

\$180 Woman

By Houston Hodges, for Sundial Writers' Corner, WLRH Radio, Huntsville, AL USA

I'm one of those family history people, and I recently got a copy of the probate records of an ancestor who died in South Carolina in 1865, with a listing of his possessions in detail:

- one straw-cutter, \$3
- one corn-sheller, 50 cents
- two chamber mugs, 50 cents

And then came the people!

- one girl, India, \$1220
- one boy, Tuck, \$1180
- one woman, Dinah, \$180

A hundred and eighty dollar woman! The boy Tuck was worth a thousand dollars more.

I've decided I know Dinah. She's old, and nearly blind. She sits in the corner by the fireplace and shells peas. She has a roof over her head, her own coffee mug, and a straw mattress in the corner, and someone to talk with about what it was like when she was a girl. I hope my ancestor was kind to her, but I have no way of knowing that.

A wave of self-righteousness sweeps over me, and I start to write this piece about the wonderful advances of the last hundred and fifty years... and then I pause, and see the price tag on the people I know.

—Here's one that agrees with me, all the time: even the mistakes! Price that one high! In Texas lingo here's another who's not worth the powder to blow him away. Here's one for whom "I wouldn't take a million dollars." Here's one who chuckles at most of my jokes: good value there, and rare! Another is one whose admiration and respect I crave, whose actions can open doors of opportunity: top of the price list!

Oh Dinah, Tuck, and India, your daughters and sons still live on the inventory list of my life. What are the price-tags I see on people, when I squint my eyes?