

BLACK CULTURE AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION



AFRO-AMERICAN FOLK
THOUGHT FROM
SLAVERY TO FREEDOM

LAWRENCE W. LEVINE

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To Cornelia

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PREFACE TO THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

In the spring semester of 1962, Richard Hofstadter, my Ph.D. adviser, summoned me to his office, where he told me that he had accepted the draft of my doctoral dissertation on William Jennings Bryan's final decade. It was time, he advised, to schedule the defense in which my dissertation committee, along with several other invited faculty, would critique my work and make suggestions for revisions. I would then receive my doctoral degree. Delighted at the news, I thanked Hofstadter and was about to leave when he asked: "What's the subject of your next book? Or don't you know? And, if not, why not?"

The question shocked me. *Next* book? My "next" book would be my first book, my published doctoral dissertation, after I did additional research and rewriting and—to me this was not anything to take for granted—if I found a publisher. But I knew that Hofstadter was referring to my next book *project*. He was at the stage of his career where he had myriad subjects he wanted to explore and write about, and he expected me to be looking ahead as well. I had to confess that I had no idea what I would do next, though I added rather lamely that I might be interested in writing a book of essays on the 1920s, a decade I became fascinated with through my work on Bryan. "You're too young to write a book of essays," Hofstadter replied. "You need to do another monograph."

Thus began my search for a topic that would make an interesting and significant book. At first it wasn't a very active search; my life was filled

with reshaping my dissertation for publication; moving from the East to the West Coast, where I became a member of the History Department at the University of California, Berkeley; writing lectures for my large courses at Berkeley; and starting a family. But through all of this intense activity, I continued to hear echoes of Hofstadter's query. What *would* my second book be about? Hofstadter had given me prudent advice: a well-contained and limited monograph fit comfortably into the life of a pressured young academic. The fact that Hofstadter himself had written a wide-ranging book of essays for *his* second book occurred to me only many years later, but I wasn't in the habit of comparing myself to my celebrated mentor.¹ Still, I obviously had similar urges to extend my research universe. I had just completed a monograph of which I was quite proud, but I now yearned to write on something more expansive and challenging, something that would excite me as well as potential readers.

I pondered a variety of biographical subjects, as I really had enjoyed the work and thought that went into my partial biography of Bryan. But again I rejected repetition; I craved a subject that would involve me in doing new types of research and solving new kinds of problems. As it turned out, that subject would emerge from an endeavor that had been part of my life for some years. While I was living in New York City, I participated in picketing stores like Woolworth's in an attempt to induce them to hire black employees. When I moved to the West Coast I joined the Berkeley branch of CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) and was immediately engaged in the struggle for fair housing. I would visit a Realtor to inquire about the availability of an apartment or small house to rent. I would invariably be given several referrals, while an African American CORE colleague who inquired not long before or after me would be told that nothing was available. Or I would rent an apartment and then bring my African American "wife" (in reality, a CORE colleague) to view the premises, and once the landlord or lady viewed my "wife," he or she always found reasons to back out of the agreement—all of this in liberal Berkeley, California, in the early 1960s. In the summer of 1963 CORE staged a demonstration in the rotunda of the state capitol in Sacramento in an endeavor to get the Burns Committee in the state senate to end its attempt to kill the Rumsford Fair Housing Act by keeping it bottled up in the committee. We brought our sleeping bags and simply camped out in the rotunda for weeks until the bill was finally released from committee. It was eventually passed by the legislature, and we then concentrated on making sure the bill was enforced. In the winter of 1963–64 we turned to

matters of employment; during that Christmas shopping season we picketed Berkeley stores that wouldn't hire black employees. In a city that harbored more than 30,000 students we were never able to get more than 100 pickets gathered at one time and thus failed in our efforts to blanket the downtown shopping area with picket lines. In 1965 I expanded my own civil rights activities; I joined the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama; made my first foray into the Deep South; and with thousands of others stood in front of the state capitol and heard Martin Luther King proclaim a new day in American freedom.

It was in the midst of these activities that I began to realize that I wanted to write a book focusing on African American history. I remembered how frustrated I had been as a student at the City College of New York and Columbia University at the absence of blacks and other peoples who had been relegated to the margins of our history from the courses we took. Year after year at CCNY I registered for a course on Blacks in the Western Hemisphere, but it was never taught during my days as an undergraduate student because too few students enrolled for it. During a quick trip to the Bay Area in the spring of 1962 to discuss my coming to Berkeley to teach, I struck up a conversation with a young Japanese American while we were both standing on a corner waiting for a red light to change in downtown San Francisco. He asked if I was a tourist, and I replied that in a few months I would be moving to Berkeley to teach American history at UC. His smile faded and he exclaimed, "I know one subject you won't teach; you won't tell your students about what they did to us in 1942." He was referring of course to the wartime internment of Japanese Americans—aliens and American citizens alike. As he stalked away, I muttered, "Yes I will," though in truth I knew precious little about that blatant episode myself. But I learned and always made it an important part of my courses in modern American history.

The demand for a politics "from the bottom up" that characterized the movements of the 1960s, from the Berkeley Free Speech Movement on, was paralleled by a demand for a history that included African Americans, women, Native Americans, immigrants, Mexican Americans, and others who had been excised from our past. I was not alone in wondering whether we could truly understand our history without understanding women, who constituted half of the population; or blacks, who were one-fifth of the population in the early nineteenth century and who remained a significant percentage of our population throughout our history; or immigrants from Europe, Asia, and the Americas, who were a

dynamic and transforming element in creating our history and our culture; or Native Americans and Mexicans, who were literally incorporated into the United States as it spread westward. I was lucky enough to be a young historian in a period in which these thoughts and questions were penetrating and spreading. I was equally fortunate in entering academe at a time when more women, minorities, and the children of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe (the “wrong” parts of Europe) became part of the academy as both students and teachers. My own education in these areas began as I attempted to incorporate them into my teaching, but they soon affected my research as well.

I received my first research leave in the academic year 1965–66. With no teaching or committee obligations, I was able to stay at home and begin work on the subject of my next book, which I finally had settled on: *Black Protest in Twentieth-Century America*. And so I set to work reading the myriad writings of civil rights leaders from Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois to Mary McLeod Bethune, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael, as well as such black intellectuals as Langston Hughes, Jesse Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. I read and read and read, took copious notes, and made numerous photocopies of a wide range of documents. It was exhilarating work, but it was also complex and difficult work.

There’s no question that when I began this book I was deeply affected by the present—the politics of my time, the civil rights of my time. I recognized that from the outset. I also recognized that the present can be an enemy of historians. What has been called the “virus of the present” can delude us into thinking that the people we study are simply earlier versions of ourselves: if they vaguely look like us, sound like us, and speak our language, they must be like and think like us. This is an important caveat, but it can be carried too far until it turns the denizens of the past into aliens whom we can never really comprehend. In fact, the present has its place in the work of historians. Differences in culture may separate us from our historical subjects, but once we understand this, there are no impenetrable barriers between us. Indeed, the knowledge of the present can be of incalculable aid in our work. We grasp things about biology, race, the human psyche, language, and the ways human beings think and act that, properly used, can make us more comfortable in and knowledgeable about the worlds of those we study.

Even as a young historian I never doubted any of this. Much more troubling was that halfway through my sabbatical I suddenly realized

that I was writing the Bryan book all over again. Once more I was writing history from the perspective of the leaders. I would be the last to deny that this is an important thing to do: books have to be written about those who deeply influenced their own times and ours. But I had already done that in my Bryan book, and I wanted to expand my range. I had hoped my study of Bryan's final years from 1915 to 1925 would explain not only Bryan's transformation from a politician focused almost completely on economic and political reform to one who, while continuing his old reform proclivities, began to emphasize such cultural causes as prohibition and anti-evolution, but also the reasons for the similar transformation of millions of his followers as well. I felt deeply that understanding Bryan helped us to understand the American people and that the anomalies and the directions of his thought were theirs as well. But I had little real evidence of that. It was entirely possible that he was going *their* way as much as they were going his. I simply didn't know how to get at the attitudes of his followers, which seriously limited my knowledge of *why* they were following the course they did. I thought out loud about delaying the publication of my Bryan book until I had worked this problem out, but my friends assured me this was another book. "You want to write that book?" they asked me. "Great! Write it next. But your Bryan book is fine as it is, and it's time to publish it."

