

READING

He Was Always Right and You Were Always Wrong

Henry Blake, a freedman from Arkansas, describes how sharecropping limited his freedom in these words:

When we worked on shares, we couldn't make nothing, just overalls and something to eat. Half went to the other man and you would destroy your half, if you weren't careful. A man that didn't know how to count would always lose. He might lose anyhow. They didn't give no itemized statement. No, you just had to take their word. They never give you no details. No matter how good account you kept, you had to go by their account, and now, Brother, I'm tellin' you the truth about this. It's been that way for a long time. You had to take the white man's work on note, and everything. Anything you wanted, you could git if you were a good hand. You could git anything you wanted as long as you worked. If you didn't make no money, that's all right; they would advance you more. But you better not leave him, you better not try to leave and get caught. They'd keep you in debt. They were sharp. Christmas come, you could take up twenty dollar, in somethin' to eat and as much as you wanted in whiskey. You could buy a gallon of whiskey. Anything that kept you a slave because he was always right and you were always wrong if there was a difference. If there was an argument, he would get mad and there would be a shooting take place.¹

¹ From *Henry Blake, Little Rock, Arkansas*, Federal Writer's Project, US Work Projects Administration (Manuscript Division), Library of Congress, available at the [History Matters website](https://www.history-matters.org).