (Cavender 2003). There is modern medical evidence that peppermint helps relieve congestion (Tyler 1985) and has antibacterial properties (Chevallier 2000). Folk practitioners have made peppermint tea to treat cramps and upper respiratory infections (Maiscott 2000). Peppermint also is a remedy for gas (Weiner and Weiner 1994; Wichtl 2004) and upper respiratory problems (Maiscott 2000). Peppermint is used by herbalists as a general treatment for a variety of digestive problems. The *PDR for Herbal*

Medicines indicated that it has been approved for liver aliments, gallbladder complaints, and some digestive problems (Fleming 2000). Although not specifically mentioned in the WPA narratives, it is likely peppermint did find medical use by enslaved African Americans.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS OF PLANT AND HERBAL TREATMENTS

It is evident that African American slaves and the herb doctors that treated them relied on a wide variety of herbs and plants as materia medica. It is true that the plants and herbs identified in the WPA narratives represent only a fraction of the number and variety of plants and herbs what were used. It is likely that some of the remedies have been lost to time.

We now know that some of the plants and herbs used did and do have scientifically based medicinal value. Others had no direct medical value or at least did not make patients any worse. Yet others may have indeed harmed or contributed to the medical ailments of the patient. Regardless of the medical efficacy or lack thereof in these plants and herbs, their use by African American slaves and those that treated them relied heavily on the confidence of the patients that such remedies worked. Slave medicine was no different than formal medical systems of the times, which also relied on the confidence of the patient.

Finally, African American slave reliance on their own herb doctors, folk practitioners, grannies, and other African Americans was a form of empowerment and means of exercising control over their lives. Many slaves trusted these remedies and the African Americans that delivered them, so possible results from all of this would have been a sense of self-determination and an enhanced African American community.

6

Enslaved African American Non-Herbal Treatments and Materia Medica

Folks uster be feard of hoodooin' en bein' witched. Dey uster carry de bone of a cat leg, flint stones, en dried dogwood blossoms fer good luck. Dey uster take bittersweet en put in en er pan with er little grease, an atter it was het up pour off de grease en use it fer sa've ter cure rheumatism. Dey uster tek sheep nannie tea fer measles, en lots o' things what seems quare now. Now, folks dey doan use no sech things like dat.

—Samuel Lyons, Kentucky

I allus has heard that if you cross pins over a wart and then hide the pins where no one can find 'em the warts will sho' go away. You can git rid of a corn on your foot by rubbin' hit with store bought soap or lemon juice. If a kernel on your body swell up, jes' go to the chimbly git some soot and mark a cross on the kernel with this soot and hit will git all right. May rain water is good for mos' any ailment. W'ite sassafras root tea is good for blindness. W'en a sty comes on your eye steal someboddy's dish rag and rub the sty with hit, then throw the rag over your left shoulder at a cross road at midnight, but hit's bes' to throw the rag over your left shoulder over a bridge at midnight. If you git the scrofula and want to cure hit, git a lot of china berry roots and poke roots and some bluestone and boil them all together strain and make a salve to rub on the sores. Then anoint them with a black chicken feather dipped in pure hog lard. This brings the sores to a head and then you can press out the cores and you are cured. Lime water is a fine tonic, especially in the spring of the year.

I keeps dat penny on a string 'roun' my neck to keep from having indigestion. If you save the inside lining of a chicken gizzard that is good for indigestion too. The old folks say that if you are having hard pains to git some one to put an axe in the bed with you because that will cut the pains. And they say to wash your face in dew for nine mornings to cure

> the tetter. If you git your heels frost bit, smoke 'em with pine top or rub the heels with a roasted turnip.
>
> —Janey Landrum, Texas

> Yas'm an ah kin buil' a unseen wall aroun' yo so as ter keep evil, jinx and enemies way fun yo and hit'll bring heaps uv good luck too. The way ah does hit is this away: Ah takes High John the conqueror root and fixes apiece of red flannel so as ter make a sack and puts hit in the sack along wid magnetic loadstone, five finger grass, van van oil, controllin' powdah and drawin powdah a d the seal uv powah. This heah mus be worn aroun the neck and sprinkle hit ever mornin fuh seven mornins wid three drops uv holy oil. Then theah is lucky han' root. Hit looks jes like a human han'.
>
> —Uncle Marion Johnson, Arkansas

THE USE OF NON-PLANT BASED MATERIA MEDICA

Slave folk practitioners, conjurers, and herb doctors did not restrict their remedies to plants and herbs. Rather, they used other materials, such as insects, animal by-products, mixtures, or stones, to treat their patients. Medical practitioners and physicians, White and African American alike, relied on a wide variety of non-herbal substances. For example, Kiple and King (1981) reported that African American folk practitioners used fried young mice, boiled cockroaches, and sheep dung tea as treatments. Southern folk medicine from 1750 to the antebellum period also used a variety of non-herbal materia medica including alum, butter, milk, petroleum, salt, sulfur (brimstone), tobacco, lye (potassium hydroxide or potash), lime water, harts horn (the horn of a male red European deer), or rattlesnake pieces for fevers (Moss 1999). Practitioners used mercury (quicksilver), lead, zinc, and other metals as well.

The manner in which folk practitioners used substances varied. Some of the non-herbal treatments were ingested, or externally applied, while others simply were worn or used in rituals. For example, slaves used medicinal amulets to prevent or treat illness. Folk practitioners relied on knotted string amulets, which secret doctors in Louisiana continue to use to this day (Fontenot 1994).

Regardless of the method, slave folk practitioners knew and used a wide variety of mineral, herbal, and plant remedies. For example, Ellen Betts (Mellon 1988: 383) of Louisiana commented on her role as a health care provider, "I nussed de sick folk too—white and black." She added, "Sometime I dose with blue mass pills, and den sometime Doc Fatchit [Fawcett] come along and leave rhubarb and epicac and calomel and castor oil ans sech."

Today, some of the materia medica used by slaves seems to border on the absurd. However, we must not be too quick to judge because sometimes seemingly strange treatments have proven to be surprisingly effective. For example, modern medical researchers have found that licking infections and certain types of clay, maggots, honey, leeches, pus, urine, and other substances have medical value (Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein 1997). Even the seemingly counterproductive practice of bleeding (cupping) the patient can be beneficial because it decreases the body temperature, temporarily lowers blood pressure, decreases the level of iron in the blood (which many harmful bacteria need), and stimulates pituitary gland production, which triggers the body's immune system (Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein 1997).

SOME OF THE NON-HERBAL TREATMENTS COULD BE ELABORATE

The folk practice of healing using non-plant or herbal remedies could be very complicated, whether effective or not. Southern folk medicine predating the Civil War was replete with concoctions and mixtures for ailments. For example, one mixture for whooping cough was comprised of unsalted butter, garlic, lard, and vinegar (Moss 1999). Harriet Collins was born following the Civil War in 1870 in Houston, Texas. Though she was never a slave, her WPA narrative provides a flavor of how complex and eclectic the materia medica could be for those practicing folk medicine. Some of her references to treatments may have modern medical value, such as her use of cobwebs to stop bleeding. Some of Harriet's treatments are highlighted within this passage:

> When er boddy git cut er hurt, I allers burn some woolen rags an' smoke de wound; er burn er piece ob fat pine an drop de tar f'om hit on some scorched wool and bind dat woolen piece on de wound. Effen you can git er piece ob calf liver an' bind hit over the wound, dat's good. I'ze aller tuk notice dat effen er boddy git hurt on de new moon dat scar gwine grow wid de moon an' make er large scar. Effen dey gits hurt on de wane ob de moon, dar will be er small scar. I stops de bleedin' wid soot an' cobwebs. Hit's pow'ful good ter let er dog lick de place. . . . W'en I git de headache, I put er hoss radish poultice on my haid effen I kin git hit. Er Jimson weed poultice is sho' fine too. Den ergin' I burn er ole shoe an' sniff dat smoke. Effen I has de headache putry offen I wears er nutmeg on er string aroun' my neck. Mammy uster tie er knot in er string an' put dat knot in de front ob de head an' tie de string 'roun' her haid. In de slave times, de niggers went barfoot mos' all de time an' dey allers git dey foots hurt an' git snake bite in snake time.
>
> Effen you kill de furst snake you see in de spring, den your enemies ain't gwine git de bes' ob you dat year. I'ze er wear dat red flannel string all plaited up, roun' my wrist ter keep away de sprains. I'ze done dat all my life an' hit

> shore wukks. W'en de folkses git er sprain, I jes' gits me er dirt dauber's nes' an git de clay f'om hit, wet dat clay wid vinegar an' bind roun' de sprain' an' hit git all right. Dat dime on de string roun' my ankle keeps de cramps outten my leg. Mammy allers did dat an' hits sho' good. Tea f'om red coon-root is good fer dat too. De pickerninnies was allers er stickin' nails in de foots atter de folks git ter usin' nails. I tie er piece ob fat meat an' er penny ober de place an' dat cures hit. Oh, de penny don' let none ob dat blood poison git in de place. Er poultice ob sugar an' turpentine is good fer dat, too. An' er poultice ob mashed Jimson weed leaves er some snake oil is good. Er salve ob stewed earth worms is good fer earache; hits good medecine fer er lot ob things.

Ex-slave Lindy Joseph of Louisiana stated:

> Coal dust and salt warmed is good for rheumatism. You can take rusty nails; put vinegar on dem; let stand; dat's good for worms. Drink about a half-glass at de time/take castor oil; soak on cotton; put in the hollow of your throat; will stop hoarseness/Take Jacob bush and boil it; drink the tea. It's good for fever. I never is had a doctor for fever. Mole tea is good for fever too; just boil it/Sassafras tea is good to brak out measles/Hot ashes and salt wet in vinegar is good for pains in de sides. (Clayton 1990: 144–45)

Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus (Texas) shared their thoughts:

> In sickness, the pioneer knew that he must depend on his own resources, as, often, the nearest doctor was fifty miles away. Doctors, at first, were distrusted and many deaths were attributed to misplaced confidence in doctors. Many remedies were believed in by White and Black people alike.

Some of these remedies were:

Rheumatism—take an empty whiskey bottle, fill half-full with vinegar; put a handful of large red ants into this and shake well before applying internally and externally.

Hay Fever—place coffee grounds in a pipe and smoke.

Good Poultice—mash up tumble bugs and put them on the raw—(they are guaranteed to draw ole Satan out ob de groun').

Lockjaw—give tea made out of cockroaches.

Toothache—cut the outer skin off of the frog of a horse's front hoof, put this skin over the fire, and char until it crumbles, put these ashes on the tooth. Will stop the toothache every time.

Warts—stick a needle through the wart, pull out the needle and stick it into a grain of corn, then burry the corn and in a day or two, the wart will drop off.

Nosebleed—tie a woolen thread around the big toe. Mash a lead bullet around a string; tie this around the neck; this will stop nosebleed every time.

Sprained ankle—bathe the sprain with turpentine; light with a match and let it burn two minutes, then fan out the flame with your hat.
Cramps—when cramp come in legs at night, turn your shoes upside down under the bed and the cramps will leave.
Colds—"Who in the hell would want a better remedy for colds than whiskey?"

NON-HERBAL MATERIA MEDICA

There are numerous non-herbal materia medica referred to as medical treatments in the WPA narratives. Because the interviewers did not always ask about medical remedies and respondents didn't necessarily share everything they had experienced, one can be sure the substances listed here are a fraction of what was used by slaves and others during the general timeframe of the antebellum South.

The following are some of the references in the narratives to non-plant/herbal remedies that were used by slaves to prevent or treat illness or cure injuries. They are arranged alphabetically. A table that lists these substances, their use, and the narrative references can be found in a table in the appendix C. Unlike herbs and plants, the efficacy of most of the non-plant based substances used by slaves is unknown. Modern researchers have studied the medical benefits of some of the substances, such as honey, yet others have not been studied. Some of the substances, such as manure-based treatments, did more harm than good. Unlike herbs and plants, which have been studied, the non-herbal materia medica used by slaves have been ignored by medical research.

Slave folk practitioners appear to have relied on some of these substances more than others. Although the WPA narratives cannot provide a definitive answer to the question of frequency of use, it is possible to note that some substances were more often mentioned as medical remedies.

Ants

Jane Montgomery (Oklahoma) was born 1857 in Louisiana. She recalled the use of ants for teething, "We used to use nine red ants tied in a sack round they neck to make 'em teethe easy and never had no trouble with 'em neither." Some slaves did not ingest the ants but wore them.

Ash/Soot

Ash or soot found use, mostly as a topical treatment, throughout the South. Ash and soot were often mentioned in the narratives and continue

to be mentioned as an effective cure in folk medicine. Slaves ingested ash and soot for certain medical ailments including stomachaches and worms. Joe Hawkins (Mississippi) provided one use of ash, a treatment for worms, and said, "Ashes and salt was given to chillun by their mammies for worms and other ailments." Josephine Hamilton (Arkansas) shared, "In slavery times they took red corn cobs burned them and made white ashes, sifted it and used it instead of soda." She then identified a medical use, "Beat up charcoal and take for gas on the stomach."

Folk practitioners used chimney or fireplace soot in teas to treat a variety of ailments and injuries. Postell (1951: 110) identified it as a treatment for colitis. Janey Landrum (Texas) recalled a medical remedy for corns was chimney soot, "If a kernel on your body swell up, jes' go to the chimbly git some soot and mark a cross on the kernel with this soot and hit will git all right." Celia Henderson (Kentucky) was born in 1849. She recalled a mix using soot:

> My Mammy was great fo' herb doctering. I hols by it, too, yes, 'em. Nowadays you gets a rusty nail in yo' foot, an' has lockjaw—but I 'member Mammy she put soot from the chimney with bacon grease when I run a big nail in mah foot, an' she had to pull it out.

Ex-slave Warner Willis (Clayton 1990: 215) stated, "When we wanted to stop bleedin', we got a handful of soot out of the chimney, and it would quit. He added, "Cobwebs did the same thing." Annie Stanton (Alabama) recalled making her own medicine that included the use of soot for infant colic:

> Us folks a long time ago neber hab no money fo' dem to git. Us had tuh make own medicine. When de babies had de colic us wud tie soot in a rag an' boil it, and den gib dem de water, an' tuh ease de prickly heat and used rotton wood powdered up fine, and fo' de yellow thrash us would boil de heep thrash an' gib em de tea.

Axe

Slave folk practitioners used the axe was used as a cure in a symbolic fashion. In African American folklore, some believed that if an axe or hoe is brought into a house in one door and taken out another, bad luck would result (Pyatt and Johns 1999). Typically, slaves would place an axe in a strategic location to fend off some spirit or medical calamity. For slaves, the shape of the axe with a sharp edge had symbolic overtones. The association between the axe and cutting pain was made by Janey Landrum (Texas) when she stated, "The old folks say that if you are having hard pains to git some one to put an axe in the bed with you because that will cut the pains."

A popular location for placing an axe was under the bed or near the front door. Besides placing a pan of water under the bed, Dellie Lewis (Alabama) remembered, "For night sweats Grandmammy would put an axe under de bed of de sick pusson wid de blade asittin' straight up."

Axle Grease

Axle grease found its way into the antebellum South as an universal ointment and general remedy. Whites and African Americans both used grease as a salve and treatment. In Southern Appalachian folk medicine, axle grease was used as a treatment for hemorrhoids (piles) (Cavender 2003). Celia Henderson (Kentucky), who was born in 1849, provided a detailed description of the use of axle grease as part of a treatment with red flannel:

> Ah'members ah come to see Mammy here in Lebanon a long time ago, an' ah had a terrible misery; ah was so miserable dat ah was soun asleep a dreamin' bout it—an' saying "Mammy you' recon axel grease goin' to hep?"
>
> Ah woke up des feelin' awful, an' I went to my Mammy—an' ol' woman mahself (ah was, about 50 yeahs ol') but ah went to Mammy an' woke her up an' ah says, jes' lak ah dream o' sayin': "Mammy you recon axel grease is goin' to hep me?"
>
> "What fo' is you wantin' axel grease to hep?" An' I told her. She say: "Axel grease hot, put on wid red flannel goin' to take it away chile." An' out of bed she climbed in de col night, an get some axel grease out n'de yard offa an ol' wagon settin' dere' she heat it up wid dat red flannel she slap it on me. Den ah got easy—sho was thankful wen dat axel grease 'n red flannel got wukin on me! But you gotta have red flannel—white stuff won't do. If you gets on' o' dem col miseries in de winter try it an' see. But go 'long! Folks is too sma't fo' dem medicines nowadays.