And so I did. But soon after I found myself facing the same dilemma in researching my next book; I was falling into the same pattern of allowing the leadership to speak for the masses. Were Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, and the rest of the NAACP leadership, and novelists like Claude McKay and Richard Wright and writer/scholars like Zora Neale Hurston expressing the opinions and desires of the African American people or attempting to impose their attitudes upon them? And how could one find out? How did one penetrate the thought and aspirations of people who left few written records behind them, especially in the era of slavery and the decades following emancipation? Historians of ancient times or the Byzantine and Medieval periods had learned to use a variety of artifacts—coins, vases, works of art of all kinds. But historians of more modern times, awash with written sources, became mesmerized by the written word. Thus if you came from a people without writing or a people whose written records were not preserved, you were out of luck so far as modern history was concerned. In the same year—1965—in which I was beginning to confront these issues, the celebrated British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper defended what he called "Europa-centric history" by advising those

undergraduates who asked for courses in African history that “there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history.” History was interested in “purposive movement” not “the unrewarding gyrations of the barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe.”²

It surprised me then, and still does, that so long after anthropologists had published important studies of the cultures of nonliterate peoples, so many historians were still stumbling around in their own self-imposed darkness. At this juncture I read an essay by Robert Louis Stevenson that I discuss at length later in the book. Stevenson described how he and his school mates would strap lanterns to their waists, cover them with long black coats, and walk together through the night, “mere pillars of darkness” to unknowing spectators, but each boy knowing that he and his mates each had lanterns shining within. A good part of reality, Stevenson concluded, “runs underground. . . . And hence the haunting and truly spectral unreality of realistic books.”³ That phrase—“the haunting and truly spectral unreality of realistic books”—particularly affected me and reminded me of how many histories I had read that seemed a parody of reality precisely because of how many people they either ignored or made no serious effort to understand. The question was *how* do you penetrate the darkness to reveal what Stevenson called “the secret of the lanterns”?

Thus, in the middle of my sabbatical year I took time out from my reading and writing to think more deeply about these issues, to delve more deeply into anthropology, and to devise strategies to hear these voices that had been so effectively silenced by historical neglect to the point where people questioned whether there had been any significant voices at all. People “speak” in a myriad of ways, and my first strategy was to discern whether certain actions of African Americans constituted “voices” that could speak to us and explain the attitudes that were the basis of those actions. I began to study the various significant black migrations that began after emancipation, and the periodic race riots that spanned the years from the late nineteenth century through much of the twentieth century. If I could link these mass actions—positively or negatively—to the thinking of the leadership, I thought I might have a better sense of the relationship between the different segments of the black population.

While I was reading and thinking about these issues, it occurred to me that African American folklore might prove an entryway into black

thought during and after slavery. I knew that slaves and freedmen had an active oral culture, though I knew little about the nature or contents of that culture, as it had not been treated in any of the large number of undergraduate and graduate history courses I had taken as a student. I enjoyed such contemporary folk and religious singers as Pete Seeger and the Weavers, Josh White, Odetta, Paul Robeson, and Mahalia Jackson, but I knew precious little about folklore as a subject and the study of folklore as a discipline. It was this ignorance that initially led me to believe I could deal with all of black folklore in no more than a chapter. As I read more and more deeply in black songs, tales, folk beliefs, jokes, reminiscences, proverbs, sermons, and anecdotes and discovered their richness, that illusion crumbled. The number of chapters I planned multiplied until they took over the book. My planned study of twentieth-century black protest thought of the leadership was transformed into a study of African American folk expression and culture that I hoped would give voice to those rendered historically inarticulate by historians who had concentrated on a relatively narrow spectrum of written sources and thus transformed large numbers of the American people into what Ralph Ellison called "the void of faceless faces, of soundless voices lying outside history." In Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, his protagonist asks: "We who write no novels, histories or other books. What about us?"⁴ It was a question that was to engross me for the rest of my career. The more deeply I researched black oral cultures the clearer it became that I couldn't confine my work to the twentieth century or even to the United States itself. There were too many roots in Africa that we had to comprehend. My book soon began to revolve around two questions: What happened to African folk expression in American slavery, and what happened to African American slave folk expression in freedom?

Before I understood that these were the questions I needed to ask and answer, I had to figure out how to use the hundreds and hundreds of songs and tales and reminiscences and sermons and proverbs I was reading in this new phase of my research. Initially, I simply did not know how to take notes on these materials. Happily, by the time I reached this impasse the process of photocopying had evolved light years from the primitive stage it has been it when I was researching my dissertation. Thus I was able to make legible and usable photocopies of these thousands of pages of material and haul them back to my Berkeley study. There I read them over and over, pondered them closely, searched for ways into them.

Years before, when I was doing my Bryan research, I had reached a similar roadblock. I had assumed that in the last years of his life Bryan had turned from reformer to conservative, and this transformation was at the heart of what I wanted to study. But this simple transformation seemed not to have happened. I discovered that on economic and political issues Bryan maintained his reformist stance and on some issues, like government ownership of railroads, had even pushed to the Left. Richard Hofstadter had taught me much about historical complexity: things were rarely as simple as they seemed; people were not one thing or another. The historian John Higham had taught me through his writings that the historian “may not wrap himself in judicial robes and pass judgment from on high. He’s too much involved in both the prosecution and the defense. He is not a judge of the dead, but rather a participant in their affairs, and their only trustworthy intermediary.”⁵ I realized that it was only when I was willing to be a participant in Bryan’s affairs that I was able to understand him. I entered his world; I began to comprehend the culture that he came from; I could hear his voice. That was very, very important to me and to the kind of history I wanted to write.

I learned also that the subjects of history did not have to be intellectuals in order for the historian to write their intellectual history. They were human beings and therefore *thinking* beings.

It was only when I didn’t write Bryan off as a fundamentalist demagogue, as so many historians had, and read his speeches and editorials with the openness and care they deserved, that he began to reveal himself to me. The same was true of black slaves and their descendants. In their varied forms of oral expression they thought about who they were, what their situation was, how it could be changed, and how best to teach their children how to survive without succumbing to the forces that had them in their grasp. Through their lore they traded information, learned what their peers were thinking, engaged in a dynamic dialogue about a wide range of matters, and—not least of all—entertained one another with songs and stories. I learned that there was no necessary gap between “entertainment” and serious thought; that the two could be—and often are—one, a lesson that served me well when I wrote my third book, on the emergence of cultural hierarchy in nineteenth-century America. I learned that many of the very whites who insisted that blacks had no culture spent a significant amount of time collecting their songs, tales, proverbs, and almost every genre of slave expressive culture, which indicated to me that even they saw more in these materials than they were generally willing to admit.

I began, as historians invariably do, by studying the words of these materials. Words of course are crucial. If people had not preserved the words of the black oral tradition, we would still be unsure of what blacks in and after slavery were thinking and feeling. This book is filled with myriad examples of those words, to the extent that readers can often come to their own conclusions. Words were central but I learned, as I made my way through the materials I had collected, that words were not sufficient. The structures in which these words were embedded were essential to fuller comprehension. Not just what was said but the *ways* in which it was said and responded to and the contexts in which it was embedded were indispensable. Let me offer a few examples that will be multiplied and more fully developed in the following chapters.

Black slave music was antiphonal, as was much African music. That is, the music was call and response—one voice answers another voice. Of course the community-less, culture-less, atomized slaves pictured in so many history books and history classes—the tabula rasa upon whom the whites could write anything they wished—would have been incapable of creating a music so deeply dependent upon a shared culture and a sense of community. Slaves had a reservoir of musical lines, phrases, and structures into which they dipped as they sang and told tales. It gave onlookers the sense of improvisation, but they weren't totally improvising. They were utilizing elements of their cultural reservoir even as they engaged in acts of pure creation and shaped new lines to the songs and new incidents in the stories, some of which would themselves find a place in the reservoir. Their acts of creation were both individual and communal, looking both back to the African cultures from which they had come and around to the American cultures they lived amidst.

A second example comes from the ubiquitous trickster tale. The central plot is widely familiar to this day. A weak animal—frequently but not invariably the rabbit—is confronted by stronger animals who want to kill and eat him. The rabbit survives by utilizing his wits—not by confronting his adversaries but by outthinking them, by tricking them. The more I read slave trickster tales, the more firmly I realized that it was not fantasy but reality that was at their core.

