

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Section: \_\_\_\_\_

# AN ENSLAVED WOMAN DECLARES HER NAME

*We have chosen to include certain racial epithets in this assignment in order to honestly communicate the bigoted language of the time. The following is excerpted from the 1937 testimony of a woman born around 1850 as a slave in Alabama. Many words in document are spelled phonetically to represent her dialect.*

Once the Yankee soldiers came. I was big enough to tote pails and piggins then. These soldiers made us chillun tote water to fill their canteens and water their horses. We toted the water on our heads. Another time we heard the Yankees was coming and old Master had about fifteen hundred pints of meat. They was hauling it off to bury it when the Yankees caught them. The soldiers ate and wasted every bit of that good meat. We didn't like them a bit.

One time some Yankee soldiers stopped and started talking to me – they asked me what my name was. I say Liza, and they say, “Liza who?” I thought a minute and I shoot my head. “Jest Liza, I ain't got no other name.”

He say, “Who live up yonder in dat Big House?” I say, “Mr. John Mixon.” He say, “You are Liza Mixon.” He say, Do anybody ever call you nigger?” And I say, “Yes, sir.” He say, “Next time anybody call you nigger you tell 'em dat you is a Negro and your name is Miss Liza Mixon.” The more I thought of that the more I liked it and I made up my mind to do jest what he told me to.... One evening I was minding the calves and old Master came along. He say, “What you doin' nigger?” I say real pert like, “I ain't no nigger, I'se a Negro and I'm Miss Liza Mixon.” Old Master who' was surprised and he picks up a switch and starts at me.

Law, but I was skeered! I hadn't never had no whipping so I run as fast as I can to Grandma Gracie. I hid behind her... 'bout that time Master John got there. He say, “Gracie, day little nigger sassed me.” She say, “Lawsie child, what does ail you?” I told them what the Yankee soldier told me to say and Grandma Gracie took my dress and lift it over my head and pins my hands inside, and Lawsie, how she whipped me... I just said dat to de wrong person.

Excerpted from William E. Gienapp, ed., *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 234.