Blue Mass/Moss Pills

Francis Lewis (Clayton 1990: 160) referred to taking blue mass pills: "We didn't get sick much, but when we did old missis gave us blue mass pills and ipecac and sarsapilla." Former slave Rebecca Fletcher remembered that taking blue mass pills made folks sick (Clayton 1990: 46). She commented, "Old missis used to give us blue mass pills when we needed medicine." She then added, "It sho did make us sick. We had to get sick to get well, old missis said."

Brass Buttons/Rings/Copper

People have long associated the wearing of brass to address arthritis or rheumatism, which continues today. Beard (2003) reported that many of

her patients claim wearing copper helps with arthritic pain and, although rheumatologists haven't approved this use, some are giving the practice some support. Southern folk practitioners of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used compounds containing copper to topically treat sores and the eyes (Moss 1999). Ahram Sells (Texas) provided an example of wearing metal objects to combat rheumatism:

> Some 'r' de niggers wo' (wore) brass rings to keep off de rheumatiz, 'n' some 'r' dem punch hole' in a penny 'r' dime 'n' wear dis on dey ankle to keep off dif'rent kin's 'r' diseases. I guess it kep' it off all right cause dey neber was sick much in dem day.

Sim Greely (South Carolina), born in 1855, provided another application for brass, "Tie brass buttons around de neck to stop de nose a-bleading." Mark Oliver (Mississippi) recalled another use, "For the heart complaint they used a brass key or a piece of lead around the neck."

Charms

Charms were a significant feature of voodoo and conjure as well as folk practice. Charms were made from any number of substances, such as coins, beads, buttons, rabbit feet, and other items. Victoria Taylor Thompson (Oklahoma) remembered:

> For sickness daddy give us tea and herbs. He was a herb doctor, that's how come he have the name "Doc." He made us wear charms. Made out of shiny buttons and Indian rock beads. They cured lots of things and the misery too.

Chicken/Chicken Gizzards

For slaves, chicken had a variety of medicinal uses in the antebellum South. Modern research indicates that chicken broth or soup does have medicinal value (Beard 2003). Postell (1951: 109) noted its use by slaves as a treatment for thrash. Specifically, Postell found a folk practitioner who would catch a big rooster, cut off some of its comb, and pour the blood into a baby's mouth. Ex-slave Jim Davis (Arkansas) shared, "And these here frizzly chicken are good luck. If you have a black frizzly chicken and enybody put any poison or anything down in your yard, they'll scratch it up." Works Project Administration respondent Harriet Collins (Texas) provided the following account of the medical use of chicken, "W'en er snake bite er pusson, hits good ter suck de poison out but don't let er blue gummed nigger do dat, case dey jes' ez pizen es er rattler." She added, "Hit be pow'ful good ter kill er black chicken an' bind hit w'ile hits hot on de bite."

Works Project Administration respondent Katie Arbony (Arkansas) claimed that chicken broth and okra had a positive result for her:

> And then Dr. Lewis fed me for three weeks steady on okra soup cooked with chicken. Just give me the broth. Then I commenced gettin' better and here I am.

Folk practitioners also found medical uses for chicken gizzards. Southern Appalachian folk practitioners used chicken gizzards to treat indigestion or upset stomach (Cavender 2003). Ex-slave Dulcinda Baker Martin (Ohio) stated, "I was bawn en Winchester, Kaintucky, en 1859." She added, "Chicken gizzard skin was saved fer medicine, en I reckon goose grease is still used fer lots of things, even en dis day en time." Janey Landrum (Texas) recalled the use of chicken gizzards as a medical remedy for indigestion, "If you save the inside lining of a chicken gizzard that is good for indigestion too."

Coins

One of the more popular medical preventions among slaves was to wear coins. The medical value of this practice was in the slave's faith in the power of coins to prevent illness. Sylvia Durant (South Carolina) described wearing coins, "Yes mamm, I see plenty people wear dem dimes round dey ankle en all kind of things en dey body, but never didn' see my mother do nothin like dat." Emma Jones (Alabama) recalled:

> An' talkin' 'bout medicines. Let me tell you a sho' 'nough cure for a baby dats havin' a hard time teethin'. Jus' putt a string of coppers on de neck an' he won't have no trouble at all. Us useta do dat to de white chilluns an' de black uns to; 'specially in hot weather when dey seem to have de misery.

Janey Landrum (Texas) linked wearing a penny to preventing indigestion: "I keeps dat penny on a string 'roun' my neck to keep from having indigestion." Aunt Silva Durant (South Carolina) recollected that some wore coins to prevent conjuring, although she didn't wear coins for this purpose. She also remembered coin wearing to prevent illness, worms, and other ailments:

> Yes, mam, I see plenty people wear dem dimes round dey ankle on all kind of things on dey body, but never didn' see my mother do nothin like dat. I gwine tell you it just like I got it. Hear talk dat some would wear dem for luck on some tote dem to keep people from hurtin dem. I got a silver dime in de house dere in my trunk right to dis same day dat I used to wear on a string of beads, but I took it off. No, mam, couldn' stand nothin like dat. Den some peoples

> keeps a bag of asafetida tied round dey neck to keep off sickness. Folks put it on dey chillun to keep dem from havin worms. I never didn' wear none in my life, but I know it been a good thing for people, especially chillun.

Not mentioned in the WPA narratives but part of African American folklore was the practice of placing a penny and fat meat inside the mouth and next to the jaw to treat the swelling from mumps (Pyatt and Johns 1999).

Fingernails

Marion Johnson (Arkansas) shared that cutting fingernails helped with rheumatism:

> Since this rain we had lately my rheumatism been botherin' me some. I is gone to cutting my fingernails on Wednesday now so's I'll have health—

To Janey Landrum (Texas), the day of the week mattered when cutting fingernails. If they were cut on Thursday, sickness could result:

> Gran'ma uset to tell us 'bout cuttin' our nails an' what would happen effen' us cut finger nails on certain week days. Hit was lak this: Cut your finger nails on Monday, an' you cut them for news; on Tuesday, for a pair ob new shoes; on Wednezday, an' you gwine trabbel soon; on Thursday, gwine be sickness; on Friday, git some money; on Sadday, see your lover in Sunday; on Sunday, an' the debbil will hab you all the week.

Frog/Toads

Frogs and toads found and continue to find use in folk medicine for medical ailments. For example, the folk guide *Dr. Chase's Recipes or Information for Everybody*, which was published in 1864, contained a recipe for a toad ointment that could be used to treat sprains, lame back, caked breasts, and other ailments. The recipe called for four good-sized toads being boiled and mixed with butter and a tincture of arnica. Works Project Administration respondent George Briggs (South Carolina) shared a chicken-and-frog remedy for snake bites:

> In 1875 a pilot snake bit me, but I was not a-acting foolish and jest catching dem to pop deir heads off. I was working and it jest up and bit me. First thing, I got a live chicken and split it wide open and put its entrails right next to whar dat snake had done bit me. I bound dat whole chicken to my leg till it got cold. Den I sont out and had some folks to catch me some live toad frogs. Dey throw'd off de dead chicken and bound two frogs next to my leg wid de bellies next to my hide. Soon dey died; den turn't green. Den my bite was cured. Yes

> sir, live frogs takes out snake poison, and dey dies and turns green. You feels dem a jumping while dey is dying.

Willis Easter (Texas) recalled the use of dried frog for teething:

> I never studied cunjurin', but I knows dat scorripins and things dey conjures with am powerful medicine. Dey uses hair and fingernails and tacks and dry insects and worms and bat wings and sech. Mammy allus tie a leather string round de babies' necks when dey teethin', to make dem have easy time. She used a dry frog or piece nutmeg, too.

Grease/Lard/Tallow

Animal fats from rattlesnakes, geese, wolves, bears, raccoons, polecats, and other animals found use in traditional Southern folk medicine (Moss 1999), and was also referred to in the WPA interviews. Typically, animal fat/lard was used in ointments and salves, as well as a general multipurpose cure all. Given the texture of grease, it seems to lend itself to use in ointments and salves. African American folklore includes the mixing of lard with sulfur as a salve to relieve the itching from chicken pox or measles, and greasing the vagina for delivery (Pyatt and Johns 1999). Thomas Anderson (South Carolina) stated:

> Younguns on de plantation was bathed two or three time a week. . . . Den dey was a llus greased after de washing to keep de skin from busting open. Mosely dey was greased wid tallow from de mutton.

Aunt Clara Walker, (Arkansas) who at the time of her interview claimed to be 111, recalled the use of hog grease to treat burns:

> Law, I used to be good once, but after I got all burned up I wasn't good for so much. It happened dis way. A salt lick was on a nearby plantation. Ever body who wanted salt, dey had to send a hand to help make it. I went over one day—an workin around I stepped on a live coal. I move quick an' I fall plum over into a salt vat. Before dey got me out I was pretty near ruined. What did dey do? Dey killed a hog—fresh killed a hog. An' dey fry up de fat—fry it up wid some of de hog hairs an' dey greased me good. An' it took all de fire out of de burns. Dey kept me greased for a long time. I was sick nearly six months. Dey was good to me.

Marion Johnson (Arkansas) recollected putting tallow on the bottom of the feet for colds:

> Hears like you got a cold . . . when you gets ready for bed tonight take a big drink of it an' take some tallow and mix snuff with it an' grease the bottom of your feets and under your arms an' behind your ears and you'll be well in the mornin'.

Carrie Nancy Fryer's (Georgia) comments about folk medicine remedies included several references to plant and non-plant materia medica, including grease:

> When us had de mumps mother git sardines and take de oil out and rub us jaws and dat cure us good. Sassafax for meesles, to run de numor (humor) out de blood. When de fever gone, she would grease us wid grease from skin of meat. Git fat light'ood, make fire, cut de skin off bacon meat, broil it over flame and let grease drip into a pan, den rub us all over for de rash. Couldn' wash us you see, 'cep' under de arms a little 'cause water musn' tech us. For a sty in de eye we nused to say: "Sty! Lie!" You see dat call 'em a lie and dey go on off. "Um got a sty! Sty! Lie!" When witches ride me I took a sifter. An old lady told me de nex' time dey come, "you put de sifter in de bed." I done dat and dey ain' bother me since. A basin of water under de bed is good too.

Hair

It was customary in African American folk medicine to place a lock of hair in the ear to cure or relieve the pain of an earache (Pyatt and Johns 1999). Conjure doctors also used hair in rituals and in their conjure bags. Works Project Administration respondent Ella Lassiter (Florida), who was 100 years old when interviewed, stated:

> Some ob de niggahs allus hab de haid-ache. Nothin much to do bout that cause dey done throwed out dey [hair?] where de birds fine hit an line a nest, no wunder dem niggahs haids ache, Deno nevah do dat, Mistis.

Honey

Honey has been a popular folk remedy for colds, coughs, fevers, splinters, and skin infections (Maiscott 2000). According to modern research, its reputation as an antiseptic may be warranted (Peirce 1999). Research has found that honey, sometimes mixed with sugar, has been found to be an effective treatment for infections from bedsores, treatment of burns, and has displayed antimicrobial properties with typhoid, dysentery, and other bacteria (Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein 1997). In the South, from 1750 to 1820, people used honey for chest complaints (Moss 1999). A modern folk remedy for colds among Southern African Americans is honey, lemon, and whiskey tea (Watson 1984). According to the WPA narratives, this practice continued in the antebellum South. However, there is no evidence that honey works for arthritis (Tyler 1985).

Harriet Miller (Georgia) mentioned, "Mullen is combined with honey and alum to make syrup for colds." Darcus Barnett (Texas) noted honey was "used for common ailments and spring malaria." Harriet Barrett (Texas)

said honey was "mixed with onions and charcoal for babies for sickness." Because of its texture, honey lends itself to use in syrups. William Coleman (Texas) recalled honey being used in this way, "Tree rosin blended with honey and onions to make cough syrup." Other ex-slaves also reported on different recipes for honey-based syrups, including Andy McAdams (Texas), Anna Lee (Texas), and Alice Cole (Texas).

Hoof (Cow/Hog)

Hog's hoof has been used in Southern Appalachia as a treatment for infant colic (Cavender 2003). African Americans in Alabama mentioned the folklore practice of scraping the debris from hog's feet and placing it in white material. The materials were then boiled and when the water turned dark it was given to patients for whooping cough, colds, or flu (Pyatt and Johns 1999). Mother Duffy (Louisiana) declared:

> I'm goin' to make him get me some hog's hoofs and make some tea: Dat's de best thing for pneumonia and if you ever gets de earache, don't put no oil [in it]. No, you split a pod of garlic and wrap it in cotton so it don't burn your ear. It sho will cure it yes. (Clayton, 1990: 64)

Works Project Administration respondent Rachel Hankins (Arkansas) recollected making teas out of hog and cow hooves:

> My feet Never saw a shoe until I was fourteen. I went barefooted in ice and snow. They was tough. I did not feel the cold. I never had a cold when I was young. If we had ep-p-zu-dit we used different things to make tea out of, such as shucks, cow chips, hog hoofs, cow hoofs. Ep-p-zu-dit then is what people call flu now.

Steve Jones, born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1849, shared, "Mistress would make us wear hog hoof round our neck to keep off fever and all kinds of itch."

Kerosene

In African American folklore, people mixed a few drops of kerosene with sugar and when it hardened, they sucked on it like a cough drop (Pyatt and Johns 1999). African American folklore also includes the practice of soaking a sock in kerosene and tying it around the throat for colds. Tildy Collins (Ohio) viewed it as a general remedy:

> Her sovereign remedy for rheumatism is "'nint de j'ints an' a little kerosene oil an' put some mullen leaves on it . . . a good lot of turpentine is good for mos' anything de matter wid you.

Carrie Nancy Fryer (Georgia) combined kerosene with camphor and rubbed it into areas where pain was present.

Leather

Some slaves wore a leather string around the throat for whooping cough (Johnson 1934). Example references to the use of leather as a remedy include Gate-Eye Fisher's (Arkansas) comment:

> Yes man, I kinda believe in signs that 's how come I wear this leather strap 'round my wrist it keeps me from havin' rheumatism, neuralgia. Yes man, it helps.

Willis Easter (Texas) indicated leather was an effective remedy for teething:

> Mammy aller tied er leather string eroun' de babies' necks w'en dey teefin' ter make dem hab er ezier time. An' she'd put er dried frog er a piece ob nutmeg eroun' deir necks too fer teefin'.

Meat

Fat meat is used by some Southern African Americans for boils (Watson 1984). WPA respondent Emma Jackson of Louisiana recalled using meat to remove warts. She recalled:

> I never did anybody a wrong as I know of. Never stole but one thing in my life; that was a steak from the lady I was working with; that was to take some warts off my hands and face. You just rub the wart with the meat and bury it. As the meat decays, the warts will go away.

Hetty Haskell (Arkansas) described how meat was hung to prevent disease:

> Somebody said if you would hang up some beef outdoors between the road and the house, it would stop the disease. I know old master hung up about a half a quarter and it seemed to work. The meat would turn green.

Mole Feet

Ex-slave William Emmons (Kentucky/Ohio) noted the practice of cutting off mole's feet to ease the pain of teething, "Some folks cut moles feet off, to mek them cut teeth easy." Jane Montgomery (Oklahoma) was born in 1857 in Louisiana. She shared a use of mole feet:

> My family didn't believe in conjure am all that stuff, 'though they's a heap of it was going on and still is for that matter. They had "hands" that was made up of all kinds of junk. You used 'em to make folks love you more'n they did. We

used asafetida to keep off smallpox and measles. Put mole foots round a baby's neck to make him teethe easy.