A child growing up in American slave culture didn't hear one rabbit story, he or she heard hundreds of them in his or her lifetime. Thus the salient message was embodied not only in the individual tale but in the *cycle* of tales itself. In the individual tale the rabbit begins as weak and vulnerable; he's assaulted by stronger animals, and through his wits he

generally thwarts their plans, defeats them, and emerges as the victor, or at least the survivor. But the next time we meet him he's weak and vulnerable and under threat. He survives, and in the very next tale he's once again weak and threatened. And so on and on and on. While each tale may bring the satisfaction of the weak triumphing over the strong, the cycle itself has a more complicated message: Rabbits may win battles but they don't win wars. Rabbits don't replace foxes and wolves; they're *rabbits*! They have to use their wits all the time. They're always in danger. They never become secure. They're never on top. That was the lesson being taught to the young; not some simple fantasy of victory, but what you needed to do to survive in this world.

A final example, developed in Chapter 4, has to do with the blues, the words of which moved black freed men and women and their progeny more firmly into the larger culture, and the music of which was revivifying and moved blacks back toward the origins of their music in Africa. Thus African Americans were one of the several groups in the United States who could move in two opposite directions *simultaneously*. For black Americans, as for many other ethnic and immigrant groups, the process of acculturation was not linear. They gave and they took. They pushed forward and they pushed back. They held on even as they let go. This is why books like this do not promote fragmentation, as has been charged. Rather, they help us understand the enormously complex processes of acculturation that have taken place throughout our history and that have made our culture inestimably richer.

Insights like these did not come to me easily; they were the product of reading deeply in the various genres of slave oral culture and becoming as familiar with them as possible. I tried to understand the African cultures slaves brought with them to the New World and what happened to these cultures in American slavery. I had to enter African American culture, see things from *within* it before I could explain it to others. I had indeed to think more deeply about culture and how it functions than I had previously. Certainly my dissertation on Bryan was deeply enmeshed in the study of culture, but I wasn't as openly aware of the transformations in my approaches and methods. In dealing with the less familiar and more complex materials of slave and post-slave culture, I had to be more aware of what it was I was doing. In writing this book I *consciously* began to think of myself as a cultural historian, and a cultural historian I have remained for the rest of my career.

There was a great deal of talk in the years this book was researched and written about which historians were most prepared to do what. Could white historians understand black Americans sufficiently to write about them meaningfully and accurately? This was a question frequently asked and too often answered in the negative. Certainly in my first sustained foray into black culture, I had much to learn and to ponder. But I never found my skin color—the fact that I was “white”—an insurmountable obstacle. I was brought up in an Eastern European Jewish family that had immigrated to the United States in the first and second decades of the last century, and I found my upbringing in Jewish folk culture helped me to understand the behavior of slaves and freed men and women. Elizabeth Kilham, a northern white who went among the freed people after the Civil War, could never comprehend their reluctance to admit to really good health. In response to her queries about how they were, they would respond: “tollable” (tolerable). This led her to write to her family back in New England about these unfathomable people. Where else would you find a youngster, obviously bursting with health, tell you he was “jes’ tollable”? I knew the answer to that one. I was brought up in a culture that believed there were unseen forces and spirits that would knock you right down if you got too cocky, too inflated with hubris. To praise the merits of one’s children or to talk about the excellence of their accomplishments or health and the brightness of their future, or of your own for that matter, you had to say certain words—in Yiddish—or “spit” over your shoulder, or perform any number of acts to ward off the unseen powers and let them know that you knew they could reduce you or yours in a second. When my younger sister was crawling around our apartment, I was given firm orders not to step over her, because, if I did, she wouldn’t grow.

And so on and on. In addition to the orthodox Jewish tradition my family brought with it was a folk tradition that they made fit with their more formal creed. And so I could understand the type of Christianity black slaves created that encompassed the formal and the folk and melded them together in a sacred universe. Was it crucial that I was who I was—a child in an immigrant family—to understand these aspects of slave culture? Not really. I think I would have come to comprehend slave culture because I was enmeshed in so many aspects of it and slaves explained themselves to me. I only mean that being who I was didn’t invariably cripple me in my search for the contours of slave life and culture; in

some respects it helped. The point is simply that all history entails comprehending the other even if she or he seems familiar. These people are not us, and it takes patience and hard work to hear *their* voices instead of merely echoes of our own. I'm convinced any good historian can accomplish this. I was exhilarated to come to hear their voices and even share aspects of their experiences and world view. I say "aspects" because the quest to understand the *entire* culture is chimerical. Indeed, we hardly understand our own culture in its entirety. But we can understand enough to allow us to see the slaves and post-emancipation freed people as having a complex culture that allowed them to explain the world to themselves and their children and even to affect that world to a larger extent than was long thought possible.

Historians naturally enough bring their theories and hypotheses, and those of other scholars, with them to their areas of research. Good enough, so long as they don't forget that the people they're studying had *their* own theories and hypotheses. The slaves had theories of how slavery and power worked, and they explored them in their trickster tales, as they explored the sacred universe in their spirituals and folk beliefs and their immediate situation in their work songs. I learned to search for these theories and take them into account when formulating my own.

I learned that it is not possible to understand a people from studying one or two genres of their culture. People employ different genres for different purposes. If historians attempted to learn about the United States by studying baseball, they would learn a lot but hardly enough. Baseball explains only some features of our culture and by itself it explains too little. Similarly, if I had studied only slave spirituals and sermons I would have only a single part of their multifarious culture. Add other genres—secular song, folk tales, folk beliefs, folk medicine, jokes, dance—and you get a very different picture of people who had many needs, interests, and beliefs and found a variety of ways to express them.

I learned how difficult the findings of this study are for some to accept. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has described the problem cogently: "When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one, . . . when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened. . . . Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just *others*, that we ourselves are an 'other' among others."⁶

And so the slaves, their post-emancipation progeny, and I had a long conversation from which I benefited more than I can express. It taught me about culture, how it works, and how people adapt it to their needs.

Indeed, it taught me much about history: what kinds of questions we can ask it and how we go about answering them. It taught me about people and how complex and artful their interactions and the cultures they build can be. I trust and hope you will be led to think about these matters for yourself as you read *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* and that you will enjoy the process.

Lawrence W. Levine

Berkeley, California
September 1, 2006

NOTES

1. Richard Hofstadter's second book was *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948).
2. Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 9–11.
3. Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Lantern-Bearers," in Stevenson, *Across the Plains* (London, 1892), 206–28.
4. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1952), 331–32.
5. John Higham, "Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic," *American Historical Review*, 67 (April 1962), 620.
6. Paul Ricoeur, "Civilizations and National Cultures," quoted in Lawrence W. Levine, *The Opening of the American Mind* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 172–73.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This study rests upon two related convictions which I hold even more firmly at the conclusion of my work than I did at its inception: It is time for historians to expand their own consciousness by examining the consciousness of those they have hitherto ignored or neglected. It is time that the study of human intellect be broadened to embrace Joseph Levenson's admirable definition of intellectual history as "the history not of thought, but of men thinking." This is such an attempt. It can be repeated for many other groups in American history. It focuses upon the orally transmitted expressive culture of Afro-Americans in the United States during the century that stretched from the antebellum era to the end of the 1940s, and is primarily concerned with two major questions: What were the contours of slave folk thought on the eve of emancipation and what were the effects of freedom upon that thought?

The significance of this study lies not only in its subject matter but also in its quest. I have attempted to present and understand the thought of people who, though quite articulate in their own lifetimes, have been *rendered* historically inarticulate by scholars who have devoted their attention to other groups and other problems. Historians are the prisoners not only of what Jack Hexter has called their "tracking devices"—the scholarly tools of perception that prevail among them at any given time—but also of their sources or what they perceive to be their sources. The effect of the embarrassment of documentary riches confronting modern

American historians is to relieve them of the desperate and innovation-producing need to examine every last bit and piece of evidence; to squeeze out of every remnant of the past whatever meaning, whatever understanding, whatever perception might lie hidden within. The abundance of those sources United States historians have considered accessible and important has produced a poverty of understanding of those groups which have not left behind them traditional written remains or have not been in the mainstream of American society and politics. The result has been that we know infinitely more about the clergy than about their parishioners; more about political spokesmen than about their constituents; more about union leaders than workers; more about troop movements during America's various wars than about the migrations that transformed the face of the United States from generation to generation; more about the aspirations and life styles of large entrepreneurs than about those of small shopkeepers, merchants, or artisans; more about social workers than about the poor to whom they ministered; more about men than women; more about Protestants and whites than about members of other religious and racial groups.

