

Mandy McCullough Cosby

Interview with Mandy McCullough Cosby

—Margaret Fowler, Fruithurst, Alabama

THEY CALLED US MCCULLOUGH'S FREE NIGGERS

Mandy McCullough Cosby puffed reflectively at her mellowed corncob pipe and began her story:

"My Massa, Bryant McCullough, was a Chambers county man. He had so many slaves I can't tell you de numbah. He didn't know hisself how many he had. I is now ninety-five years old an' what I remembers mos' is de way de chillun roll aroun' in de big nurses room." Mandy lives at 1508-Pine Street, Anniston, Alabama. She was cutting collards for dinner and left her dishpan and butcher knife to receive her caller.

"Mist' McCullough, he raised niggahs to sell—an' the little black chillen play aroun' until 'bout sundown, dey is give dey supper. A long trough out in a cool place in the bak yard is filled wif good, cold buttermilk an' cornbread crumbed in, an' dey each is give a spoon, an' dey eats dey fill. Den dey is ready fo' bed. Some of dem jes' fall ovah on de groun', asleep, and is picked up, and put on dey pallet in de big chillens room. Dey was old woman called de nurse, look after 'em. Dey git good care fo' de master expects dey will bring good money.

"Ol' Miss, she don't lak to see dem sold, an' she cry ever' time, she so tender-hearted. But Mist' McCullough is jes' lak mens is today. He jes' laugh an' go on.

"But he was good to his black folks. Folks called us 'McCullough's free niggers.' Wasn't much whippin' went on 'roun' our plantation, but on some places close to us, they whipped until blood run down. Some places they even mixed salt an' pepper in water an' bathed 'em with it. The salt water'd heal, but when the pepper got in there, it burned lak fire, an' they'd as well get on to work quick, cause they can't be still nohow.

"One woman, on a plantation not so far from us, was expectin', an' they tied her up under a hack-a-berry tree, an' whipped her until she died. Mos' any time at night ef you go 'roun' that tree, you could hear that baby cry. I 'spect you could hear it yet.

"Everybody said that was murder, an' that something ought to be done about it, but nothin' ever was.

"Mist' McCullough always give his folks plenty of sumpin' t'eat an' then he say, 'I's lookin' for plenty uv work.' 'Niggahs fat an' greasy can't do nothin' but work.

"My mother was a loomer. She didn't do nothin' but weave. We all had reg'lar stints of spinnin' to do, when we come from the fiel'. We set down an' eat a good supper, an' ever'night until ten o'clock we spin cuts of cotton, an' reel the tread, an' nex' day, the rolls is carded an' packed in a basket to be wove.

"Spinnin' wheels was in every cabin. Dere was so many of us to be tuk care of, it took lots of spinnin'."