Manure/Dung

In the pre-antebellum South, animal dung was used as a medicinal. Dog, cow, sheep, horse, peacock, dog, goose, and others were identified as useful materia medica (Moss 1999). In African American folklore, chicken manure was dried, wrapped in white cloth and used to make a tea for scarlet fever (Mitchell 1978; Pyatt and Johns 1999). In Alabama, a tea called "mini weed tea" was made from placing dried cow manure in a white cloth, boiling it and sometimes adding turpentine or whiskey. It was given to people for colds (Pyatt and Johns 1999). Manure was made into pills, poultices, ointments, and other home remedies. The WPA interviewees also refer to manure as the basis of a curative tea. Sheep manure was sometimes made into a tea and used for measles. Samuel Lyons (Kentucky) described the use of sheep manure tea:

Dey uster tek sheep nannie tea fer measles, en lots o' things what seems quare now. Now, folks dey doan use no sech things like dat.

Tyler (1985) reported that sheep dung tea is a folk treatment for measles in Indiana, but cautions the obvious that it was unsanitary and ineffective. Other uses included the use by some of sheep manure tea for whooping cough (Postell 1951). Manure use was not limited to sheep. Cow manure was also used. Rachel Hankins (Arkansas) shared that cow manure was used as a tea for colds.

Nails

Folk practitioners and herb doctors used iron nails as materia medica. Gabriel Gilbert (Texas) was born into slavery on the plantation of Belizare Broussard, in New Iberia Parish, Louisiana. He spoke of the use of a new nail as a remedy:

I 'member back home dey was a white man. He had dat kinder gif'. I don' care what kind of animal you had, a dog or a hoss. Dat man he wuk on de animal and it neber would leave you or yo' house. Any time anybody hab toofache or yearache he tek a bran' new nail what ain't neber wuk befo' and he wuk dat 'roun' yo' toof or year [ear] and dat break up de toofache or yearache right now. He hab a li'l prayer he say but I dunno what it was. He neber tell nobody what it way he say. One mawnin' I had a toofache what been bodderin' me sumpin' awful and dat man he pass by. Us call him and he come dere. I tell him I got a mis'ry in my toof. He say, "Is you got a new nail, a bran' new one what ain't neber been use?" I tell him, "Yes." He say, "Git it and bring it here." So I done

> it. Den he say, "Bring me a hammer." Den he shake he han's 'roun' some kinder way and put de nail in de groun' and drive it down wid t'ree hit, plum' down in de groun' and when he done dat de toofache done gone. Sometime' he put he finger on a pusson's jaw.

Betty Cunningham (Virginia) also mentioned the recipe for vinegar nail as mixing one pound of iron nails in vinegar over night.

Rabbit's Foot

Given the role of rabbit's foot in folklore as a good luck charm, it should come as no surprise that it would find a place in slave medicine. Jim Davis (Arkansas), who claimed to be 98 when interviewed, shared that rabbit's foot was sewn into cloth as a medical preventative. Eli Davison, who was born in West Virginia and enslaved there and in Texas, recalled:

> An old black mama would tie rabbits foot around our necks to keep chills and fever off. Those old remedies will still beat anything those white Doctors can give you yet Boss.

Red Flannel

Red flannel was believed by some slaves to have medicinal value. In African American folklore, it was believed that wearing red flannel would ward off rheumatism (Pyatt and Johns 1999). In Southern Appalachian folk medicine, it was soaked in turpentine and worn around the neck to treat sore throats (Cavender 2003). Why the flannel had to be red is unknown, but may be linked at least in color to blood. Examples of narrative references to red flannel include Willis Easter's (Texas) comment:

> Dem cunjuremen sho' bad. Dey make you have pneumony and boils and bad luck. I carries me a jack all de time. It am de charm wrap in red flannel. Don't know what am in it. A bossman, he fix it for me.

He also stated:

> For to make a jack dat am sho' good, git snakeroot and sassafras and a li'l modest one and brimstone and asafetida and resin and bluestone and gum arabic and a pod or two red pepper. Put dis in de red flannel bag, at midnight on de dark of de moon, and it sho' do de work.

Jim Davis (Arkansas), who was 98 at the time of his interview, stated:

> You can take a rabbit foot and a black cat's bone from the left fore shoulder, and you take your mouth and scrape all the meat offen that bone, end you take that bone end sew it up in a red flannel—I know what I'm talkin' 'bout now—

> and you tote that in your pocket night and day—sleep with it—and it brings you good luck. But the last one I had got burnt up when my house burnt down and I been goin' back ever since.

Soda Water/Soda

African American folklore includes the mixing of soda with castor oil or lard to relieve aching feet, such as those with corns and calluses (Pyatt and Johns 1999). In modern folk medicine, baking soda is still used as an antacid, to clean teeth, and to treat other ailments (Watson 1984). George Briggs (South Carolina) mentioned using soda water to treat indigestion, a use consistent with the modern use of soda. He stated, "I tells folks dat dey will bust if dey doesn't drink soda water fer de indigestion."

String

In African American folklore, a string with sixteen knots was sometimes worn around the waist to prevent malaria (Pyatt and Johns 1999). In modern Southern folklore, some wear string around the leg for cramps (Watson 1984). The WPA narratives contain references to the use of string for a variety of medical ailments. For example, Rosie McGillery, who was enslaved in South Carolina and interviewed in Texas, shared:

> I have had string tied around my neck with camphor to keep away the chills and fevers. When little chile is cutting teeth the best thing that can be done is to tie string around her neck with spices of all kind and let it stay there.

Jane Cotton (Texas) recalled a similar use of string, "Sometimes, he would have old black mammy, and she would get some weeds, make tea to give for fever and chills and malaria, or tie camphor on string and put that around neck to keep off sickness."

Sugar

African American folk practitioners have used sugar to stop bleeding. There is medical evidence that sugar does in fact help stop bleeding and has antiseptic qualities (Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein 1997). They would apply sugar to cuts and wounds (Pyatt and Johns 1999). In modern African American folklore, sugar is also mixed with kerosene to fight colds (Watson 1984). Examples of using sugar as materia medica include ex-slave Rena Clark (Mississippi) who recalled mixing sugar with chimney soot for colic. Robert Bryant (Missouri) remembered mixing sugar with turpentine for stomach aches.

Turpentine

Turpentine was one of the most common remedies used during the antebellum period. Southern folk medicine used turpentine for chest complaints (Moss 1999). In large doses it could cause convulsions, shock, and vomiting (Tyler 1985). As an oil, it is an effective vermifuge for worms (Tyler 1985). Folks used it as an expectorant and for colic, typhoid fever, and other ailments. There has been relatively little to no modern research on its effectiveness (Weiner and Weiner 1994). Modern research has found that turpentine does have medicinal value for certain kinds of skin ailments and as a cough and congestion treatment, but caution must be exercised because it can be toxic (Peirce 1999). In Southern Appalachia, folk practitioners used turpentine to expel worms (Cavender 2003). References to turpentine are numerous in the WPA narratives as a general cure all for many ailments. Today, turpentine is not generally used as topical treatment.

Narrative respondent George Briggs (South Carolina) gave an account of using turpentine for snake bites. Tildy Collins (Ohio) shared that it was a good medical remedy for many ailments. Ex-slave Irene Poole (Alabama) told of turpentine being included with other medical remedies:

> Asked then about her mistress she said "Yas ma'am she was good. She never punished me, she used to go 'roun' de quarters eve'y mornin' to see 'bout her sick niggers. She always had a little basket wid oil, teppentine an' number six in it. Number six was strong medicine. You had to take it by de drap. I always toted de basket."

Ann Hawthorne (Texas) shared:

> When any of de slave git sick ol' mistus and my gramma dey doctor 'em. De ol' mistus she a pretty good doctor. When us chillun git sick dey git yarbs or dey give us castor oil and turpentime.

Anne Rice (South Carolina) also remembered turpentine as a remedy, "When we got sick all the medicine we took was turpentine—dat would cure almost any ailment." Everett Ingram of Alabama described one mixture using turpentine, "Gran'mammy was a great doctor; useta give us turpentine an' castor oil an' Jerusalem oak fer worms." Salena Taswell (Florida) reported, "Sometimes they would give us oil with a drop or two of turpentine in a big spoonful." Then she added, "They put turpentine on outs and sores." John Cole (Georgia) stressed the importance of turpentine as a treatment for sore throats, cuts, and bruises. Aunt Margaret made a salve for carbuncles out of a mixture of pine resin, sweet gum, beeswax, mutton suet, and turpentine (Postell 1951: 110).

Vinegar

Most modern experts suggest that frequent vinegar and water douches avoid the development of vaginal infections. Vinegar may have other medical benefits, such as helping reduce cholesterol levels. Folk practitioners used vinegar as a cure for fevers, as an astringent for nose bleeding, and as a gargle (Meyer 1975). Apple cider vinegar was used for colds, arthritis, fungal skin infections, hair and scalp problems, insect bites, and itching (Maiscott 2000). In African American folklore, vinegar has even been used to treat broken bones. Pyatt and Johns (1999) reported that vinegar and water were heated and placed on broken bones for several hours.

In the WPA narratives, vinegar was used in combination with pine rosin pills (Rawick 4: 11). Fontenot (1987) found that vinegar was mixed with cabbage leaves or pokeweed to make poultices for treating boils and sores. There is no evidence that vinegar works for arthritis (Tyler 1985). Uncle George used clay mud mixed with vinegar to treat a sprained leg (Postell 1951: 110). Warner Willis (Clayton 1990: 215) also used vinegar for this purpose. He stated, "If you got a sprain, take clay, mix it with vinegar, bind it on the wrench and it goes out."

Whiskey

Whiskey was one of the most frequently mentioned remedies in the narratives. Alcohol in its various forms has been used for many medical purposes over the centuries and it should not come as a surprise that it was used by slaves and their doctors. George Taylor (Alabama), Julia Brown (Georgia), Winger Vanhook (Texas), and Henry Boraddus (Texas) all took whiskey for colds and fevers. Emma Lowran (South Carolina) mixed whiskey with lemons for colds. Mary Colbert (Georgia) reported that whiskey was mixed with garlic to make a tea for worms. Joanna Thompson Isom (Mississippi) recalled whiskey being mixed with sheep manure to make a tea for the measles.

OTHER MATERIA MEDICA

In addition to those previously identified, slave folk practitioners used other non-plant substances. Appendix C presents a listing of those found in the WPA narratives. Beeswax is currently used in some commercial lip balms (Beard 2003). Slaves used beef broth, which is typically rich in potassium, which helps muscles. People with diarrhea or vomiting may benefit from ingesting broth (Meyer 1975). Slave folk practitioners used cobwebs to stop bleeding. Works Project Administration respondent Warner Willis

used cobwebs in this manner (Clayton 1990: 215). The use of cobwebs—sometimes mixed with turpentine—to stop bleeding was common to African American folklore (Pyatt and Johns 1999). Salt was often mixed with many substances, plant and non-plant, to make remedies. In modern African American folk medicine, some mix salt with milk for hangovers (Mathews 1992) or with warm water for fevers (Watson 1984). Janey Landrum (Texas) mentioned using dew, "And they say to wash your face in dew for nine mornings to cure the tetter." She also identified a dish towel as a cure to a sty, "W'en a sty comes on your eye steal someboddy's dish rag and rub the sty with hit, then throw the rag over your left shoulder at a cross road at midnight, but hit's bes' to throw the rag over your left shoulder over a bridge at midnight." In addition, other non-plant based materia medica were identified in the WPA narratives. Reuben Fitzpatrick (Alabama) mentioned the use of a horn as a cure all:

> We didn't have no doctors much in dem days, but us had a horn us use when we got sick. If we had the headache that horn would go right over the spot and it wouldn't be no time 'fore the pain'd be gone. We'd use that horn anytime we was ailing an' it'd sho' do the work. I used to have the horn but I don't know jes' where it is now.

Emiline Waddell (Arkansas), who was 100 when interviewed, attributed a cure of deafness and speechlessness to a lightening strike. It was said that:

> Mammy Emiline was a faithful old black mammy, true to life and traditions, and refused her freedom, at the close of the war, as wanted to stay and raise "Old Massa's chilluns," which she did, for she was nursing her sixth generation in the Weddell family at the time of her death. Even to that generation there was a close tie between the southern child and his or her black mammy. A strange almost unbelievable thing happened to Emiline; she was born a deaf mute, but her hearing and speech was restored many years before her death, when lightening struck a tree under which she was standing.

Abraham Chambers (Alabama) shared that oil was combined with gourd, buckeye, goat seed, turpentine, and lobelia for sickness. Bill and Ellen Thomas of Texas recalled oil being used for colic. Some used soap for corns, as reported by respondent Janey Landrum (Texas), "You can git rid of a corn on your foot by rubbin' hit with store bought soap or lemon juice." George Gilliam (Alabama) told of placing a stick in the ground to prevent disease. Mattie Logan (Oklahoma) identified turtle blood as a treatment for whooping cough. She shared how it was used:

> The whooping cough cure was by using a land turtle. Cut off his head and drain the blood into a cup. Then take a lump of sugar and dip in the blood,

> eat the sugar and the coughing was supposed to stop. If it did or not I don't know.

Harriet Collins (Texas) identified worms as a remedy, "Er salve ob stewed earth worms is good fer earache; hits good medecine fer er lot ob things."

Other unidentifiable substances were mentioned by the WPA respondents. Some of these include Rev. Squires Jackson (Florida) reference to "burmo chops" for unspecified medical purposes. John Crawford (Texas) reference to "copperas" for unspecified medical purposes. Gus Smith's (Missouri) recollection of "croton oil" as a laxative. Sam Polite's (South Carolina) memory of "dead shot" to induce vomiting to expel worms. He also referred to "puke powder" which also ridded the patient of worms. Finally, Mr. Polite mentioned "juse-e-smoke" for pains in the stomach. It is likely that the narratives contain other unknown substances that slaves and folk practitioners used as materia medica.

It should be noted that some of the materia medica were not identified in the narratives, but were nevertheless were likely used. For example, folk practitioners used tar as a treatment for ear and tooth aches (Perdue et al. 1976). Southern folk medicine used tar for chest complaints (Moss 1999). African American folklore includes the practice of adding liquid tar to hot water for coughs and colds (Pyatt and Johns 1999). Whites and enslaved African Americans addressed tooth and earaches by stuffing tar in the cavities (Kiple and King 1981).

Another example not found in the narratives is the use of urine as a remedy. Postell (1951: 109) reported a use witnessed by an Aunt Margaret of urine for thrash. Thrash is a common term for a fungus typically occurring in the mouths of young children. This treatment had a woman urinate on leaves and then rub the leaves in the baby's mouth. While urine is sterile, leaves are not and this treatment served in no way to benefit or treat thrash.

The use of all the many non-herbal treatments, including these unidentified substances, points to the plethora of substances used in folk remedies. The complex combinations of ingredients also point to the extent to which folk practitioners and slaves (and even Whites) went to find remedies they thought would work.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS— NON-HERBAL AND PLANT TREATMENTS

Similar to the use of herbs and plants, one develops a sense that a wide variety of substances were used by African American slave practitioners to treat medical ailments and conditions. Also similar to herb and plant remedies,

some worked, some did nothing, and others harmed the patient. It would be easy to criticize some of the practices used by slaves as being foolish and misdirected. For example, based on what we know today, making manure teas for colds and fevers just doesn't make sense. But in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even formally trained White physicians and folk practitioners relied on questionable medical treatments too. For example, water treatments, bleeding, applying electrical shocks, and strange teas were part of the established White medical genre of the period. Slave reliance on non-traditional non-herbal or plant materia medica does not seem that far afield.