This catalogue—which of course could be extended—is not meant to be an indictment of the history that has been written most frequently. Obviously, there can be no meaningful historiography which does not take as one of its central tasks the re-creation of the background, thought, and action of those who direct the important institutions and movements of any society. No one who understands the historian's craft would plead seriously that all groups should receive equal time. We know more about some groups than others not only because of the predilections of historians or the nature of their sources but frequently because we should know more about some groups of individuals in terms of their importance and their effects upon others. The problem is that historians have tended to spend too much of their time in the company of the "movers and shakers" and too little in the universe of the mass of mankind. I began this study with a sense of isolation from the mainstream of current historiography. I conclude it with the recognition that it is part of what hopefully is a growing effort on the part of historians to restore a greater balance in historical writing.

Greater balance is necessary not only in the amount of attention we devote to neglected groups of people, but also in the nature of that attention. This book may dismay some because it abandons the popular formula which has rendered black history an unending round of degrada-

tion and pathology. The familiar urge to see in heroes only virtue and in villains only malice has an analogue in the desire to see in the oppressed only unrelieved suffering and impotence. This ideal construct—the pure victim—is no more convincing or supported by what we know of human psychology and history than the ideals of pure hero or villain. Yet such are the realities of our current racial and political situation that it remains necessary to stress that which should be obvious: to argue, as this book does, that even in the midst of the brutalities and injustices of the antebellum and postbellum racial systems black men and women were able to find the means to sustain a far greater degree of self-pride and group cohesion than the system they lived under ever intended for them to be able to do, is not to argue that the system was more benign than it has been pictured, but rather that human beings are more resilient, less malleable, and less able to live without some sense of cultural cohesion, individual autonomy, and self-worth than a number of recent scholars have maintained.

Upon the hard rock of racial, social, and economic exploitation and injustice black Americans forged and nurtured a culture: they formed and maintained kinship networks, made love, raised and socialized children, built a religion, and created a rich expressive culture in which they articulated their feelings and hopes and dreams. My aim has not been to reiterate the difficult conditions that Negroes have faced in this country—though certainly these conditions do emerge in the following pages—but rather to examine the folk sources without which it is impossible to understand the history and culture of the bulk of black Americans. My efforts have led me to depart from the traditional historical practice of viewing the folk as inarticulate intellectual ciphers, as objects who were continually acted upon by forces over which they had no control, and to recognize them as actors in their own right who not only responded to their situation but often affected it in crucial ways. Those who would restrict intellectual history to the educated, the intelligentsia, the elite, would do well to look carefully at the richness of expression, the sharpness of perception, the uninhibited imagination, the complex imagery that form the materials upon which this study has been based. I have utilized these materials as fully as possible in order to explore and reconstruct the mind of the black folk.

Inevitably, this task is simpler to state than to accomplish. Having worked my way carefully through thousands of Negro songs, folktales, proverbs, aphorisms, jokes, verbal games, and the long narrative oral

poems known in Afro-American culture as “toasts,” I am painfully aware of the problems inherent in their use. They are difficult, often impossible, to date with any precision. The identity of their creators and their point of origin are lost in the obscurity of the past. Their geographical distribution is usually unclear. They were collected belatedly, frequently by men and women who had only a rudimentary knowledge of the culture from which they sprang, and little scruple about altering or suppressing them. The historian’s frustration can only mount as he reads in one collection after another variants of the admission of Howard Odum and Guy Johnson that they failed to publish “a great mass” of their material “because of its vulgar and indecent content” and that many of the songs they did print “have been shortened by the omission of stanzas unfit for publication,” or John Burma’s lament that many of the “most illustrative” jokes he collected “are too crude and obscene for the printed word.” The offending material not only went unpublished, it seems to have gone unpreserved as well. Of the major collectors of black folklore, only Newman White in the papers he left to Harvard University and John and Alan Lomax in many of the recordings and tapes they deposited in the Library of Congress’ Archive of Folk Song appear to have followed the admonition of Cecil Sharp that unexpurgated texts be placed in libraries “where they may be examined by students and those who will not misunderstand them.”

Censorship was not the exclusive province of folklorists. The black folk from whom they collected their material were often extremely selective and circumspect in choosing the songs and stories they related to the dignified whites who came among them. When Elsie Clews Parsons accused James Murray, a resident of the South Carolina Sea Islands, of deleting salacious material from one of his tales, he replied, “Yes, I leave out a little bit. I know twenty-five or t’irty man stories, funny too, but I *wouldn’t tell dem.*” During the 1930s an interviewer for the Federal Writers’ Project heard a story from a South Carolina black, Lewis Small, and promptly related it to one of Small’s Negro neighbors who exclaimed, “I heard that story all my life but that ain’t the way I hear it! The way I hear it had such a disgraceful ending that I didn’t tell you that one. But Lewis fix it up all right!” “No, honey,” a black stevedore told Mary Wheeler, “I don’t know no rouser songs fittin’ fo’ a nice lady to write down.” Nor was it merely material of a sexual nature that occasioned this reticence. As this study will demonstrate, black singers and storytellers were often extremely self-conscious and self-protective in the presence

of folklorists, white and black alike. Their attitudes and actions were succinctly expressed in a song sung by generations of Negroes:

Got one mind for white folks to see,
'Nother for what I know is me;
He don't know, he don't know my mind.

That these folkloristic documents are not perfect sources should hardly surprise historians whose quest by its very nature engages them in an incessant struggle to overcome imperfect records. They have learned how to deal with altered documents, with consciously or unconsciously biased firsthand accounts, with manuscript collections that were deposited in archives only after being filtered through the overprotective hands of friends and relatives, and with the comparative lack of contemporary sources. The scholarly challenge presented by the materials of folk culture is very real, but it is neither unique nor insurmountable.

I could not have written this book without the past and present work of scholars in the fields of folklore, ethnomusicology, and anthropology, and my debt to them is incalculable. Nevertheless, my aims and procedures remain those of the historian. While I have utilized with great profit such aids to research as the various folkloristic indices of tale types and motifs, I have not felt it necessary to make extensive comparative considerations part of my own scholarly apparatus. I am aware that many of the materials I analyze have their origins or parallels in the folk thought of other peoples, and whenever it was relevant to my purposes I have explored these avenues, but for the most part I have assumed that once these materials made their way firmly into the network of Afro-American thought and culture they could be used to shed light upon black consciousness without constant reference to their existence in other cultures. Such comparative studies are important, of course, and much remains to be done in this area. My own aims have been different. I have attempted to write a history of the thought of a group of people who have been too largely neglected and too consistently misunderstood. If I have succeeded at all then this study should serve the dual purpose of helping to establish the contours of Afro-American folk thought in the United States and of calling to the attention of other historians the importance of an entire body of sources which, until very recently, they have chosen to ignore.

Where I have utilized folk materials collected after 1950 it has been to illustrate the continuance of patterns present before then rather than to detail the emergence of new lines of thought. I have ended my inquiry

with the 1940s, since it seems to me that the major patterns of change wrought by freedom were observable by then. Of course I am aware that changes have continued to take place since then in black music, black religion, and black consciousness in general, but these are the subject of a different study than the one I have undertaken.

I have attempted not only to understand the materials of Afro-American expressive culture but also to present them to readers to whom they are unfamiliar. I have quoted more frequently and at greater length than historians commonly do because the materials upon which this study is based are extremely difficult to present in summary or paraphrase. They must be experienced directly to be comprehended. Thus while this book contains an argument or, more accurately, a series of arguments, it is not intended exclusively as a vehicle for purveying my own analysis. I have been at least equally interested in communicating a sense of black folk thought. I have tried to include sufficient material so that whether or not readers are convinced by my arguments they will come away with a feeling for and a comprehension of the folk materials upon which my work is based. These materials, like all folk materials, are extremely redundant and relatively long-lived. In order to limit repetition I generally have not told the same story, song, saying, or joke again and again no matter how frequently it was told throughout the period of this study. Since I have chosen representative materials the reader should assume redundancy; that is, most of the material quoted in these pages was known over a relatively wide area and was repeated over and over in seemingly endless variation.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that folk expression is only one part of a people's culture. As Bruce Jackson has written: "It is not all of culture, it is not all of action. It is one way of handling some things, but only one way, appropriate only to certain circumstances at certain times." This, then, does not pretend to be a study of all of Afro-American culture but only of one crucial and much neglected aspect of it. Even within these confines I have no illusions of definitiveness. I have attempted to inaugurate not end discussion, to open up not seal off new avenues of research and understanding.

L.W.L.

