

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 12, NO. 247.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 1912.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

GRANNY HAFFORD.

By DANIEL DE LEON

FROM Bloomington, Ind., news comes that a negress, said to be 124 years of age, and long known in the place as Granny Hafford, died at her Bloomington home.

The sketch of Granny Hafford's life is short—she was born in Richmond, Va.; she was sold seven times while in slavery; she was the mother of seventeen children, ten of whom were sold before her emancipation, and she could never find any trace of them.

Short as is the sketch, it is vast. It casts its light upon the past; it casts its light upon the present; inferentially, it casts its light upon the future.

Born just before the cotton gin was invented—an invention that gave new increment to slavery by rendering the slave profitable; born, at that, in Virginia—the State whose leading industry then became the breeding of Negroes for the slave market;—born in such a State and such a season, the passage in Granny Hafford's life, to the effect that she was sold seven times, was the mother of seventeen children, ten of whom were sold before her emancipation, and were lost sight and sound of by her, tells its tale in full. A fertile breeder, Granny Hafford was coveted, like a fertile cow, or mare, or sow, by “raisers” of Negroes; she passed from “raiser” to “raiser,” and ten of the chattels she gave birth to were sold away from her before the storm of the Civil War broke her shackles, and readmitted her to the human family.

It takes the occasion of the death, in our own days, of such a victim of institutions that have gone by, to bring home to the present generation of Labor the distance that it has traveled. Labor being ONE, Northern Labor partook of the feudal ignominy of Southern Labor. That specific form of ignominy exists no more. Is Labor now free from all ignominy?

The ills of the past often are used for cloaks to cover up the ills of the present. It

is the part of a new order of Evil Doers to do the cloaking. It is the part of the new order of Evil Sufferers to tear the cloak away.

Motherhood in the Family of Labor is, in spirit, though no longer in form, no better off than was Motherhood among the Black portion of the Family of Labor during Granny Hafford's prime.

The physical, visible chain once held Labor in slavery. That chain is no longer visible. Yet it is felt all the same. A new contrivance accomplishes the identical end—Capitalist Society. As on the field of production—the mill, the yard, the mine, the farm—so, likewise with regard to modern Motherhood in the Family of Labor. The wage-slave Mother is a breeder of wage-slaves for the wage-slave market. In spots, as noted in Pennsylvania regions, the fact is hardly disguised by the employers who give a bonus to the wage-slave for every child he or she becomes the parent of. The cards have been shuffled; a new game is being played; the essence is old.

There IS progress when the Present is contrasted with the Past. The very fact that the rule of the present game compels the Ruling Class to hide its hand is a mark of progress.

Granny Hafford's death illumines the progress that has been made. Her death likewise spurs onward to the progress that is yet to be made, that the people are marching forward to.

The Labor Question, ethically summed up, is the Question of dignified Fatherhood, Motherhood and Childhood. Its Past is symbolized by Granny Hafford as a monument shamelessly unveiled—solitary, torn away from husband and children.

Its Present is symbolized by the veiled monument of the same Granny Hafford.

Speed the day when that monument can be seen only in museums; a monument, looked upon by emancipated Fatherhood, Motherhood and Childhood, as the compressed symbol of the horrors of Class Rule.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded March 2013

slpns@slp.org