7

Closing Observations

It would be presumptuous to think that all the substances used by enslaved herb doctors, conjurers, and folk practitioners have been identified in this book. This collection of plant, herb, and non-plant-based remedies represents only a fraction of the materia medica they used. Without question, the WPA respondents knew and used numerous other substances as medicine remedies that they did not identify in the narratives. The fact that WPA interviewers did not specifically and systematically ask questions about medical care implies that a vast array of plants, herbs, and non-plant-based substances was likely used by and for enslaved African Americans. One develops a sense about these medical treatments that only the surface has been scratched in the narratives and that much more can be done to explore the use of plants and herbs as medical remedies.

IMPORTANCE OF FAITH AND TRUST

All systems of medical and health care involve faith and trust (Watson 1984). Slave medical care was no exception. Most of the WPA respondents registered confidence in their herb doctors, conjurers, and the folk practitioners who administered treatments. Even though many of the substances—plant and non-plant—have stood the test of modern scientific scrutiny and have medical value, it is clear that some of the remedies had no medical value, but slaves nevertheless viewed them as effective. How can this be the case? One explanation is that patient faith, confidence, trust, and all of the other beliefs and attitudes during the period promoted healing and the perceived effectiveness of treatments. Enslaved African American medical practicioners

were holistic (Bailey 2002). There was a tendency of herb doctors and conjurers during slavery and thereafter to treat the whole patient. This approach has a surprisingly modern ring to it.

We are only recently beginning to appreciate the role that faith and belief play in effective medical care, such as that for cancer patients. The role faith plays in the healing process is increasingly being appreciated by modern medical research. As some of the narratives suggest, the patient's faith in the doctor and treatment was central to perceived medical effectiveness, whether justified or not.

During the 1930s, the WPA narratives captured the fact that some respondents continued to have confidence in traditional African American folk and herbal medicine into the twentieth century. One respondent (Rawick 5: 216) commented, "I still believes in them old home-made medicines and I don't believe in so many doctors." This confidence has continued through the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries. For example, Eric Bailey's (2002) study of informal medical practices among African Americans cited the following cases:

> Informant 54: A middle-aged African American man with a history of essential hypertension who uses sassafras and leaf tea in treating his slightly elevated blood pressure. Although under a doctor's care, he continues his folk treatment regimen in conjunction with his physician's prescribed medication because, "If I tell him that I am using herbs, he would think that I was silly."
>
> Informant 4: A 59-year-old African American woman who practices a folk care regimen (vinegar and herbal teas) to treat her high blood pressure and believes that one's health is the responsibility of the individual and not the physician.

The fact that many of the WPA respondents referred to materia medica that have been proven to be effective is a message that should not be lost. While they may not have always understood why, it cannot be denied that some of the materia medica they used was indeed effective. In some cases, the herb, plant, or substance was correctly linked with the desired medical benefit. We, in modern society, continue to use these same remedies for the same purposes. There is a common heritage of plant and herbal treatments used by slaves and their folk practitioners that links to us. We may benefit from continuing to review what they used and how they used it, just as medical anthropologists explore the tropical forests for new plants, drugs, and medical treatments.

This is not to suggest that everything they used was effective or had medical value. In many instances, what they used and how they used it placed the patient at risk of more harm or, at least, of receiving little benefit. For example, the traditional African practice of rubbing mud on the umbilical

stump undoubtedly harmed many infants and may have even killed some. With the benefit of hindsight, we can second-guess some of the medical treatments they used. However, it should be noted that established White medical practice of the period also could be equally ineffective and sometimes had negative effects on the patients. We must be careful not to judge some of the questionable practices and remedies too critically because they may have been consistent with medical practices of the times.

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN HEALTH CARE GIVERS

Mathews (1992: 70) wrote, "The origins of black traditional medicine can be traced to slave culture in the antebellum south." A number of studies have described how the African American and enslaved African American medical and healing practices present in the antebellum South continue to exist throughout many regions of contemporary America (Bailey 2002; Bankole 1998; Fontenot 1994; Hill 1973). Fontenot (1994: 127) wrote of contemporary Louisiana, "Though there are medical options open to this African-American population many people still rely on the herbal knowledge and cures in the area." People continue to take their children and themselves to secret doctors for a variety of medical problems. They do so out of a long-established confidence that these treatments work, distrust of physicians, and economic necessity. The healing traditions found in the antebellum South and some extending back to Africa are alive in contemporary society. Watson (1984) concluded that older African Americans continue to rely on herb doctors and folk medicine as a supplement, or alternative, to formal or "established medicine." Modern secret doctors, conjurers, and African American folk practitioners continue to use enduring remedies, some of which were identified in the WPA narratives and other oral traditions.

Modern herb doctors continue to use some of the remedies in the same manner mentioned in the narratives. Byrd and Clayton (2000: 184) wrote, "Traditional root doctors, herbalists, and voodoo practitioners continue to have a quiet and persistent presence in African American communities today." Because African American herb doctors, conjurers, and folk practitioners have always heavily relied on an oral tradition before, after, and following slavery, we must continue to probe these oral traditions for answers.

The importance attached into belief continues today. Carole Hill (1973: 850) found that contemporary African American healers often specialized in ailments, such as "taking the fire out of burns, "stopping the bleeding," or "curing the thrash." The healers described by Hill always had rituals involving words and in some treatments used materia medica, such as cotton placed in ears, roots, herbs, oils, and biblical quotes. All of the healers

studied by Hill learned their trade via the oral tradition and based their practices on religious beliefs found in the bible.

With medical costs rising and formal medical care economically segregating lower income groups, the rise of alternative and more affordable—and hence accessible—medical care is likely to increase. Given the continued reliance on herbal and folk healers in many African American communities, as documented by Fontenot (1994), Hill (1973), Bailey (2002), Bankole, (1998), and others, people will continue to use and even become more reliant on alternative medical solutions that often trace their roots to the antebellum South and practices of enslaved African Americans.

There is reason to believe that by studying such practices, we may run the risk of discovering new approaches to medical ailments using relatively unknown remedies or unconventional practices. In the past, African American folk medicine was dismissed by the White medical establishment, even though we have learned that some of what was used was effective. Bankole (1998: 121) wrote, "Contrary to long-held beliefs, the narratives, oral histories, enslaved African American owner records, medical records and case studies of the antebellum period indicate that Africans played an important role in the development of medicine during the period of enslaved Africans." This may continue to be true in contemporary times.

Finally, it should be noted that the herb doctors, conjurers, folk practitioners, and root doctors—or however they were labeled during slavery and thereafter—can be viewed as exercising power and social control in their respective communities. The practice of medical care provided some patients with a sense of self-determination. Under the yoke of slavery, the oppressed could control or at least attempt to control an important aspect of their lives—their health and the health of others. Sometimes they did this as effectively, or even more so, than their White counterparts.

Appendix A

Plant and Herb Treatments

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Apple (Pyrus Malus)	Root used for unspecified medical purpose.	Nan Stewart, OH.
Asa foetida/Asafetida/ Assafoetida/Assfedity/ Azsafitty (*Ferula asafetida*)	Worn around neck to prevent illness, including asthma, colic, headaches, measles, whooping cough, mumps, fever, diphtheria, small pox, chickenpox, and others.	Harry Johnson, AK; Henrietta McCarthy and Florence Lee, OH; Hannah Jones, AL; Silva Durant, SC; William Henry Towns, AL; Rose Williams, TX; Annie Ware, TX; Ellen Payne, TX; John McAdams, TX; Henry Lewis, TX; Anna Lee, TX; Carter J. Jackson, TX; Ann Hawthorne, TX; Harriet Chesley, TX; Alice Cole, TX; Darcus Barnett, TX; Darcus Barnett, TX; Emma Lowran, SC; Harriett Robinson, OK; Alice Douglass, OK; John Davenport, SC; Chency Cross, AL; Sylvia Durant, SC; Alice Douglass, OK; L. B. Barner, OK; Nan Stewart, OH; Carrie

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	Medical Use	WPA Source
		Davis, AL; Angie Garrett, AL; William Mcwhorter; GA; Susan Mcintosh, GA; Anderson, Furr, GA; Minnie Davis, GA; Smith Simmons, MS; Mark Oliver, MS; Lizzie Norfleet, MS; Prince Johnson, MS; Will Sheets, GA; and Rena Clark, MS.
	Mixed with tar water for unspecified purpose.	Millie Ann Smith, TX.
	Mixtures and compounds such as: combined with camphor and worn around neck to prevent illness; and dipped in turpentine and worn around neck to prevent disease.	Lou Williams, TX; and Victoria Adams, SC.
	Unspecified medical treatment.	Mary Reynolds, TX; Mary Colbert, GA; Charlie Hudson, GA; and Rachel Adams, GA.
	Used as a tea for unspecified illness.	Mary Colbert, GA.
Balmony/Barmonia Weed (*Chelone glabra*)	Made into tea for chills and fever.	Mollie Dawson, TX.
Bear Grass (*Xerophyllum tenax*)	Boiled and mixed with black haw root, sour dock, grape root, bull nettle, sweet gum bark, red oak bark as a blood medicine.	Della Fountain, OK.
Bittersweet/bitter weeds/ Bittercrest Weeds (*Solanum dulcamara*)	Combined with grease to cure rheumatism.	Samuel Lyons, OH.
	Unspecified medical use as tea.	Vina Moore, MS.
	Tea for unspecified ill; tea for fever, chills, and colds; use as a tea for sickness; and used as tea and bath for malaria.	Rose Williams, TX; Rosa Pollard, TX; John Bates, TX; and Easter Wells, SC.
Black Gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*)	Tea used for unspecified illnesses.	William Mcwhorter; GA.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Black Haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*)	For female trouble and high blood pressure.	Curley McGade, TX.
	Bark used for a variety of ailments; barks from wild cherry, poplar, black haw, slippery elm and dried mullein leaves mixed and brewed to make bitters that was used for a variety of illnesses, including rheumatism, fever, stomach ache and other sickness.	Harriet Miller, GA; and James Bolton, GA.
	Used as a general purgative.	Ned Meridan Chaney, MS.
	Leaves made into tea for fever or colds.	Lu Lee, TX; and George Womble, GA.
	Root blended with cherry bark, dogwood bark, and "chinquin" bark to make a general purpose tonic; and boiled and mixed with black haw root, sour dock, bear grass, grape root, bull nettle, sweet gum bark, red oak bark as a blood medicine.	Sam Bush, TX; and Della Fountain, OK.
Black Pepper (*Piper nigrum*)	Used for menstrual headaches.	Curley Mcgade, TX.
Black Snake Root (*Polygala senega*)	Unspecified medical use.	Josephine Bacchus, SC.
	Used for constipation.	Robert Bryant, MO.
	Tea for colds and fevers, sick stomach; fevers, and headaches.	Harriet Collins, TX; George Taylor, AL; Griffin Myrax, AK; Ned Meridan Chaney, MS; Green Willbanks, GA; and Dosia Harris, GA.
	Mixed with corn shucks to make tea to cure chills and malaria; and combined with anvil iron and whiskey to make tonic for consumption.	Henry Brown, SC; and Lou Smith, OK.
	Used for "blood trouble."	George Pretty, FL.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosis*)	Roots used for unspecified purposes.	Josephine Hyles, TX.
Blackjack Vine (*Sagittaria platyphylla*)	Made into tea for fever.	Lu Lee, TX.
Blood Root/Coon Root (*Sanguinaria Canadensis or Sanguinaria minor*)	Tea used for common ailments.	Anthony Dawson, OK.
	Tea used for leg cramps.	Harriet Collins, TX.
Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*)	Used as a tea for colds and fevers, aching joints, or croup.	Wade Owens, AL; Sol Walton, TX; Ellen Payne, TX; Henry Cheatam, AL; Anthony Dawson, OK; John Davenport, SC; Emma Hurley, GA; Toy Hawkins, GA; Harriet Miller, GA; Matilda McKinney, GA; and Susan Mcintosh, GA.
	Mixed with catnip weeds, comi (cami?) to make tea for general sickness.	Steve Jones, TX.
Branch Elder (*Sambuci nigra*)	Twigs and dogwood berries used for chills.	Solomon Caldwell, SC.
Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*) or Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)	Two buckeyes carried in pocket will ward off joint misery; or carried in pocket to prevent cramps or colic.	Vinnie Brunson, TX; and Harriet Miller, GA.
	Combined with gourd, goat seed, oil, turpentine, and lobelia for sickness.	Abraham Chambers, AL.
	Used in little bags to prevent illness; or worn around necks to prevent diseases.	Mark Oliver, MS; and Green Willbanks, GA.
Bull Nettle (*Cnidoscoius texanus*)	Root used for kidney trouble or clap.	Curley Mcgrade, TX.
	Root boiled with castor beans and horsemint and used as a bath (soak) for swelling.	Easter Wells, OK.
	Root boiled and mixed with black haw root, sour dock, bear grass, grape root, sweet gum bark, and red oak bark as a blood medicine.	Della Fountain, OK.
Bull Tongue Root (*Sagittaria lancifolia*)	Used as a tea for many ailments.	Rhodus Walton, GA.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Bulrush (*Scirpus cyperinus* or *Typha latifola*)	Made into tea for sore throat.	Simon Hare, MS.
Burdock (*Articum lappa*)	Roots soaked in whiskey for unspecified illness.	Victoria Adams, SC.
	Root mixed with citrate of potash for scrofula.	Easter Sudie Campbell, KS.
Burr Vine (*See* Burdock)	General use as tea for ailments including stomachaches or cramps.	Sarah Ford, TX; and Mark Oliver, MS.
Butterfly Weed or Pleurisy Root (*Asclepias syriaca* or *Asclepias tuberosa*)	As tea for pleurisy or chills, and other ailments.	Millie Ann Smith, TX; Gus Smith, MO; Rhodus Walton, GA; William McWhorter; GA; and Harriet Miller, GA.
	Mixed with life everlasting, dog-fennel and butterfly root to cure "palia" and pleurisy; or mixed with horehound make tea or candy for worms.	Polly Colbert, OK and Georgia Smith, GA.
Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*)	Leaves used as a wrap for fevers.	Fannie Moore, NC.
	Unspecified medical use.	James Bolton, GA.
Cactus (unspecified)	Roots made in to tea for fever, chills, and colic.	Harriett Barrett, TX.
Calamus (Sweet Flag) (*Acornus calamus*)	Used as a tea for children's colic.	Mary Thompson, AL.
	Unspecified medical use to "clean out."	Adeline Hodge, AL.
	Used for sickness.	Ellen Payne, TX.
	Unspecified medical use.	George Taylor, AL.
	"Flagroot" made into tea for pain.	Jane Lassiter, NC.
Cami-weed/ [Clammyweed/ Polanisia dodecandra (*Polanisia trachysperma*)?]	Mixed with peach tree leaves and mayflower roots and boiled into syrup for malaria.	Charlie Sandles, TX.
	Made into tea for fevers, chills, and colds or malaria.	Rosa Pollard, TX; John Mosley, TX; and Toby Jones, TX.
	Mixed with peach tree leaves, red oak bark, privy roots boiled into syrup for sickness.	John McAdams, TX.
	Roots mixed with red oak bark and privet roots for	Andy McAdams, TX.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Cami-weed/ (*continued*)	chills, fevers, and malaria.	
	Mixed with catnip weeds, boneset to make tea for general sickness.	Steve Jones, TX.
	Roots mixed with peach tree leaves, red oak bark, and privet roots cooked and boiled and used for chills, fevers, and malaria.	Anna Lee, TX.
	Mixed with peach tree leaves and red oak bark.	Lizzie Grant, TX.
	Boiled into tea with sassafras, poke weed roots, red oak bark and peach tree leaves for malaria, chills, fever, and colic.	Lizzie Grant, TX.
	Mixed with red oak bark as a tea used for chills and fever.	Eli Davidson, TX.
	Used to keep off chills, fever, malaria, colic, and others.	Parilee Daniels, TX.
	Made into tea with red oak bark and peach tree leaves for malaria, chills, and fever.	Charlie Cooper, TX.
	Used for fevers, chills, malaria, or sick stomach.	William Coleman, TX.
	Blended with sassafras roots and peach tree leaves to make syrup for chills and fevers.	Eli Coleman, TX.
	Cami weed blended with privet roots, mayflower root, and peach tree leaves and boiled down into syrup for chills, malaria, and typhoid fever.	Alice Cole, TX.
	Cami blended with sassafras root and red oak bark to prevent sickness.	Louis Cain, TX.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*)	A camphor string around the neck for chills and fevers.	William Byrd, TX.
	Put on string and tied around neck to prevent illness.	Jane Cotton, TX.
	Mixed with asafetida and worn around neck for colds.	Lou Williams, TX.
	Worn on string around neck for teething.	Rosa Pollard, TX.
	Worn around neck top prevent malaria.	Anna Lee, TX.
	Tied around neck to keep off chills, fever, or malaria.	Dempsey Jordan, TX; and William Byrd, TX.
	Worn around neck for chills, fever, and teething.	Harriett Barrett, TX.
	Used for a variety of ailments.	Rachel Adams, GA.
Castor Beans (*Ricinus communis*)	Unspecified use for sickness, colds, or fevers.	Andrew Pullen, TX; Ellen Payne, TX; Ann Hawthorne, TX; Pierce Harper, TX; Richard Carruthers, TX; Ellen Betts, TX; Pauline Worth, SC; Lina Anne Pendergrass, SC; Easter Wells, OK; Richard Toler, OH; Nan Stewart, OH; Fred Forbes, NE; George Eason, GA; Claude Augusta Wilson, FL; George Womble, GA; Charlie Pye, GA; Annie Price, GA; Susan Mcintosh, GA; Amanda McDaniel, GA; Charlie Hudson, GA; Emmaline Heard, GA; Milton Hammond, GA; Isiah Green, GA; Davis Mose, GA; Rev. Squires Jackson, FL; Barney Alford, MS; and Celestia Avery, GA.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Castor Beans (*continued*)	Mixed with whiskey to improve blood.	Sam Polite, SC.
	Boiled castor beans and bull nettle root used as a bath (soak) for swelling.	Fannie Griffin, SC.
	Used for worms.	Ella Harris, AL.
	For jaundice.	Richard Carruthers, TX.
	Mixed with roots of wild lettuce mixed with cider beans, maple sap, and turpentine for sore throats and colds.	Everett Ingram, AL.
	To ease pain of teething.	William Mcwhorter, GA.
	Used for stomach ache.	Jim Allen, MS; John Cole, GA; and Marshal Butler, GA.
Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*)	Unspecified medical use.	William Emmons, OH; Henrietta McCarthy and Florence Lee, OH; Victoria Adams, SC; William Mcwhorter; GA; and Celestia Avery, GA.
	As a tea for chills, fevers, and colds.	Mary Thompson, AL; Pauline Worth, SC; Marshal Butler, GA; and Emeline Stepney, GA.
	Treatment for asthma.	Curley Mcgade, TX.
	Made into tea for hives.	Lu Lee, TX.
	Mixed with boneset and cami to make tea for general sickness.	Steve Jones, TX.
	Used as a tea for health.	Lucy Pulliam McBee, MS.
	Tea used for thrash.	Phil Town, GA.
	Tea good for newborn babies or used to stop babies from crying.	George Pretty, FL; and Easter Sudie Campbell, KS.
	Tea mixed with sage for babies that had chills or fevers.	Hector Smith, SC.
	Used with horehound as a tea for pain.	Jane Lassiter, NC.
Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla/Matricaria recutia*)	Used as a tea or mixed with whiskey.	Gus Smith, MO.
	Mixed with sage to make tea for sickness.	Lou Williams, TX.
Cherry (*See* Wild Cherry)		