Berkeley, California
December 1975

A NOTE ON BLACK DIALECT

The numerous quotations which document this study make it evident that Afro-American oral culture was distinctive not only in content but in structure and sound as well. The language employed in these quotations, of course, is not invariably the language actually spoken by black Americans but representations of that language recorded by observers and folklorists, the great majority of whom were white and a substantial proportion of whom were southern. The language I have been forced to rely upon is a *mélange* of accuracy and fantasy, of sensitivity and stereotype, of empathy and racism. The distortions, where they exist, were not always conscious; people often hear what they expect to hear, what stereotype and predisposition have prepared them to hear. Thus the variety and subtlety of Negro speech was frequently reduced to what the auditor thought Negroes spoke like. Even when the pronunciation of a given word was precisely the same as that of the collectors, their desire to indicate the exotic qualities of black speech led them to utilize such misleading and superfluous spellings as *wen* for "when," *fo'ks* or *fokes* for "folks," *wite* or *wite* for "white," *wuz* for "was," *bizness* for "business," *neer* for "near," *wurst* for "worst," *frum* for "from," *reel* for "real," *cullered* for "colored," *cundemn* for "condemn," *fast'n* for "fasten," and so on and on.

The temptation to delete the most obvious distortions from the documented dialect has been great but in the end I have resisted it and have utilized the language as it was recorded. Any attempt to standardize it

into some ideal form of Afro-American dialect would have the effect of distorting it even more, since there was no standard black dialect covering all sections of the country and all periods from the antebellum South through the 1940s. Indeed, it was the very attempt at standardization that has led to the distortions that appear throughout the collections upon which my research is based, and I have been reluctant to compound the problem by any further and necessarily futile attempts in this direction. The record we have, in spite of its errors, is closer to what prevailed than any mid-twentieth-century reconstruction could be. I have utilized the language as I found it in the reports of nineteenth- and twentieth-century observers and folklorists because for all of its manifold mistakes and inaccuracies, it does have the ultimate effect of conveying the enduring distinctiveness and creativity of black speech.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have received generous help and courtesy from the staffs of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; the New York Public Library and its branches, the Schomburg Collection in Harlem and the Library of the Performing Arts in Lincoln Center; the University of California Library at Berkeley and particularly the staff of its interlibrary loan division. I am especially indebted to the Archive of Folk Song and the Music Division of the Library of Congress. Alan Jabbour, who was then the head of the Archive, Joseph Hickerson, its present head, and their staff not only gave me expert help but treated me with great warmth. They simultaneously facilitated my work in the Library's rich collections and made it one of my more rewarding and enjoyable research experiences.

Funds from the Social Science Research Council enabled me to devote the academic year 1965-1966 to begin my education in the field of Afro-American history. National Institute of Mental Health grant no. MH18732-02 provided indispensable funds for research, travel expenses, and time off from my teaching duties. The Committee on Research and other agencies of the University of California at Berkeley generously granted me funds for research and typing expenses. And, finally, Phi Beta Kappa awarded me a Bicentennial Fellowship which enabled me to complete the writing of this study.

I have been even more richly endowed with human resources. At the very beginning of my work on this book, I met the poet and scholar

Sterling A. Brown who gave me warm words of encouragement and sent me a copy of his unpublished manuscript collection of Negro jokes. An early version of Chapter 1, which I delivered as a paper at the 1969 meetings of the American Historical Association, was perceptively criticized by J. Saunders Redding, Mike Thelwell, and my friend Nathan Huggins. Professor Huggins also read an early version of part of Chapter 4. In the process of writing Chapter 5, I was fortunate enough to meet Linda Morris who shares my interest in exploring what makes people laugh. She spent time helping me to formulate a number of my ideas as well as reading and improving a draft of the chapter. I benefited also from my conversations on Afro-American culture with VèVè Clark. Lisa Rubens helped me for a time with my research, but she has been even more important as a friend who was always willing to talk out matters relating to this work and who invariably buoyed my spirits by her unwavering faith that somewhere, somehow, amid the mass of notes and documents piled high on my desk, a book was taking shape.

Kenneth Stampp read and helped me to improve early drafts of my chapters on slavery and shared with me his vast knowledge of the antebellum United States. Paula Fass read the entire final draft of the manuscript with perception and sensitivity. I found myself incorporating her suggestions again and again. Alan Dundes, of Berkeley's Anthropology Department, never begrudged the time and energy necessary to guide a historian through some of the intricacies of folklore scholarship. He has read the entire manuscript and encouraged and stimulated me to explore these unfamiliar sources with more confidence than I might otherwise have mustered.

From the inception of this work five friends have shared some of its burdens and, I hope, some of its joys as well. Leon Litwack, Robert Middlekauff, and Irwin Scheiner of Berkeley's History Department, Sheldon Meyer of Oxford University Press, and my wife, Cornelia Levine, read various drafts, listened with patient understanding to my compulsive conversation about folk history, and responded in ways that have made this a richer book in every respect.

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BLACK
CULTURE
AND
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1

THE SACRED WORLD OF BLACK SLAVES

You t'inks I'm mistaken, honey! But I know t'ings dat de wite folks wid all dar larnin' nebber fin's out, an' nebber sarches fo' mudder. . . .

No, honey! De good Lawd doan gib ebery'ting to his wite chilluns. He's gib 'em de wite skin, an' larnin', an' he's made 'em rich an' free. But de brack folks is his chilluns, too, an' he gibs us de brack skin an' no larnin', an' hab make us t' work fo' de wite folks. But de good Lawd gibs us eyes t' see t'ings dey doan see, an' he comes t' me, a poor brack slave woman, an' tells me be patient, 'cause dar's no wite nor brack in hebben. An' de time's comin' when he'll make his brack chilluns free in dis yere worl', an' gib 'em larnin', an' good homes, an' good times. Ah! honey, I knows, I knows!

“Aunt Aggy”—a Virginia slave in the 1840s¹

The Africans brought to the English colonies as slaves in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries did not carry with them a network of beliefs, customs, institutions, and practices constituting what might be called with accuracy a unified “African” culture. No such monolithic cultural entity existed. The peoples of Africa created a myriad of languages, religions, customs, social, political, and economic institutions which differentiated them and gave them separate identities. These marked

differences have been cited frequently to illustrate the insuperable obstacles slaves in the British colonies of North America faced in keeping a semblance of their traditional cultures alive. With few exceptions—the most notable being W. E. B. Du Bois and Melville Herskovits—most scholars until very recently have assumed that because United States slavery eroded so much of the linguistic and institutional side of African life it necessarily wiped out almost all of the fundamental aspects of traditional African cultures. “The Negro,” Robert Park wrote in 1919, in a statement that typifies much of twentieth-century scholarship on this question, “when he landed in the United States, left behind him almost everything but his dark complexion and his tropical temperament. . . . Coming from all parts of Africa and having no common language and common tradition, the memories of Africa which they brought with them were soon lost.” This inability to transmit and perpetuate African culture on American soil, Park maintained, made the Negro unique among the peoples of the United States. “Other peoples have lost, under the disintegrating influence of the American environment, much of their cultural heritage. None have been so utterly cut off and estranged from their ancestral land, traditions and people.”¹

What has been lost sight of too easily in these pronouncements is that culture is more than the sum total of institutions and language. It is expressed as well by something less tangible, which the anthropologist Robert Redfield has called “style of life.” Peoples as different as the Lapp and the Bedouin, Redfield has argued, with diverse languages, religions, customs, and institutions, may still share an emphasis on certain virtues and ideals, certain manners of independence and hospitality, general ways of looking upon the world, which give them a similar life style.² This argument applies with special force to the West African cultures from which so many of the slaves came. Though they varied widely in language, institutions, gods, and familial patterns, they shared a fundamental outlook toward the past, present, and future and common means of cultural expression which could well have constituted the basis of a sense of common identity and world view capable of withstanding the impact of slavery.

The terms which scholars utilize in their search for the manifestations of this traditional world view are important. To think of them as “survivals” is to prejudge the issue, to make the prior decision that even if they did continue to exist within the contours of a slave world they did so vestigially, as quaint reminders of an exotic culture sufficiently alive to render the slaves picturesquely different but little more. Scholars must be recep-

tive to the possibility that for Africans, as for other people, the journey to the New World did not inexorably sever all associations with the Old World; that with Africans, as with European and Asian immigrants, aspects of the traditional cultures and world view they came with may have continued to exist not as mere vestiges but as dynamic, living, creative parts of group life in the United States.

To insist that only those elements of slave culture were African which remained largely unchanged from the African past is to misinterpret the nature of culture itself. Culture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of interaction between the past and present. Its toughness and resiliency are determined not by a culture's ability to withstand change, which indeed may be a sign of stagnation not life, but by its ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation. The question, as VèVè Clark recently put it, is not one of survivals but of transformations.³ We must be sensitive to the ways in which the African world view interacted with that of the Euro-American world into which it was carried and the extent to which an Afro-American perspective was created. There is no better place to search for these transformations than in the numerous folk expressions of nineteenth-century slave cosmology.

