

Interlude

Bullwhip Days

De nigger used to sing to nearly everything he did. Hit wuz jes' de way he 'spressed his feelin's, an' hit made him relieved. If he wuz happy, hit made him happier; if he wuz sad, hit made him feel better. An' so, he jes' naturally sings his feelin's.

De timber nigger, he sings as he cuts de logs, an' keeps de time wid his axe. De women sing as dey bend over de washtub. De cotton choppers sing as dey chops de cotton. De mother sings as she rocks her baby to sleep. An' dey all sing in de meetin's, an' at de baptizin's, an' at de funerals.

Singin' is de niggers' mos' joy an' dey mos' comfort. When dey needs all dese things, dey sing 'bout de joys in de nex' world an' de trouble in dis. Dey first jes' sung de 'ligious songs. Den, dey commenced to sing 'bout de life here. An' when dey sung of bofe, dey called dem de "spirituals." De ole way to sing dem was to keep time wid de clappin' of de han's an' pattin' of de feet. Dey sing dem in different ways fur different occasions. At a meetin', when dey shouts, dey sing joyful, an' when dey sing de same song at a funeral, dey sing hit slow and moanful. When dey sing de same song in de fiel's, hit is sung quick, if dey workin' fas'. If dey is tired, hit is sung slow. If hit is sung at Christmas, den hit is sung gay an' happy.

De days of slavery made de nigger live his life over in de spirituals. Mos' of de real ole-time slaves are gone. Jes' a few, maybe, is lef' who were boys den, but deir song lives on wid bofe de white an' de black folks. We forgets de sorrows an' remembers de happy days, jes' like in de songs.

Vinnie Brunson (pp. 144-145)