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Chestnut (unspecified)	Inside bark of tree used for tea for coughs.	Joanna Thompson Isom, MS.
	Leaves used for asthma.	Julia Brown, GA.
Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach L.*)	Used for stomachache.	Alonzo Power, GA.
	For scrofula boil with poke roots and bluestone to make a salve and rub on sores. Then rub with black chicken feathers dipped in hog lard to bring sores to head. Then press out heads.	Janey Landrum, TX.
	Worn around neck for teething.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Made into tea for unspecified use.	Ester Green, AL.
Chinchona or Cinchona (*Cinchona ledgeriana* or *Cinchona pubescens*)	For chills or fever.	Katie Arbony, AK; Lavinia Lewis, TX; Bill and Ellen Thomas; TX; and Louis Davis, MS.
	Used for spring malaria and common ailments.	Darcus Barnett, TX.
	Unspecified medical use.	Andrew Pullen, TX; Carter Jackson, TX; Ellen Payne, TX; Jeptha Choice, TX; Jacob Branch, TX; and Jim Allen, MS.
Clove (*Syzgium aromaticum*)	Cloves mixed with whiskey to reduce pain.	Dellie Lewis, AL.
	Used by woman after childbirth for "bruised" blood.	Dellie Lewis, AL.
Coffee (*Coffea Arabica, Coffea Robusta*, or *Coffea Liberica*)	Grounds smoked in pipe for hay fever.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.
Collard (*Brassica oleracea L.*)	Wet leaf tied on aching head or skin sores for pain.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.
	Unspecified medical use.	James Bolton, GA.
Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)	Made into tea for unspecified medical purposes.	Emma Hurley, GA.
Corn (*Zea mays*)	Corn shucks made into poultices for side ache.	Zenia Culp, AK.
	Shucks made as a tea for the flu, chills, and fever.	Rachel Hankins, AK; Lou Walton, TX; Martha

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Corn (*continued*)		Patton, TX; and Richard Carruthers, TX.
	Cornmeal mixed with lard, and poke root made into salve for sores and bruises.	Andy McAdams, TX.
	Meal mixed with pine tar or bark and poke root and made into syrup and added to tallow or grease for a salve.	Mary Gaffney, TX.
	Used as a poultice for foot swelling.	Govan Littlejohn, SC.
	Mixed with corn shucks to make tea to cure chills and malaria.	Lou Smith, OK.
	Shuck tea to address hives.	Bill and Ellen Thomas, TX.
	Meal mixed with flour to make pills for general illness.	Wes Brady, TX.
Cotton (*Gossypium herbaceum*)	Roots used for malaria and fevers or chills.	Tucker Smith, TX.
	Roots chewed to keep women from bearing children.	Anna Lee, TX; and William Coleman, TX.
	Seed made into tea for chills and fever.	Sol Walton, TX.
Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)	Root used for unspecified medical use.	Dulcinda Baker Martin, KT.
Dewberry (*Rubus trivialis*)	Wine used for stomachaches.	Georgia Smith, GA.
Dogwood (*Cornus florida)*	Unspecified medical use of the blossoms or bark.	Andrew Pullen, TX; William Mathews, TX; Fannie Moore, NC; and Harriet Miller, GA.
	Mixed with black haw root blended with cherry bark and "chinquin" bark to make a general purpose tonic.	Sam Bush, TX.
	Made into tea with cherry tree and olive bush for sickness.	Morgan Scurry, SC.
	Mixed with whiskey to improve blood.	Lina Anne Pendergrass, SC.
	Mixed with branch elder twigs for chills.	Solomon Caldwell, SC; and Nan Stewart, OH.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	Tea used for colds.	Gus Smith, MO.
	Buds used as a laxative.	Smith Simmons, MS.
	Used for unknown sores that occur in the fall.	Easter Sudie Campbell, KS.
	Tea used for worms.	Phil Town, GA.
Dollar Leaf/Prostrate Tick-Trefoil/Snout Bean (*Desmodium rotundifolium* or *Rhyncosia reniformis*)	Make tea for bad breath.	Anne Ware, TX.
Echinacea (*Echinacea angustifolia*) (*See also* Sampson Root or Black Sampson Root)	Tea used for cramps.	Phil Town, GA.
	Unspecified medical use.	Josephine Bacchus, SC; Sam Bush, TX; Jacob Branch, TX; and Anne Rice, SC.
	Combined with red coon root, camphor, or whiskey for joint pain.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Pains in stomach.	Pierce Harper, TX; and Fannie Moore, NC.
	Tea used for bellyache.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.
	Mixed with whiskey as a daily preventive.	Ned Meridan Chaney, MS.
Elder/Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)	Worn around neck for teething.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Unspecified tea for babies.	Henrietta McCarthy and Florence Lee, OH.
	Flowers used to remove red bugs and tick as salve.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Leaves boiled to make tea and poured into sores.	Rhody Holsell, MO.
	Unspecified medical use as tea.	William Emmons, OH.
	Made into tea for fever.	Henry Barnes, AL.
Fennel/Yellow Weed/ Dog Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)	Used for whooping cough.	Joanna Thompson Isom, MS.
	Made into tea and bath for fevers.	Joanna Thompson Isom, MS.
	Mixed with molasses and hog hoof into a tea for consumption (tuberculosis) and coughs.	Joanna Thompson Isom, MS.
	Made into tea for chills and fevers.	Green Cumby, TX.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Fennel (*continued*)	Mixed with corn shucks to make tea to cure chills and malaria.	Lou Smith, OK.
	Mixed with life everlasting and butterfly root to cure "palia" and pleurisy.	Polly Colbert, OK.
Feverfew/Fever Grass (Tanacetum parthenium)	Used a purgative when taken as a tea.	George Pretty, FL.
	Tea used for unspecified illnesses.	William Mcwhorter, GA.
	For sickness or fever.	Wade Owens, AL; and Henry Lewis, TX.
Fig (*Ficus carica*)	Leaves used for rash.	George Pretty, FL.
	Used to draw boils.	George Pretty, FL.
	Leaves applied to forehead for fever.	George Pretty, FL.
Flagroot (*See* Calamus)		
Flax/Flux Weed (*Linum usitatissimum*)	Made into tea for upset stomach.	Griffin Myrax, AK.
Fleaweed (*Galium verum*)	Used for toothache and neuralgia.	Henry Lewis, TX.
	Made into tea for sickness.	Hal Hutson, TN.
Garlic (*Allium sativum*)	Worn around neck to prevent illness.	Eva Martin, TX; Henry Ryan, SC; Harriett Robinson, OK; and Chency Cross, AL.
	Unspecified medical use as water or poultice.	Victoria Adams, SC; Nan Stewart, OH; Wheeler Gresham, GA; Emma Hurley, GA; and Emma Hurley, GA.
	Mixed with whiskey for good health.	Adeline Willis, GA.
	Mixed with whiskey for worms.	Mary Colbert, GA.
	Used with Jerusalem oak for worms.	Ella Harris, AL.
	Garlic water taken for colds.	Manuel Johnson, GA.
	Roasted garlic juice was given to children for illness.	James Bolton, GA.
	Used to make poultice for pneumonia.	James Bolton, GA.
Ginger (*Zingiber Officinale*)	Leaves were used as a wrap for fevers.	None identified but likely used by some. Fanny

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
		Moore, NC, may have used ginger.
Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*)	Leaves had unspecified medical use.	Gus Smith, MO.
Golden Rod (*Solidago virgaurea*)	Mixed with mullen, horehound, cherry bark, and golden rod to make tea.	Annie Davis, AL.
	Unspecified medical use.	Gus Smith, MO.
	Tea used for fever.	George Pretty, FL.
Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*)		None identified in the WPA narratives but likely used by some.
Goose Grass (*Eleusine indica*)	Used as a tea for stomach aches.	Robert Bryant, MO.
Grape (*Vitis vinifera*)	Roots used for swollen feet.	Henry Lewis, TX.
	Roots were boiled and mixed with black haw root, sour dock, bear grass, bull nettle, sweet gum bark, and red oak bark to treat blood.	Della Fountain, OK.
Grey Beard (*Chionanthus virginicus*)	Tea used for chills.	George Briggs, SC.
Heart Leaf/Philodendron *(Philodendron scandens)*	Used in a tea for unspecified illness.	Davis Mose, GA.
Hickory (*Carya ovata*) or Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*)	Bark used for unspecified medical purpose.	Dulcinda Baker Martin, KT.
	Leaf used to bring on sweats.	Henry Brown, SC.
Holly (*Ruscus aculeatus* or *Ilex aquifolium*)	Mixed with horsemint, and life-everlasting to make a tea for sickness.	Carrie Davis, AL.
Hops (*Humulus lupuluse*)	Used as a cure for rheumatism.	Sarah Louise Augustus, NC.
Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare* or *Ballota nigra*)	Unspecified medical use.	William Emmons, OH; Mary Colbert, GA; Manuel Johnson, GA; Susan Mcintosh, GA; Hamp Kennedy, MS; and Toy Hawkins, GA.
	Mixed with mullen, cherry bark, and golden rod to make tea.	Annie Davis, AL.
	Made as a tea for sickness, colds, fevers, and coughs.	Sally Murphy, AL; George Taylor, AL; Annie Ware, TX; Charles Hayes, AL;