THE CONTOURS OF SLAVE SONG

White southerners, no matter how much they might denigrate the culture and capacities of their black bondsmen, paid tribute to their musical abilities, from Thomas Jefferson's observation that musically the slaves "are more generally gifted than the whites with accurate ears for tune and time," to the northern Mississippi planter who told Frederick Law Olmsted more than half a century later that "Niggers is allers good singers nat'rally. I reckon they got better lungs than white folks, they hev such powerful voices." "Compared with our taciturn race, the African nature is full of poetry and song," an anonymous correspondent in *Dwight's Journal of Music* wrote in 1856. "The Negro is a natural musician. He will learn to play on an instrument more quickly than a white man. They have magnificent voices and sing without instruction. . . . They go singing to their daily labors. The maid sings about the house, and the laborer sings in the field." The slaves seem to have agreed. "That's one

thing the colored folks is blessed," an ex-slave exclaimed. "They certainly got the harp in their mouths."¹ An examination of the shape and content of slave song reveals much about slave culture and consciousness.

Alan Lomax's argument that musical style appears to be one of the most conservative of culture traits and that even when an entirely new set of tunes, rhythms, or harmonic patterns is introduced a musical style will remain intact and yield to change only very gradually, certainly seems borne out by slave music.² As this chapter will demonstrate, black slaves engaged in widespread musical exchanges and cross-culturation with the whites among whom they lived, yet throughout the centuries of slavery and long after emancipation their song style, with its overriding antiphony, its group nature, its pervasive functionality, its improvisational character, its strong relationship in performance to dance and bodily movement and expression, remained closer to the musical styles and performances of West Africa and the Afro-American music of the West Indies and South America than to the musical style of Western Europe. In their songs, as in their tales, aphorisms, proverbs, anecdotes, and jokes, Afro-American slaves, following the practices of the African cultures they had been forced to leave behind them, assigned a central role to the spoken arts, encouraged and rewarded verbal improvisation, maintained the participatory nature of their expressive culture, and utilized the spoken arts to voice criticism as well as to uphold traditional values and group cohesion.

While observers have collected and ex-slaves have remembered songs containing some African words and phrases, specific African songs do not seem to have remained an important element in antebellum slave song, though their history in the colonial period still requires investigation.³ The disappearance of a specific song literature, of course, is not synonymous with the disappearance of the structure of that literature or the purposes to which it had been put. Slaves, in fact, continued to utilize song in much the way their African ancestors had. Music remained a central, living element in their daily expression and activities. "I used to pick 150 pounds of cotton every day," an ex-slave recalled and then, perhaps to explain what helped to make that tedious, grueling task bearable, she added, "We would pick cotton and sing, pick and sing all day."⁴ Slaves not only picked cotton but planted rice, husked corn, rowed boats, rocked babies, cooked food, indeed performed almost every conceivable task to the accompaniment of song with an intensity and style that continually elicited the comments of the whites around them. During the Second Seminole

War in Florida in the 1830s, a white passenger on a boat propelled by "a dozen stout negro rowers" described a scene which could have as easily taken place in Africa as on the St. Johns River. As the boat shot through the quiet waters, the black rowers timed the strokes of their oars by singing. A song leader sang a line, the other rowers joined in on a short chorus, then came another solo line and another brief chorus, followed by a longer chorus. Some of the lines seemed to be standard ones known by all, but as soon as these were used up lines relating to the surrounding scenes and people were extemporized. "Some of these were full of rude wit, and a lucky hit always drew a thundering chorus from the rowers, and an encouraging laugh from the occupants of the stern-seats." The singers paid little attention to rhyme or even to the number of syllables in a line: "they condensed four or five [syllables] into one foot, or stretched out one to occupy the space that should have been filled with four or five; yet they never spoiled the tune. This elasticity of form is peculiar to the negro song."⁵

Fannie Berry, an ex-slave, described a similar use of song when she told of how the hired slaves from her plantation cut down trees and sawed them into ties for the railroad that was being built through her section of Virginia during the late 1850s. As the slaves felled pine trees in the morning mist and fog, they sang:

A col' frosty mo'nin'
De niggers feelin' good
Take yo' ax upon yo' shoulder
Nigger, talk to de wood.

The voices of hundreds of slaves ringing through the woods created a memorable scene, but the purpose of their song was not exclusively aesthetic any more than that of the slave rowers had been.

Dey be paired up to a tree, an' dey mark de blows by de song. Fus' one chop, den his partner, an' when dey sing TALK dey all chop togedder; an' purty soon dey git de tree ready for to fall an' dey yell "Hi" an' de slaves all scramble out de way quick.⁶

Throughout slavery black workers continued to time their work routines to the tempo of their music in much the same manner as their African ancestors.

Black song, of course, had many additional functions both in Africa and America. In Africa, songs, tales, proverbs, and verbal games served the dual purpose of not only preserving communal values and solidarity but

also providing occasions for the individual to transcend, at least symbolically, the inevitable restrictions of his environment and his society by permitting him to express deeply held feelings which ordinarily could not be verbalized. Among a number of African peoples, for example, periods were set aside when the inhabitants were encouraged to gather together and through the medium of song, dance, and tales to openly express their feelings about each other and their leaders. William Bosman, the Dutch traveler and official who lived in Africa from 1688 to 1702, described a ceremony which he had twice witnessed on the Gold Coast: "This Procession is preceded by a Feast of eight Days, accompanied with all manner of Singing, Skipping, Dancing, Mirth, and Jollity: In which time a perfect lampooning Liberty is allowed, and Scandal so highly exalted, that they may freely sing of all the Faults, Villanies and Frauds of their Superiors as well as Inferiors without Punishment, or so much as the least interruption."⁷ More than two hundred years later the English anthropologist R. S. Rattray witnessed this same annual eight-day *Apo* ceremony. All around him the Ashanti freely chanted their normally repressed feelings:

All is well to-day.

We know that a Brong man eats rats,

But we never knew that one of royal blood eats rats.

But to-day we have seen our master, Ansah, eating rats.

To-day all is well and we may say so, say so, say so.

At other times we may not say so, say so, say so.

"Wait until Friday when the people really begin to abuse me," the chief told him, "and if you will come and do so too it will please me." In their custom of *bo akutia* the Ashanti practiced an ingenious vituperation by proxy in which a person brought a friend to the home of a chief or some other official who had offended him but of whom he was afraid. In the presence of this personage, the aggrieved individual pretended to have an altercation with his friend whom he verbally assailed and abused freely. Once he had thus relieved himself of his pent-up feelings in the hearing of the person against whom they were really intended, the brief ritual ended with no overt acknowledgment by any of the parties involved of what had actually taken place.⁸

In the days of their kings, the Dahomeans too had annual rites in which the subjects were encouraged to invent songs and parables mocking their rulers and reciting the injustices they had suffered. They possessed numerous additional outlets as well. Melville and Frances Herskovits witnessed

the monthly social dance known as *avogan* in which the residents of a given quarter of the city of Abomey satirized those of another section. "Crowds come to see the display and to watch the dancing, but, most of all, to listen to the songs and to laugh at the ridicule to which are held those who have offended members of the quarter giving the dance. Names are ordinarily not mentioned, . . . However, everyone who is present already knows to whom reference is being made." In everyday work situations also, Dahomean men and women wove songs in which they commented on the generosity or scant hospitality of their last host, recounted gossip, and articulated attitudes of reproach and protest. In these songs indirection was typical. Thus a Dahomean woman masked her ridicule of her co-wife, a princess, by referring to her as a "man of rank."