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Horehound (*continued*)		Fannie Moore, NC; Emeline Stepney, GA; and Nettie Henry, MS.
	Mixed with catnip to make tea for pain.	Jane Lassiter, NC.
Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*)	Candy used for worms.	Phil Town, GA.
	Mixed with butterfly root to make tea or candy for worms.	Georgia Smith, GA.
	Made into candy with brown sugar for colds and sickness.	Julia Brown, GA.
Horsemint (*Monarda punctata*)	Use as tea for chills and fevers.	Millie Ann Smith, TX; Pierce Harper, TX; Green Cumby, TX; Charles Hayes, AL; and Nettie Henry, MS.
	Used as a tea for general ailments.	Sarah Ford, TX.
	Boiled with castor beans and bull nettle root used as a bath (soak) for swelling.	Easter Wells, SC.
	Mixed with life-everlasting and holly to make a tea for sickness.	Carrie Davis, AL.
	Tea used for sickness.	Ed Crump, MS.
	Unspecified medical use.	Hamp Kennedy, MS.
Horseradish (*Armoracia rusticana*)	Root was used for unspecified medical use.	Dulcinda Baker Martin, KT.
	Root was used as a poultice put on head for headaches.	Harriet Collins, TX.
Indian Root or Indian Pink Root (worm grass) (*Spigelia marilandica*)	Put on boils.	Cecil George, LA.
Ipecac (*Cephaelis ipecacuanha*)	Unspecified use for illness.	John Crawford, TX; Ellen Betts, TX; Stearlin Arnwine, TX; and George Eason, GA.
Jerusalem Oak/Weed (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*)	Mixed with sorghum syrup or made into candy for worms.	Henry Ryan, SC; Esther Green, AL; Manuel Johnson, GA; and Charles Hayes, AL.
	Made into tea for chills and fevers.	Millie Ann Smith, TX.
	Used with garlic for worms.	Henry Cheatam, AL.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	Unspecified uses to build children up.	Everett Ingram, AL.
	Used for worms.	Louis Davis, MS; Wheeler Gresham, GA; and Julia Cole, GA.
	Seeds mixed with syrup for unspecified purposes in the spring.	Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
	Mixed with sugar to make a candy for colds.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Seeds mashed up and given to children for worms or made into tea for worms.	George Strickland, AL; Sol Walton, TX; Henry Barnes, AL; Ella Harris, AL; and Charles Hayes, AL.
	Boiled down into syrup with red oak bark, and privet roots for malaria, fever, and chills.	Mary Gaffney, TX; and John Crawford, TX.
Jimson Weed/Thorn Apple (*Datura stramonium*)	Mixed into a salve with lamp oil, quinine, turpentine, and camphor for chest and throat congestion.	Sampson Willis, TX.
	Mixed into a salve with lamp oil, quinine, turpentine, and camphor for chest and throat congestion.	Sampson Willis, TX.
	Weed was used for unspecified medical purposes.	Gilliam Lowran, SC.
	Mashed into a pulp for pain.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Used for rheumatism.	Julia Brown, GA.
	For headache or fever.	Henry Brown, SC.
	Used as a tea for stomach aches.	Davis Mose, GA.
	Tea made for unspecified medical purposes.	Gilliam Lowran, SC.
	Made into tea for colds.	Alec Bostwick, GA.
	Used as a poultice for a sore foot.	Jasper Battle, GA.
Larkspur (*Delphinium consolida*)	Unspecified medical use.	Jacob Branch, TX.
Lemon (*Citrus limon*)	Juice used for corn removal.	Janey Landrum, TX.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Life Everlasting/Rabbit Tobacco (*Gnaphalium obtusifolium* or *Anaphalis margaritacea*)	Tea used for fever.	Henry Cheatam, AL.
	Mixed with dog-fennel and butterfly root to cure "palia" and pleurisy.	Polly Colbert, OK.
	Mixed with horsemint and holly to make a tea for sickness.	Carrie Davis, AL.
	Tea used for colds.	Charles Hayes, AL.
	Tea used for unspecified purposes.	Emma Hurley, GA.
	Unspecified medical use.	Hamp Kennedy, MS.
	Used a bath for a leg.	John R. Cox, KS.
	Rabbit tobacco, pine tops, and mullen leaves boiled together to make a tea mixed with molasses for a variety of ailments.	Will Sheets, GA.
Lime (*Citrus aurantifolia*)	Juice used for unspecified medical use.	Janey Landrum, TX.
Lobelia/Indian Tobacco (*Lobelia inflate*)	Unspecified use of oil.	Amanda Mcdaniel, GA.
	Combined with gourd, buckeye, oil, and turpentine for sickness.	Abraham Chambers, AL.
Mandrake/May Apple (*Podophyllum peltatum*)	Root used as laxative.	Oliver Bell, AL.
	Made into tea for unspecified medical purposes.	Dosia Harris, GA.
Maple (*Acer rubrum*)	Sap was mixed with roots of wild lettuce mixed with cider beans, castor beans, and turpentine for sore throats and colds.	Fred Forbes, NE.
Marshmallow or Marsh Root (*Althaea officinalis*)	Unspecified medical use.	Jacob Branch, TX.
Mint (*Mentha Aquatica* or *Mentha Piperica*)	Used for rheumatism.	Tildy Collins, OH.
	Tea used for unspecified illnesses.	William Mcwhorter, GA.
Moss (unspecified)	Unspecified medical use.	Annie Ware, TX.
Mullen/Mullein (*Verbascum densiflorum*)	Unspecified medical use.	Dulcinda Baker Martin, KT; William Emmons, OH; and William Mcwhorter; GA.
	Made into tea for colds or sickness.	Harriet Collins, TX; Marion Johnson, AK; Hal Hutson, TN; Matilda McKinney, GA; and Wheeler Gresham, GA.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	Made into tea for swelling in foot.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Leaves mixed with poke roots, alum, and salt into tea for rheumatism.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Flowers mixed with poke root, alum, and salt to make a liniment.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Used with salt to bath babies to prevent sickness.	Thomas Anderson, SC.
	Leaves made into poultice for swelling.	Henry Barnes, AL.
	Mixed with horehound, cherry bark, and golden rod to make tea.	Annie Davis, AL.
	Tea used for colds and swollen joints.	Charles Hayes, AL.
	Mixed with sassafras to make tea for sickness.	Isaac Johnson, NC.
	Barks from wild cherry, poplar, black haw, slippery elm and dried mullein leaves mixed and brewed to make bitters that was used for a variety of illnesses, including rheumatism, fever, stomach ache, and other sickness.	James Bolton, GA.
	Mullen is combined with honey and alum to make syrup for colds.	Harriet Miller, GA.
	Leaves used in bath for dropsy.	Julia Brown, GA.
	Leaves used for fever.	Nettie Henry, MS.
	Leaves boiled with rabbit tobacco and pine tops to make a tea mixed with molasses for a variety of ailments.	Will Sheets, GA.
Mulberry (White Mulberry—*Morus alba L.*; Black Mulberry—*Morus. nigra L.*; American Mulberry, Red Mulberry—*Morus rubra L.*)	For kidney trouble.	Henry Lewis, TX.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*)	Unspecified medical use.	Willis Easter, TX.
	Worn around the neck for headache.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Worn around neck to make eyes strong.	Bill and Ellen Thomas, TX.
	For the heart.	Virginia Harris, MS.
	For neuralgia.	Henry Lewis, TX; and Sim Greely, SC.
	Worn around neck to prevent sickness.	Silva Durant, SC.
	Worn around neck for unspecified reason.	Sylvia Durant, SC.
Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*)	Broth mixed with chicken and used for chills.	Katie Arbony, AK.
	Dried blossoms are soaked in water and applied to boils.	George Pretty, FL.
Olive (*Olea europaea)*	Made into tea with dogwood and cherry tree for sickness.	Morgan Scurry, SC.
Onion (*Allium cepa*)	Used in house to prevent consumption (tuberculosis).	Hal Hutson, TN.
	Boil onion and put sugar on it for cough.	Adeline Walton, TX.
	Mixed with honey and vinegar for cough.	Tucker Smith, TX.
	Mixed with honey for colds.	Charlie Sandles, TX.
	Mixed with turpentine and honey to make syrup for colds.	John McAdams, TX; and William Coleman, TX.
	Kept in pocket or in room to prevent illness.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Mixed with pine tree bark and pure honey to make cough syrup.	Andy McAdams, TX.
	Blended with tree rosin, honey to make cough syrup.	Anna Lee, TX.
	Unspecified medical use.	Harriett Robinson, OK.
	Mixed with charcoal and honey for babies for sickness.	Alice Cole, TX.
	Worn to prevent illness.	Harriett Barrett, TX.
	Used roasted onion ashes as a base for tea for sore throat.	Gus Smith, MO.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Orange (*Citrus aurantium*)	Brushes and leaves mixed with whiskey and made into tea for yellow fever.	Rose Mosley, AK.
Peach Tree (*Prunus persica*)	Unspecified medical use.	William Henry Towns, AL.
	Tea for fever, chills, colds, or malaria.	Rosa Pollard, TX; and John Mosley, TX.
	Mixed with privet roots, red oak bark, and cami weed roots and boiled into syrup for sickness.	John McAdams, TX.
	Leaves mixed with red oak bark, cami weed roots, and privet roots—cooked and boiled and used for chills, fevers, and malaria.	Anna Lee, TX.
	Mixed with red oak bark and cami weed for unspecified medical purpose.	Lizzie Grant, TX.
	Made into tea for malaria, chills, and fever.	Parilee Daniels, TX.
	Used for fevers, chills, malaria, and sick stomach.	Charlie Cooper, TX.
	Blended with sassafras roots and cami weed to make syrup for chills and fevers.	William Coleman, TX.
	Cami weed blended with privet roots, mayflower root, and peach tree leaves and boiled down into syrup for chills, malaria, and typhoid fever.	Eli Coleman, TX.
	Made into tea to prevent malaria, chills, and fever.	Alice Cole, TX.
	Boiled into tea with sassafras, cami weed, red oak bark, and poke weed roots for malaria, chills, fever, and colic.	Louis Cain, TX.
	Unspecified medical use as a tea.	Lizzie Atkins, TX.
	Used for common ailments.	Anne Rice, SC.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Peach Tree (*continued*)	Leaves made into a poultice and used for inflammation of the back.	Anthony Dawson, OK.
	Leaves used as tea for fever.	Charity Jones, MS; and Julia Brown, GA.
Pennyroyal (*Mentha Pulegium*)	Unspecified medical use.	Dulcinda Baker Martin, KT.
	Unspecified medical use.	Henrietta McCarthy and Florence Lee, OH.
	Used as a tea or mixed with whiskey.	Gus Smith, MO.
	Tea used for colds.	Fannie Moore, NC.
Pepper Grass (*Lepidium virginicum*)	Tea made for unspecified medical use.	Vina Moore, MS.
	Combined with poke berry as a laxative.	Annie Ware, TX.
Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)	Tea (splinter/straw/bark)	Manuel Johnson, GA; Benny Dillard, GA; Harriet Collins, TX; Marion Johnson, AK; and Adeline Willis, GA; William Mcwhorter; GA; and Henry Barnes, AL.
	Mixed with onions and pure honey to make cough syrup.	Anna Lee, TX.
	Chew pine needles for colic.	George Fleming, SC; Gus Feaster, SC; and Thomas Anderson, SC.
	Pine oil used for colic.	Rosa Pollard, TX.
	Resin made into pills and used for backache and "starts your water."	Gus Feaster, SC; and Thomas Anderson, SC.
	For frost bite (of feet), smoke frozen heels in pine top.	Janey Landrum, TX.
	Tar mixed with poke root and make into syrup and added to tallow and mixed with cornmeal for salve.	Mary Gaffney, TX.
	Mixed into tea as a cure all.	Hector Smith, SC.
	Pine tops mixed with rabbit tobacco, and mullen leaves boiled together to make a tea	Will Sheets, GA.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	mixed with molasses for a variety of ailments.	
Pleurisy Root (*See* Butterfly Root)		
Pokeweed/Poke Root/Berries (*Phytolacca americana*)	Unspecified medical use.	Dulcinda Baker Martin, KT; and Lizzie Atkins, TX.
	Cure for small pox.	Adeline Walton, TX.
	Boiled down and mixed with egg yellow and cornmeal for sores, cuts, bruises, or burns.	Charles Sandles, TX.
	Cornmeal mixed with lard, and poke root made into salve for sores and bruises.	Andy McAdams, TX.
	Root salve used for sores and skin eruptions.	Lizze Grant, TX.
	Mixed with pine tar or bark and made into syrup and added to tallow or grease and mixed with cornmeal for salve.	Mary Gaffney, TX.
	Poke weed meal as a general good medicine; mixed with mullein flowers, alum, and salt to make a liniment.	Sarah Henderson Fuller, TX.
	Blended with lard and turpentine to make salve for sores, sprains, and bruises.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Boiled into tea with sassafras, cami weed, red oak bark, and peach tree leaves for malaria, chills, fever, and colic.	William Coleman, TX.
	Cut and strung around baby's neck for cutting teeth.	Mary Edwards, SC.
	Used as a laxative.	Lou Smith, OK.
	Root used for fever.	Thomas Carlisle, SC.
	Dried root put in whiskey for rheumatism.	Oliver Bell, AL.
	Roots boiled with sugar as a cure for asthma and colds.	George Henderson, KY.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Pokeweed (*continued*)	Poke roots boiled with sugar as a cure for asthma and colds.	Julia Brown, GA.
	Mixed with whiskey for unspecified reason.	Gus Smith, MO.
	Used for rheumatism.	Harriet Miller, GA.
Poplar (*Populus* species)	Bark mixed with Samson snake root to make tea used for colds and sore throats.	Georgia Smith, GA.
	Barks from wild cherry, poplar, black haw, slippery elm, and dried mullein leaves mixed and brewed to make bitters, which was used for a variety of illnesses, including rheumatism, fever, stomachache, and other sickness.	James Bolton, GA.
Poppy (*Papaver somniferum*)	Seeds worn to prevent illness.	Carrie Davis, AL.
Potato (*Solanum tuberosum*)	Used as a poultice for a black eye.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Potato carried in pocket for rheumatism.	Harry Johnson, AK; Aunt Ann Stokes, MO; and Mary Edwards, SC.
	Worn around both legs under the knee for physical disability.	Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
	Placed against tooth for toothache.	Easter Sudie Campbell, KS.
Prickly Ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum* or *Zanthoxylum clava-herculis*)	Taken to clean blood.	William Henry Towns, AL.
	Bark used for swollen feet.	And Henry Lewis, TX.
Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia phaeacantha*)	Made into tea for cholera.	Charlie Cooper, TX.
Privet Weed (*Ligustrum sinense*)	For tuberculosis.	John Mosley, TX.
	Roots mixed with peach tree leaves, red oak bark, and cami weed roots boiled into syrup for sickness.	Andy McAdams, TX.
	Mixed with red oak bark, peach tree leaves, cami weed roots, and privet	Anna Lee, TX.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	roots cooked and boiled and used for chills, fevers, and malaria.	
	Mixed with Jerusalem oak and red oak bark and boiled down into syrup for malaria, fevers, and chills.	Mary Gaffney, TX.
	Cami weed blended with privet roots, mayflower root, and peach tree leaves and boiled down into syrup for chills, malaria, and typhoid fever.	Alice Cole, TX.
Pumpkin (*Cucurbita pepo*)	Used for the heart.	Henry Lewis, TX.
Quinine (*See* Chinchona or Cinchona Bark/ Peruvian Bark)		
Rabbit Foot Weed—possibly (*Polypodium aurem* or fern *Polypogon monspeliensis—Grass, Trifolium arvense L.*	Mixed and boiled with sassafras to make cough syrup.	Toby Jones, TX.
	Leaves used to keep off chills, fever, malaria, colic, and others.	Parilee Daniels, TX.
Rabbit Tobacco (*See* Life Everlasting)		
Rat's Vein (Wild Arsenic Weed)	Made into tea for toothache and strong gums.	George Briggs, SC.
	Mixed with sugar to make syrup for colic.	Fannie Moore, NC.
Red Coon Root (*See* Blood Root)		
Red Oak (Swamp Red Oak) (*Quercus shumardis* or *Quercus rubra*) or Texas Red Oak (*Quercus texana*)	Bark made into tea for colds, chills, and fevers or malaria.	George Taylor, AL; John Mosley, TX; John McAdams, TX; Alice; Harriett Barrett, TX; Cole, TX; and Hector Smith, SC.
	Made into tea for hiccups.	Rosa Pollard, TX.
	Bark mixed with privet roots, peach tree leaves, and cami weed roots boiled into syrup for sickness.	Andy McAdams, TX.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Red Oak (*continued*)	Roots mixed with cami weed roots, and privet roots for chills, fevers, and malaria.	Henry Lewis, TX.
	Used for women's "troubles."	Henry Lewis, TX.
	Mixed with ashes for heartburn.	Anna Lee, TX.
	Roots mixed with privet roots for chills, fevers, and malaria.	Lizzie Grant, TX.
	Bark mixed with peach tree leaves, cami weed roots, and privet roots boiled and used for chills, fevers, and malaria.	Mary Gaffney, TX.
	Mixed with peach tree leaves and cami weed for unspecified purpose.	Eli Davidson, TX.
	Bark mixed with Jerusalem oak and privet roots and boiled down into syrup for malaria, fevers, and chills.	Parilee Daniels, TX.
	Mixed with cami weed as a tea used for chills and fever.	Charlie Cooper, TX.
	For fevers, chills, malaria, and sick stomach.	Louis Cain, TX.
	For stomachaches.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.
	Mixed with cami weed and peach tree leaves for malaria, chills, and fever.	William Coleman, TX.
	Made into tea with cami weed and sassafras roots to prevent sickness.	William Byrd, TX.
	Tea used for fevers, poor appetites, and night sweats and leaves used to heal deep cuts.	Lizzie Atkins, TX.
	Used as a bath for rheumatism.	William Mcwhorter, GA.
	Boiled and mixed with black haw root, sour dock, bear grass, grape root, bull nettle, and	Rachel Adams, GA.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	sweet gum bark as a blood medicine.	
	Tea used for unspecified illnesses.	Charity Jones, MS.
	Bark made into tea for ailments and also given to children for stomach ailments.	James Bolton, GA.
	Boiled into tea with sassafras, cami weed, poke salad roots, and peach tree leaves for malaria, chills, fever, and colic.	Della Fountain, OK.
	Tea used for running of the bowels and young girls at a certain age.	George Pretty, FL.
Red Onion (*See* Onion)		
Red Pepper (*Capsicum frutescens*)	Placed in shoes to prevent chills.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Tea used to cure flu.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.
	Used for pain.	Georgia Smith, GA.
Red Root (*Amaranthus retroflexus L*). Red root is also called common amaranth, red pigweed, redroot, rough amaranth, rough pigweed, or wild-beet.	Unspecified medical use.	Jacob Branch, TX.
Red Shank Root (*Persicaria maculosa*)	Used as a tea for many unspecified ailments or diseases.	Rhodus Walton, GA; and Dosia Harris, GA.
Redwood? (*Sequoia semperviren)*	Tea used for worms.	Phil Town, GA.
Rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum*)	Unspecified medical purpose.	John Crawford, TX; Ellen Betts, TX; and Claude Augusta Wilson, FL.
	Used to cure foot swelling.	Govan Littlejohn, SC.
	Tea used for worms in children.	Alec Bostwick, GA.
Sage (*Salvia officinalis)* (Blue/White/wild)	Tea for fevers, chills or colds.	Mary Thompson, AL; Mary Kincheon Edwards, TX; Pauline Worth, SC; and Ed Crump, MS.
	Used as a balm for unspecified purpose.	Martha Patton, TX.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Sage (*continued*)	Tea mixed with catnip for chills and fevers in babies.	Hector Smith, SC.
	Tea used for minor sickness.	Matilda McKinney, GA and Smith Simmons, MS.
	Tea used for unspecified medical purpose.	Bill and Ellen Thomas, TX.
	Tea used for menstruation or "sickened flow."	George Pretty, FL.
Sampson/Samson Snake Root (*See* Echinacea)		
Sarsaparilla (*Smilax aristolochiae folia* or *Smilax medica officinalis*)	Root used for unspecified medical purpose.	William Emmons, OH; Nan Stewart, OH; and Gus Smith, MO.
Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)	Root used as tea for blindness.	Janey Landrum, TX.
	Root used for unspecified medical purpose.	Ella Lassiter, FA; William Emmons, OH; William Henry Towns, AL; Rosie McGillery, TX; Isaac Johnson, NC; and Easter Sudie Campbell, KS.
	Bark used in tea for fever.	William Mathews, TX.
	Root used as tea to purify, cool, or purge the blood.	Annie Ware, TX; Curley Mcgade, TX; Green Cumby, TX; Vinnie Brunson, TX; and Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
	Root used as tea for fever, chills, and colds.	Rosa Pollard, TX.
	Root used as tea to keep off chills, fever, and malaria.	Dempsey Jordan, TX.
	Root used to keep off chills, fever, malaria, colic, and other ailments.	Parilee Daniels, TX.
	Root tea used for general sickness.	Harriet Chesley, TX.
	Root tea used for rheumatism.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Root blended with cami weed roots and peach tree leaves to make syrup for chills and fevers.	Eli Coleman, TX.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	Root tea made for malaria.	Jeff Calhoun, TX.
	Root tea used for spring fever.	Henry Barnes, AL.
	Root mixed into tea with cami weed and red oak bark for the prevention of sickness.	Louis Cain, TX.
	Root boiled into tea with cami weed, poke weed roots, red oak bark, and peach tree leaves for malaria, chills, fever, and colic.	Lizzie Atkins, TX.
	Root tea used for pain.	Anthony Dawson, OK.
	Root mixed with mullen to make tea for sickness.	Jane Lassiter, NC.
	Root used for measles.	Hamp Kennedy, MS.
	Root tea used for colds.	Emeline Stepney, GA.
	Root used to clean system (laxative?).	Amanda Mcdaniel, GA.
	Root used for stomach and as a laxative.	Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
Scurry Grass (*Cochlearia officinalis)*	Used for sickness.	Wade Owens, AL.
	Used as a tea for many ailments.	Rhodus Walton, GA.
Senega (*Polygala senega*) "Snake Root"	Used as a tonic.	Mark Oliver, MS.
Slippery Elm (*Ulmus rubra/ Ulmas fulva*)	Used as a poultice for sickness.	George Henderson, KY.
	Used for fever.	Oliver Bell, AL; and Harriet Miller, GA.
	Tea used for fever and female complaint (bark is inserted into the vagina).	George Pretty, FL.
	Tea used for unspecified illnesses.	William Mcwhorter; GA.
	Barks from wild cherry, poplar, black haw, slippery elm, and dried mullein leaves mixed and brewed to make bitters that was used for a variety of illnesses, including rheumatism, fever, stomachache, and other sickness.	James Bolton, GA.
	Unspecified medical use.	William Mathews, TX.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Slippery Elm (*continued*)	Chewed as a cure for bad feelings.	Mary Kincheon Edwards, TX.
Snake Root/Black Snake Root (*Sanicula L.*)	Unspecified medical use.	Virginia Harris, MS; William Mathews, TX; and Hamp Kennedy, MS.
	Made into tea for sickness.	Lou Williams, TX.
	Tea used to treat fever or malaria.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Steeped and mixed with whiskey for chills.	Polly Colbert, OK.
	Tea used for colds and stomach ailments.	Will Sheets, GA.
	Used as a tonic for sickness.	Mark Oliver, MS.
Sorghum (*Sorghum vulgare*)	Sorghum molasses mixed with sulfur to purify blood.	William Emmons, OH.
	Sorghum syrup mixed with Jerusalem oak for worms.	John Crawford, TX.
	Mixed with dog fennel and hog hoof into a tea for consumption (tuberculosis) and coughs.	Joanna Thompson Isom, MS.
	Rabbit tobacco, pine tops, and mullein leaves boiled together to make a tea mixed with molasses for a variety of ailments.	Will Sheets, GA.
Spicewood (*Calyptranthes pallens*)	Unspecified use as a tea.	Gus Smith, MO.
Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)	Chewed for indigestion and (toofies?).	Gus Feaster, SC.
	Boiled and mixed with black haw root, sour dock, bear grass, grape root, bull nettle, and red oak bark as a blood medicine.	Della Fountain, OK.
	Bark made into tea for unspecified ailments.	Rachel Adams, GA.
Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)	Unspecified medical use.	Victoria Adams, SC.
	Tea used for minor sickness.	Matilda McKinney, GA.

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	Tea used for unspecified purposes.	Emma Hurley, GA.
	Poultice used for colds.	Emma Hurley, GA.
Tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*)	Chewed for gum pain.	Alice Fairweather, FL.
	Smoke blown into ear for earache.	Easter Sudie Campbell, KS.
Trailing Arbutus (*Epigaea repens*) (Mayflower)	For chills, fever, and malaria.	Tucker Smith, TX.
	Root blended with cami weed, privet roots, and peach tree leaves and boiled down into syrup for chills, malaria, and typhoid fever.	Alice Cole, TX.
	Roots used to keep off chills, fever, malaria, colic, and others.	Parilee Daniels, TX.
Turnip (*Brassica rapa*)	For frost bite (of feet), rub heels with roasted turnip.	Janey Landrum, TX.
	Hot cooked turnips used to cure chilblains.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.
	Bound around foot for frostbite.	Robert Bryant, MO.
	Unspecified use.	James Bolton, GA.
Violet (*Viola odorata*)	Leaves used in to heal foot sores.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.
Walnut (*Juglans regia*)	Made into tea for unspecified purposes.	John Crawford, TX.
Watermelon (*Citrullus vulgaris*)	Seeds used for kidney stones or kidneys.	Dellie Lewis, AL; and Lu Lee, TX.
Wheat (unspecified)	Flour mixed with cornmeal to make pills for general illness.	Wes Brady, TX.
Wild Aster (*Machaeranthera tanacetifolia* or *Aster tanacetifolius*) also named prairie aster, tahoka daisy, tanseyleaf, and tansy aster.	Made into tea for unspecified purposes.	Dosia Harris, GA.
Wild Cherry (*Prunus serotina* or *Prunus virginiana*)	Unspecified medical use.	Dulcinda Baker Martin, KT; and Harriet Miller, GA.
	Mixed with whiskey and rust off of nails and used for general sickness medicine.	Louise Mathews, TX.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Wild Cherry (*continued*)	Bark blended with black haw root, dogwood bark, and "chinquin" bark to make a general purpose tonic.	Sam Bush, TX.
	Made into tea with dogwood and olive bush for sickness, colds, or ailments.	Morgan Scurry, SC; Fannie Moore, NC; and Rachel Adams, GA.
	Tea for bad colds.	Hector Smith, SC.
	Mixed with whiskey to improve blood.	Lina Anne Pendergrass, SC.
	Mixed with mullein, horehound, cherry bark, and golden rod to make tea for unspecified medical use.	Annie Davis, AL.
	Barks from wild cherry, poplar, black haw, slippery elm, and dried mullein leaves mixed and brewed to make bitters that was used for a variety of illnesses, including rheumatism, fever, stomachache, and other sickness.	James Bolton, GA.
	Used as a tea or mixed with whiskey.	Gus Smith, MO.
	Wild cherry bark mixed with wine for sickness.	Charlie Davenport, MS.
Willow (*Salix alba*)	Tea used for chills and fevers.	Hector Smith, SC; George Womble, GA; and Sol Walton, TX.
	Ashes are good for corn removal.	Harriet Miller, GA.
Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*)	For stomach problems.	Pierce Harper, TX.
	Tea used for rheumatism.	Hector Smith, SC.
Yellow Dock (*Rumex crispus*)	Used as a poultice for sickness.	George Henderson, KY.
	Made into tea for sickness.	Hal Hutson, TN.
Yellow Root (*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*)	Unspecified medical use.	William Emmons, OH; and Toy Hawkins, GA.
	Tea used for colds.	George Womble, GA.
	Tea used for sore throats.	Emeline Stepney, GA.
Yellow Weed (*See* Fennel) (*Foeniculum vulgare*)		
Yucca (*Yucca L.*)	Tea used for foot sores.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.

Appendix B

Unknown Plant/Herbal Treatments

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Beans (Unspecified)	Unspecified medical use.	James Bolton, GA.
Beets (Unspecified)	Unspecified medical use.	James Bolton, GA.
Bitter Apple (*Solanum aculeastrum*)	Unspecified medical use.	Jeptha Choice, TX.
Bluearbs	Unspecified medical purposes.	Richard Orford, GA.
Candnilo	Mixed with sage for sickness.	Lou Williams, TX.
Chinquin	Bark blended with black haw root, cherry bark, and dogwood bark, to make a general purpose tonic.	Sam Bush, TX.
Cider Beans	Mixed with roots of wild lettuce, maple sap, castor beans, and turpentine for sore throats and colds.	Fred Forbes, NE.
Ditney	Used as a tea or mixed with whiskey.	Gus Smith, MO.
English Peas	Unspecified medical use.	James Bolton, GA.
Mackaroot	Made as a tea for worms.	Emoline Glasgow, SC.
Missing Link Root	Used for colds and asthma.	George Pretty, FL.
Paw Paw	Seeds worn around necks to prevent disease.	William Mcwhorter, GA.
Pork Root (Possibly poke root)	Used as a bath for itches.	Sam Anderson, OK.
Primerrhine	A tea used for fevers.	Henry Ryan, SC.

(*continued*)

Herb/Plant	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Puraley Weed (Squirrel Physic)	Boiled into syrup to cure chills and fevers.	Polly Colbert, OK.
Queensy's Lightroot	Used as a tea for many ailments.	Rhodus Walton, GA.
Remedy Weed	Unspecified medical use.	Gus Smith, MO.
Ringdom	Boiled and used for fevers or colds.	Hector Smith, SC.
Soon Root	Mixed with whiskey for unknown illness and rheumatism.	Hector Godbold, SC.
Spring Briars	Worn around neck to keep chills off.	Harriet Collins, TX.
Swamp Root	Unspecified medical use.	Sam Bush, TX.
Thread-salve buds	Worn around the neck to keep off chills.	Gilliam Lowran, SC.
Tree (Unspecified)	Tree resin blended with honey and onions to make cough syrup.	William Coleman, TX.
Turrywork	For fever and headache.	Henry Brown, SC.
Vermifuge	Unknown medical use.	Pierce Harper, TX.
White Root	Unspecified medical use.	Gus Smith, MO.
Wourwood	As a stick the same height as a sick child. When the child outgrows the stick the illness will be outgrown.	George Gilliam, AL.
Yeller Percoon Root	Used for sore eyes.	Easter Sudie Campbell, KS.
English Peas	Unspecified medical use.	James Bolton, GA.
Field Grass? (Unknown)	Unspecified medical use.	Mary Edwards, SC.
	Roots boiled as used as a tea for fevers.	Henry Ryan, SC; and Solomon Caldwell, SC.
Goat Seed (Unknown)	Combined with gourd, buckeye, oil, turpentine, and lobelia for sickness.	Abraham Chambers, AL.
Gourd (Unspecified)	Combined with goat seed, buckeye, oil, turpentine, and lobelia for sickness.	Abraham Chambers, AL.
Hammel leaves	Bath for fever.	William Mathews, TX.
Sour Dock	Boiled and mixed with black haw root, bear grass, grape root, bull nettle, sweet gum bark, and red oak bark as a blood medicine.	Della Fountain, OK.
Stinkin Jacob	Made into tea and mixed with honey for bitterness and unspecified sickness.	Ned Meridan Chaney, MS.

Appendix C

Non-Plant or Herbal Treatments

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Alum	Mixed with saltpeter and bluestone, for snake bite.	Patsy Moses, TX.
	Mixed with saltpeter, bluestone, and whiskey for snake bite.	Adeline Waldon, TX.
	Mixed with mullein flowers, poke roots, and salt to make a liniment.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Mullen is combined with honey and alum to make syrup for colds.	Harriet Miller, GA.
	Used for sore throats.	Marshal Butler, GA.
	Mixed with sweet cream for poison oak.	Harriet Miller, GA.
	Unspecified medical use.	Rev. Squires Jackson, FL.
Ash	With salt as a cure for worms.	Joe Hawkins, MI.
	Hickory ash mixed with vinegar for headaches.	Toy Hawkins, GA.
Anvil Dust	Mixed with apple vinegar to cure dropsy.	Easter Wells, OK.
	Combined with snake root and whiskey to make tonic for consumption.	Lou Smith, OK.
	Mixed with syrup for good health.	Adeline Willis, GA.

(*continued*)

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Axe	Place axe in bed for all pains.	Janey Landrum, TX.
	Unspecified medical use.	Dellie Lewis, AL.
Axel Grease	For chills.	Celia Henderson, OH.
Bacon Rind	Used for mumps.	Patsy Moses, TX; and Adeline Waldon, TX.
Beef	Hung between road and house to prevent disease.	Hetty Haskell, AK.
	Used as a soup or broth for yellow fever.	Rose Mosley, AK.
Bitters	Prevention for disease.	Henry Green, AK.
Black Fever Pills	Unspecified medical use.	Mary Reynolds, TX.
Blue Moss (Mass) Pills	Unspecified medical use.	Millie Ann Smith, TX; Carter Jackson, TX; Sarah Henderson Fuller, TX; John Crawford, TX; Jeptha Choice, TX; Jacob Branch, TX; Ellen Betts, TX; Stearlin Arnwine, TX; SB Adams, TX; Fannie Griffin, SC; Nan Stewart, OH; Joe Mccormick, GA; and Claude Augusta Wilson, FL.
	Taken for minor ailments and colds.	Charlie Pye, GA; and Richard Orford, GA.
	Used for sickness or jaundice.	Richard Carruthers, TX.
	Used for liver ("spring malaria") and common ailments.	Darcus Barnett, TX.
Brass Key	Worn around the neck for heart complaints.	Mark Oliver, MS.
Brass Rings/Buttons	Ring on each hand will cure rheumatism.	Adeline Waldon, TX; and Ahram Sells, TX.
	Tie brass buttons around neck to stop nose bleeding.	Sim Greely, SC; and Easter Wells, OK.
	Worn around fingers to prevent croup.	Jim Allen, MS.
Bread	Made into pills and soaked in bitter weed tea for malaria.	Easter Wells, OK.
Buttered Bread	Lightly baked bread buttered on one side and placed on a comatose	Gus Smith, MO.