O son of King Hwegbadja
To you I bring news
With you I leave word
That a man of rank who kills and then steals is here.
Something has been lost in this house
And the owner has not found it.
The man of rank who kills and then steals
Has been here.⁹

The psychological release these practices afforded seems to have been well understood. "You know that everyone has a *sunsum* (soul) that may get hurt or knocked about or become sick, and so make the body ill," an Ashanti high priest explained to Rattray. "Very often . . . ill health is caused by the evil and the hate that another has in his head against you. Again, you too may have hatred in your head against another, because of something that person has done to you, and that, too, causes your *sunsum* to fret and become sick. Our forbears knew this to be the case, and so they ordained a time, once every year, when every man and woman, free man and slave, should have freedom to speak out just what was in their head, to tell their neighbours just what they thought of them, and of their actions, and not only their neighbours, but also the king or chief. When a man has spoken freely thus, he will feel his *sunsum* cool and quieted, and the *sunsum* of the other person against whom he has now openly spoken will be quieted also."¹⁰ Utilization of verbal art for this purpose was widespread throughout Africa and was not confined to those ceremonial occasions when one could directly state one's feelings. Through innuendo, metaphor, and circumlocution the Ashanti, Dahomeans, Chopi,

Ibo, Ewe, Yoruba, Jukun, Bashi, Tiv, Hausa, and other African peoples could utilize their songs as outlets for individual release without disturbing communal solidarity.¹¹

There is abundant evidence that the verbal art of the slaves in the United States served many of these traditional functions. Priscilla McCullough recalled that when young women on the plantation where she was a slave misbehaved, their fellow slaves "put um on duh banjo," a practice which she explained as follows: "When dey play dat night, dey sing bout dat girl and dey tell all bout uh. Das puttin uh on duh banjo. Den ebrybody know an dat girl sho bettuh change uh ways."¹² On a boat trip to Edisto Island in South Carolina in the early 1840s, the leading oarsman, Big-Mouth Joe, used song to criticize one of his fellow slaves who was not pulling his weight:

One time upon dis ribber,
 Long time ago—
 Mass Ralph 'e had a nigger,
 Long time ago—
 Da nigger had no merit,
 Long time ago—
 De nigger couldn't row wid sperrit,
 Long time ago—
 And now dere is in dis boat, ah,
 A nigger dat I see—
 Wha' is a good for nuthing shoat, ah,
 Ha, ha, ha, he—
 Da nigger's weak like water,
 Ha, ha, ha, he—
 'E can't row half quarter,
 Ha, ha, ha, he—
 Cuss de nigger—cuss 'e libber,
 Ha, ha, ha, he—
 'E nebber shall come on dis ribber,
 Ha, ha, ha, he—¹³

In the 1840s slaves on a Louisiana plantation sang songs in which the actions of their fellow slaves were commented upon and lampooned:

Ebo Dick and Jurdan's Jo,
 Them two niggers stole my yo'.
Chorus. Hop Jim along,
 Walk Jim along,
 Talk Jim along, &c.

Old black Dan, as black as tar,
He dam glad he was not dar.
Hop Jim Along, &c.¹⁴

The precise meaning of the song is difficult to decipher and may be only a compilation of nonsense verses, but we should not come to this conclusion too easily as contemporary whites were wont to do. Slaves frequently sang songs about each other which were incomprehensible to white listeners. In the late 1830s on the Altamaha River in Georgia, Frances Kemble heard this rowing song which provided "an unmistakable source of satisfaction" for the black oarsmen but only a source of puzzlement for Miss Kemble who quickly concluded that, with few exceptions, "I have never heard the Negroes on Mr. [Butler]'s plantation sing any words that could be said to have any sense."

Jenny shake her toe at me,
Jenny gone away;
Jenny shake her toe at me,
Jenny gone away.
Hurrah! Miss Susy, oh!
Jenny gone away;
Hurrah! Miss Susy, oh!
Jenny gone away.¹⁵

Chadwick Hansen has shown that in all probability what Miss Kemble heard was not the English word "toe" but an African-derived word referring to the buttocks. The Jenny of whom the slaves were singing with such obvious pleasure was shaking something more interesting and provocative than her foot.¹⁶ Negro tales frequently featured music as a device to get around and deceive the whites. In one such story a master dropped in on his slave on a rainy day to hear him play the fiddle. The slave had just stolen a shoat and hidden it under his bed. Afraid that his master would notice the pig's leg sticking out, he sang as he played the fiddle: "Ding-Ding a Dingy—Old Lady put the pig's foot further on the bed." His wife walked to the bed while harmonizing, "Ummmmmmmmmm," and jerked the cover down over the pig's foot. "Yessir, that's a new one," the master said, delighting in the improvised song. "Yessir, that's a new one."¹⁷

Inevitably, the slaves used the subtleties of their song to comment on the whites around them with a freedom denied them in other forms of expression. In her fictionalized biography, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*

(1838), Caroline Gilman included a superb example of this type of song. During a boat trip down the Ashley River in South Carolina, Juba, the head oarsman, led his fellow slaves in a song about the boat *Neely*, which was named for the young mistress Cornelia who was aboard:

Hi de good boat Neely?
 She row bery fast, Miss Neely!
 An't no boat like a' Miss Neely,
 Ho yoi'!

Who gawing to row wid Miss Neely?
 Can't catch a' dis boat Neely—
 Nobody show he face wid Neely,
 Ho yoi'!

Almost imperceptibly, Juba shifted the song's focus from the boat to its namesake and her suitor Lewis who was also present:

Maybe Maus Lewis take de oar for Neely,
 Bery handsome boat Miss Neely!
 Maus Lewis nice captain for Neely,
 Ho yoi'!¹⁸

Slave songs about whites were not invariably this good-natured. In 1774 an English visitor to the United States, after his first encounter with slave music, wrote in his journal: "In their songs they generally relate the usage they have received from their Masters or Mistresses in a very satirical stile and manner."¹⁹ Songs fitting this description can be found in the nineteenth-century narratives of fugitive slaves. Harriet Brent Jacobs recorded that during the Christmas season the slaves would ridicule stingy whites by singing:

Poor Massa, so dey say;
 Down in de heel, so dey say;
 Got no money, so dey say;
 Not one shillin, so dey say;
 God A'mighty bress you, so dey say.²⁰

"Once in a while among a mass of nonsense and wild frolic," Frederick Douglass noted, "a sharp hit was given to the meanness of slaveholders."

We raise de wheat,
 Dey gib us de corn;
 We bake de bread,
 Dey gib us de crust;
 We sif de meal,
 Dey gib us de huss;

We peel de meat,
Dey gib us de skin;
And dat's de way
Dey take us in;
We skim de pot,
Dey gib us de liquor,
And say dat's good enough for nigger.²¹

During their Christmas-time John Kuners or John Canoe festival, slaves in Wilmington, North Carolina, dressed in gayly colored tattered costumes with grinning masks, horns, and beards on their heads and faces, wound their way from house to house accompanying their songs and dances with bones, triangles, cow's horns, and an assortment of home-made instruments. They improvised verse after verse and quickly identified those whites who did not respond to their offerings with generosity:

Run, Jinnie, run! I'm gwine away,
Gwine away, to come no mo'.
Dis am de po' house,
Glory habbilulum!²²

Abram Harris remembered a satirical song sung by himself and his fellow slaves which was to become one of the most long-lived songs in the black repertory:

My old Mistis promised me
Dat when she died, she gwine set me free.
But she lived so long en got so po
Dat she lef me diggin wid er garden ho.²³

The slaves were able to use even their most seemingly inconsequential songs to communicate with each other and those around them. In 1808 John Lambert took a twenty-five-mile trip down the Savannah River and recorded one of the songs he heard from the slave rowers:

We are going down to Georgia, boys,
To see the pretty girls, boys;
We'll give 'em a pint of brandy, boys,
And a hearty kiss, besides, boys.
&c. &c. &c.

Chorus
Aye, aye.
Yoe, yoe.
Aye, aye.
Yoe, yoe.

"The words were mere nonsense; any thing in fact, which came into their heads," Lambert noted, but then added an insight which indicated that he understood the limits of his own generalization: "I however remarked

that brandy was very frequently mentioned, and it was understood as a hint to the passengers to give them a dram."²⁴ In the 1850s the Swedish visitor Fredrika Bremer took a steamship trip on the Ohio River and was escorted to the lowest deck, where she observed the black stokers stripped to the waist passing wood to each other and feeding the immense fires. She admired the "fantastic song" with which the slaves timed their actions and noted that they quickly incorporated into their song "a hint that the singing would become doubly merry, and the singers would sing twice as well, if they could have a little brandy when they reached Louisville, and that they could buy brandy if they could have a little money, and so on."²⁵

If slaves used their work songs to laugh at each other and the whites around them and to communicate their momentary desires, they used them as well to speak of the forces that affected their lives profoundly. They sang of the white patrols and the whippings that continually harassed them:

Run, nigger, run, patteroler'll ketch yer,
Hit yer thirty-nine and sware 'e didn' tech yer.²⁶

They used their omnipresent humor to articulate dreams that would not come true in their lifetimes:

Harper's creek and roarin' ribber,
Thar, my dear, we'll live forebber;
Den we'll go to de Ingin nation,
All I want in dis creation,
Is pretty little wife and big plantation.²⁷

They sang especially of the enforced separations that continually threatened them and haunted their songs. In Maryland, John Dixon Long heard the slaves sing:

William Rino sold Henry Silvers;
Hilo! Hilo!
Sold him to de Gorgy trader;
Hilo! Hilo!
His wife she cried, and children bawled,
Hilo! Hilo!
Sold him to de Gorgy trader;
Hilo! Hilo!²⁸

In the midst of their comic corn shucking songs, slaves on a South Carolina plantation sang this "wild and plaintive air" in 1843:

Johnny come down de hollow.
Oh hollow!
Johnny come down de hollow.
Oh hollow!
De nigger-trader got me.
Oh hollow!
De speculator bought me.
Oh hollow!
I'm sold for silver dollars.
Oh hollow!
Boys, go catch de pony.
Oh hollow!
Bring him round the corner.
Oh hollow!
I'm goin' away to Georgia.
Oh hollow!
Boys, good-by forever!
Oh hollow!²⁹

Emma Howard remembered the following song as "one of de saddest songs we sung en durin' slavery days. . . . It always did make me cry."