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Buttered Bread (*continued*)	patient's mouth to diagnose life. If patient is alive as shown by the melted butter, mix whiskey with butter and give a few drops to patient for recovery.	
Buttons	Worn to prevent illness.	Victoria Taylor Thompson, OK; Rosie McGillery, TX; and Henry Lewis, TX.
Calf Liver	Tied to wound to heal.	Harriet Collins, TX.
Calomel	Used for unspecified sickness.	Richard Carruthers, TX; Jacob Branch, TX; Ellen Betts, TX; Sam Polite, SC; LB Barner, OK; Sam Anderson, OK; Charlie Hudson, GA; Rev. Squires Jackson, FL; and Claude Augusta Wilson, FL.
	Mixed with turpentine to induce miscarriage.	Lu Lee, TX.
	Used for chills.	Louis Davis, MS.
	For jaundice in babies.	Sudie Campbell, KS.
	Combined with salts for spring tonic for health.	Della Briscoe, GA.
Charcoal	Break up and take for stomach gas.	Josephine Hamilton, AK.
	Mixed with onions and honey for babies for sickness.	Harriet Barrett, TX.
	Mixed with salt and put into bags that were worn to prevent disease.	Willis Williams, FL.
Chicken gizzard (and skin)	Inside of chicken gizzard kept in pocket to prevent indigestion.	Janey Landrum, TX.
	Unspecified medical use.	Dulcinda Baker Martin, KY.
	Taken for stomach problems.	Adeline Waldon, TX.
	Linings cure indigestion.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.
Chimney Soot	Combined with bacon grease for rusty nail wound.	Celia Henderson, OH.
	Corn removal by marking a cross of chimney soot over corn.	Janey Landrum, TX.

(*continued*)

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Citrate of Potash	Mixed with burdock root for scrofula.	Sudie Campbell, KS.
Coal	Coal oil inhaled for cold.	Benny Dillard, GA.
Cockroaches	Made into tea for lockjaw.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.
Coin/Penny/Dime/Coppers	Worn around neck to prevent indigestion.	Janey Landrum, TX; Patsy Moses, TX; and Adeline Waldon, TX.
	Worn (dime) around ankle for unspecified medical purpose.	Sylvai Durant, SC.
	Worn around neck for teething.	Emma Jones, AL.
	Dime around ankle for leg cramps.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Penny placed with meat over nail wound.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Dime worn around leg to prevent spells.	John R. Cox, KS.
	Brass, copper, and dimes worn around neck to prevent "runertiz"?	William Henry Towns, AL.
	Worn to prevent illness.	Ahram Sells, TX; and Tishey Taylor, MO.
	Dime on string around ankle to prevent cramps.	Harriet Collins, TX.
Cow Hoofs	As a tea for flu.	Rachel Hankins, AK.
	Cow's feet are boiled in water to produce "oil" that was used for a variety of purposes.	Celestia Avery, GA.
Cow Manure	As a tea for flu, made into tea for indigestion.	Rachel Hankins, AK.
	Mixed with whiskey and made into tea for measles; used with mint for consumption.	Curley Mcgade, TX; Joanna Thompson Isom, MS; and Julia Brown, GA.
Dish Rag (stolen)	Steal someone else's dish rag and rub over sty (eye) then throw rag over left shoulder at crossroad or bridge at midnight.	Janey Landrum, TX.
Dish Water	Used as a bath to promote good health.	Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
Dog Manure	Used as a tea for measles.	Curley Mcgade, TX.
Earth Worm	Cook earthworms in grease and rub into parts having rheumatism.	Curley Mcgade, TX.

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Egg Shells	Made into tea for "whites"(?)	Curley Mcgade, TX.
Fingernails	Don't cut fingernails on Thursday or there will be sickness.	Janey Landrum, TX.
	Cut on Wednesdays for rheumatism.	Marion Johnson, AK.
Frogs (live/dried)	Used with dead chicken to cure a snake bite and as live frogs take out poison.	George Briggs, SC.
	Used for unspecified medical purpose.	Willis , TX.
	Frog skin is charred and the soot is put on toothache.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.
Grease	Mixed with snuff and rubbed on bottom of feet or under arms for colds.	Marion Johnson, AK.
	Mixed with soap and applied to boils.	Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
	Bacon grease used on rash resulting from measles.	Charity Jones, MS.
Goose Grease	Unspecified medical use.	Dulcinda Baker Martin, KY.
Hickory Switch	When roasted in hot ashes is good medicine for young hides that need to be loosed.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.
Hog Hoof	Made into tea for children with colds.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Tea used for flu.	Rachel Hankins, AK.
	Hoofs boiled in whiskey to make tea for colds.	Lou Williams, TX.
	Parched hoofs made into tea for colds.	Lu Lee, TX.
	Worn around neck to fend off fevers and all kinds of itches.	Steve Jones, TX.
	Mixed with molasses and dog fennel into a tea for consumption (tuberculosis) and coughs.	Joanna Thompson Isom, MS.
	Used for making tea to combat fever.	Fannie Moore, NC.

(*continued*)

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Hog Jaw	Mixed with horse milk for consumption or whooping cough.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Helps children teeth easily.	Harriet Miller, GA.
Honey	Mixed with turpentine and onions to make syrup for colds.	Andy McAdams, TX.
	Mixed with pine tree bark and onions to make cough syrup.	Anna Lee, TX; and Alice Cole, TX.
	Tree resin blended with honey and onions to make cough syrup.	William Coleman, TX.
	Mixed with onions and charcoal for babies for sickness.	Harriet Barrett, TX.
	Used for common ailments and spring malaria.	Darcus Barnett, TX.
	Mullen is combined with honey and alum to make syrup for colds.	Harriet Miller, GA.
	Made into tea and mixed with stinkin Jacob for unspecified sickness.	Ned Meridan Chaney, MS.
Horse Hoof	Outer skin of hoof charred and the soot is put on toothache.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.
Horse Trough Water	Drink of horse trough water for whooping cough.	Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
Indian Rock Beads	Worn as charm to prevent illness.	Victoria Taylor Thompson, OK.
Iodine	Unspecified medical use.	Curley Mcgade, TX.
Kerosene	Combined with camphor and rubbed into areas where pain is present.	Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
Land Turtle	Cut off head of turtle and drain blood into cup and dip sugar lump for whooping cough.	Mattie Logan, OK.
Lard	Blended with poke root, turpentine to make salve for sores, sprains, and bruises.	William Coleman, TX.
Lead	Lead put on string and worn around neck for nose bleeds.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Leather Strap/String	Worn around the wrist to prevent rheumatism and neuralgia.	Gate-Eye Fisher, AK.
	Tied around neck for baby teething.	Willis , TX.
Lightning Bug	Two lightning bugs in a bottle that held whiskey used as a painkiller.	Vinnie Brunson, TX.
Matches	Wear in hair to cure headache.	Tildy Collins, OH.
Meat	Used to remove warts.	Emma Jackson, LA.
	Hung outside to prevent disease.	Hetty Haskell, AK.
Mole Feet	For cutting teeth.	William Emmons, OH; and Jane Montgomery, OK.
	Tied around neck for good health and children would feel no pain cutting teeth.	Rena Clark, MS.
Morning Dew	Wash face in morning dew for 9 days to cure tetter?	Janey Landrum, TX.
Nail (New)	Nail worked around tooth or ear for tooth or earache.	Gabriel Gilbert, TX.
	Nail was placed in vinegar until it rusted and then the vinegar was drunk.	Betty Cunningham, VA.
Needle	Stick a needle through a wart, pull it out, and put in a corn and then bury the corn and the wart will disappear.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.
	Use needle to poke wart and take resulting blood and put on bean vine and hide under stone, then walk away backwards.	Annie Ware, TX; and Mary Gaffney, TX.
Negro Wool	Burned and used for earache.	Rosa Pollard, TX.
Oil	Combined with gourd, buckeye, goat seed, turpentine, and lobelia for sickness.	Abraham Chambers, AL.
	Unspecified medical use.	Benjamin Henderson, GA.
	Used to stop colic.	Bill and Ellen Thomas, TX.
Paregoric	Unspecified medical use.	Rev. Squires Jackson, FL.

(*continued*)

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Peach Brandy	Used to treat pneumonia.	Phil Town, GA.
Pins	Cross pins over a wart then hide the pins where no one can find them.	Janey Landrum, TX.
Pole Cat Grease	Used for croup and rheumatism.	Polly Colbert, OK.
Pot Liquor	Used as a bath to promote good health.	Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
Rabbit Foot	Tied around neck to keep chills and fevers off.	Eli Davison, TX; William Coleman, TX; and Harriett Barrett, TX.
Rain Water	General cure-all.	Janey Landrum, TX.
Rattlesnake	Rattles worn around neck for teething.	Harriet Collins, TX.
Rattlesnake Oil	Oil used for rheumatism.	Ahram Sells, TX.
Red Ants	Nine red ants in small bag worn around neck for teething.	Jane Montgomery, OK.
Red Flannel	For chills when filled with warm axel grease.	Celia Henderson, OH.
	Tied around arm or leg for pain of rheumatism.	Patsy Moses, TX.
	When filled with frog bones, snakeskin, horse hair, and ashes by doorstep prevented sickness, blindness, and "fits."	Patsy Moses, TX.
	Worn as string around wrist to prevent sprains.	Harriet Collins, TX.
Rusty Metal	Placed under mattress to ease pain.	Julia Brown, GA.
Salt/Salts	Little salt on mole of the head for headache.	Tildy Collins, OH.
	Mixed with ash as a cure for worms.	Joe Hawkins, MI.
	Mixed with sugar, soda, and vinegar for heartburn.	Henry Lewis, TX.
	Mixed with mullein flowers, poke roots, and salt to make a liniment.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Unspecified medical use.	Richard Toler, OH; Nan Stewart, OH; Amanda Mcdaniel, GA; and Claude Augusta Wilson, FL.

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	Mixed with charcoal and put into bags that were worn to prevent disease.	Willis Williams, FL.
Sardines	Oil rubbed in jaw to cure the mumps.	Carrie Nancy Fryer, GA.
Sheep Manure (Nannie)	Made into tea for whooping cough.	Patsy Moses, TX.
	Mixed with whiskey and made into tea for measles.	Joanna Thompson Isom, MS.
	Made into a tea for measles.	Isaac Johnson, NC; Samuel Lyons, OH; and George Womble, GA.
	Used as a tea for constipation.	Marshal Butler, GA.
	Used with catnip as tea for colic.	Easter Sudie Campbell, KY.
	Tea used for helping babies teeth.	Emeline Stepney, GA.
Sheep Wool	Made into tea for whooping cough or colds.	Adeline Waldon, TX.
Shoe	Turned upside-down under bed for cramps.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.
Soap	Mixed with grease and applied to boils.	Charity Jones, MS.
Soda	Mixed with sugar for unspecified use.	Benny Dillard, GA.
Sick bed	"Don't move a person's sick bed or they will die."	Janey Landrum, TX.
Smoke	Smoke from scorched leather inhaled for cold.	Benny Dillard, GA.
Soda Water	Drink for indigestion.	George Briggs, SC.
Soot	Soda mixed with lye soap and soda into a poultice for snake bite.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Used with sugar for colic.	Rena Clark, MS.
	Mixed with water and taken for stomach aches.	Rev. Squires Jackson, FL.
Sugar	Used with chimney soot for colic.	Rena Clark, MS.
	Mixed with turpentine for stomach aches.	Robert Bryant, MO.
	Made into candy with brown sugar for colds and sickness.	Julia Brown, GA.
	Mixed with Jerusalem oak to make a candy for colds.	Manuel Johnson, GA.

(*continued*)

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Sugar (*continued*)	Mixed with soda for unspecified use.	Benny Dillard, GA.
Sulfur	For spring malaria and common ailments.	Darcus Barnett, TX.
	Unspecified medical use.	Nan Stewart, OH.
	Worn to prevent disease.	Willis Williams, FL.
Sweet cream	Mixed with alum for poison oak.	Harriet Miller, GA.
Teeth	Snake, alligator, and hog teeth worn around neck for teething.	Harriet Collins, TX.
Thread	Tie woolen thread around big toe for nose bleed.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.
Tumble Bugs	Mashed into poultice for unspecified use.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.
Turpentine	Used as a soak for snake bite.	George Briggs, SC.
	Used for rheumatism.	Tildy Collins, OH; and Annie Ware, TX.
	Mixed with sugar and placed over nail wounds.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Used for sickness, fevers, or colds.	Irene Poole, AL; John McAdams, TX; and Adeline Willis, GA.
	Bathe in turpentine and set on fire and then fan out for sprain.	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.
	Put on tooth for ache or teething pain.	Annie Ware, TX; and Isiah Green, GA.
	Take 15 drops for indigestion.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Mix 10 drops in water for indigestion.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Unspecified medical use.	Mary Reynolds, TX; Ann Hawthorne, TX; Fannie Griffin, SC; Sam Anderson, OK; Richard Toler, OH; Solomon Caldwell, SC; Everett Ingram, AL; Fred Forbes, NE; Green Willbanks, GA; Salena Taswell, FL; William Mcwhorter; GA; Benjamin Henderson, GA; Marshal Butler, GA; Davis Mose, GA; and Rachel Adams, GA.

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
	Mixed with honey and onions to make syrup for colds.	Andy McAdams, TX.
	Combined with castor oil for body soreness.	Annie Ware, TX.
	Taken 10 to 12 drops to induce miscarriage.	Lu Lee, TX.
	Blended with poke root and lard to make salve for sores, sprains, and bruises.	William Coleman, TX.
Turpentine	Used as a cure for almost any ailment.	Anne Rice, SC.
	Dip string in turpentine and tie around waist and add knots each time a chill is felt.	Solomon Caldwell, SC.
	Combined with goat seed, gourd, buckeye, oil, and lobelia for sickness.	Abraham Chambers, AL.
	Mixed with onions and honey to make syrup for colds.	Alice Cole, TX.
	Used as drops for a variety of ailments or applied to sores and cuts.	George Womble, GA.
	Dip string in turpentine and tie around waist and tie knots every time a chill occurs.	Ella Harris, AL.
	Mixed with roots of wild lettuce mixed with cider beans, maple sap, castor beans for sore throats and colds.	Dosia Harris, GA.
	Rubbed in nose for medical purposes.	Ed Crump, MS.
	Used as a mouthwash to prevent diphtheria.	John Cole, GA.
	Used for sore throats, cuts, and bruises.	Jim Allen, MS.
	Used for sprains and bad cuts.	Susan Mcintosh, GA.
	Mixed with a piece of sugar for stomach aches.	Robert Bryant, MO.
Vinegar	Mixed with a handful of red ants in an empty whiskey bottle and	Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX.

(*continued*)

Non-Plant Substance	*Medical Use*	*WPA Source*
Vinegar (*continued*)	apply internally and externally.	
	Added to clay and applied to sprains.	Harriet Collins, TX.
	Mixed with anvil dust to cure dropsy.	Easter Wells, OK.
	Mixed with hickory ash for headaches.	Toy Hawkins, GA.
Whiskey	Taken for cold and fevers.	George Taylor, AL; Winger Vanhook and Henry Boraddus, TX; and Julia Brown, GA.
	Mixed with lemons for chills.	Charles Sandles, TX.
	Mixed with herbs to prevent sickness.	Emma Lowran, SC.
	Combined with snake root and anvil chips to make tonic for consumption.	Lou Smith, OK.
	Unspecified medical use.	Nan Stewart, OH.
	Mixed with garlic to make tea for worms.	Mary Colbert, GA.
	Dried poke root put in whiskey for rheumatism.	Gus Smith, MO.
	Mixed with sheep manure and made into tea for measles.	Joanna Thompson Isom, MS.
	Mixed with Sampson snake root as a daily preventive.	Ned Meridan Chaney, MS.
	Mixed with poke root for unspecified reason.	George Henderson, KY.
	Mixed with garlic for good health.	Adeline Willis, GA.
	Used for colds.	Julia Brown, GA.
Wine	For sickness.	Charlie Davenport, MS.
Wood Lice	Put in bag around the neck for teething.	Della Fountain, OK.
Woolen Rags	Used with pine tar for burns and wounds.	Harriet Collins, TX.

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