Mammy, is Ol' Massa gwin'er sell us tomorrow?
Yes, my chile.
Whar he gwin'er sell us?
Way down South in Georgia.³⁰

Slaves, then, had frequent recourse to their music, and they used it in almost every conceivable setting for almost every possible purpose. The accounts of contemporaries, white and black, and the numerous interviews with former slaves are filled with evidence that the variety of nonreligious songs in the slaves' repertory was wide. There were songs of in-group and out-group satire, songs of nostalgia, nonsense songs, children's songs, lullabies, songs of play and work and love.³¹ Nor was slave music confined to song. Louise Jones, who had been a slave in Virginia, remembered the Christmas festivities her master allowed his slaves: "de music, de fiddles an' de banjos, de Jews harp, an' all dem other things. Sech dancin' you never did see befo. Slaves would set de flo' in turns, an' do de cakewalk mos' all night."³² Slaves brought the banjo, the musical bow, several other stringed instruments, and a number of percussive instruments with them from Africa. In the New World they learned the use of the guitar, violin, and a variety of instruments common to the Europeans.³³ In 1753 one planter advertised in the *Virginia Gazette* for "an orderly Negro or mulatto who can play well the violin," another offered to sell "a young

healthy Negro fellow . . . who [plays] extremely well on the French horn," while a third begged for the return of his escaped slave who "took his fiddle with him."³⁴ Slaves played their instruments primarily for their own pleasure and that of their fellow slaves but facility on an instrument could have other rewards as well. Solomon Northup wondered how he could have endured his long years of bondage without his beloved violin: "It introduced me to great houses—relieved me of many days' labor in the field—supplied me with conveniences for my cabin—with pipes and tobacco, and extra pairs of shoes, and oftentimes led me away from the presence of a hard master, to witness scenes of jollity and mirth. It was my companion. . . . It heralded my name round the country—made me friends, who, otherwise would not have noticed me—gave me an honored seat at the yearly feasts, and secured the loudest and heartiest welcome of them all at the Christmas dance."³⁵

In America as in Africa Negro music, both vocal and instrumental, was intimately tied to bodily movement. John Bernard, an Englishman who lived in the United States from 1797 to 1811, wrote of slaves who would walk five or six miles after a hard day's work "to enjoy the pleasure of flinging about their hands, heads, and legs to the music of a banjo, in a manner that threatened each limb with dislocation."³⁶ Ella Lassiter, who had been a slave in Florida, told of the slaves' love of dancing: "Did us uster dance? . . . When some plantation niggahs give a frolic dey sont de word aroun bout three weeks ahaid time so us all be ready and git Massa to say we kin go. Sometimes us walk fifteen miles to de frolic but us don min dat."³⁷ While slaves often learned the dances of the whites—the quadrille, the reel, the cotillion, and even the waltz—their own dance style remained distinctive. There is a wealth of evidence in contemporary accounts and slave recollections to buttress Melville Herskovits' assertion that the dance "carried over into the New World to a greater degree than almost any other trait of African culture."³⁸ The basic characteristics of African dance, with its gliding, dragging, shuffling steps, its flexed, fluid bodily position as opposed to the stiffly erect position of European dancers, its imitations of such animals as the buzzard and the eagle, its emphasis upon flexibility and improvisation, its concentration upon movement outward from the pelvic region which whites found so lewd, its tendency to eschew bodily contact, and its propulsive, swinging rhythm, were perpetuated for centuries in the dances of American slaves and ultimately affected all American dance profoundly.³⁹

Dance no less than song could become an instrument of satire at the

expense of the whites. In 1772 the *South Carolina Gazette* printed an account of a clandestine country dance attended by sixty slaves on the outskirts of Charleston. "The entertainment was opened," the anonymous correspondent reported, "by the men copying (or *taking off*) the manners of their masters, and the women those of their mistresses, and relating some highly curious anecdotes, to the inexpressible diversion of that company."⁴⁰ At the close of a corn shucking he attended in 1843 on a South Carolina plantation, the poet William Cullen Bryant described a series of slave dances which gradually turned into a mock military parade, "a sort of burlesque of our militia trainings, in which the words of command and the evolutions were extremely ludicrous."⁴¹ In 1901 an ex-slave recalled that when she was young in the 1840s she was particularly fond of dancing: "Us slaves watched white folks' parties where the guests danced a minuet and then paraded in a grand march, with the ladies and gentlemen going different ways and then meeting again, arm in arm, and marching down the center together. Then we'd do it, too, *but we used to mock 'em*, every step. Sometimes the white folks noticed it, but they seemed to like it; I guess they thought we couldn't dance any better."⁴² Shephard Edmonds described how the slaves in Tennessee would do the cakewalk: "It was generally on Sundays, when there was little work, that the slaves both young and old would dress up in hand-me-down finery to do a high-kicking, prancing walk-around. They did a take-off on the high manners of the white folks in the 'big house,' but their masters, who gathered around to watch the fun, missed the point."⁴³

It was not merely the satirical element in slave secular song and dance but the entire rich vein of secular music itself that many contemporary whites missed. Touring a Richmond, Virginia, tobacco factory in 1843, William Cullen Bryant listened to the slave workers sing religious songs and was told by one of the proprietors: "What is remarkable, their tunes are all psalm-tunes, and the words are from hymn-books; their taste is exclusively for sacred music; they will sing nothing else."⁴⁴ Writing in 1862 James McKim noted that the songs of the Sea Island freedmen "are all religious, barcaroles and all. I speak without exception. So far as I heard or was told of their singing, it was all religious."⁴⁵ Others who worked with recently emancipated slaves recorded the same experience, and Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson reported that he rarely heard his black Union troops sing a profane or vulgar song. With a few exceptions "all had a religious motive."⁴⁶ Whether they were aware of secular song or not—and some whites quite consciously eschewed the "simple

airs" of the oarsmen and corn huskings in favor of the spirituals—it was black religious song that fascinated and attracted the early collectors of slave music. Consequently, we have long known far more about slave spirituals than about any other form of slave music. Spirituals were collected by the hundreds directly from slaves and freedmen during the Civil War and the decades immediately following, and although they came from widely different geographical areas they share a common structure and content which seem to have been characteristic of Negro music wherever slavery existed in the United States.

It is possible that a greater number of religious than nonreligious songs have survived because slaves were more willing to sing these ostensibly innocent songs to white collectors who in turn were more eager to record them since they fit easily with their positive and negative images of the Negro. But I would argue that the vast preponderance of spirituals over any other sort of slave music rather than being merely the result of accident or error is instead an accurate reflection of slave culture during the antebellum period. Though slaves never abandoned secular song, by the time of the Civil War the widespread conversion of slaves to Christianity and the impact of the revivals had made important inroads. "When I joined the church," Willis Winn of Texas recalled, "I burned my fiddle up."⁴⁷ Sir Charles Lyell visited the Hopeton plantation in Georgia during his second trip to the United States in the 1840s and reported that "above twenty violins have been silenced by the Methodist missionaries."⁴⁸ During the next decade Fredrika Bremer toured the South and heard that the Methodist missionaries were condemning as sinful the slaves' love of dancing and music. "And whenever the negroes become Christian, they give up dancing, have preaching meetings instead, and employ their musical talents merely on psalms and hymns."⁴⁹ In 1842 Charles C. Jones observed with satisfaction that one of the advantages of teaching the slaves psalms and hymns "is that they are thereby induced to lay aside the extravagant and nonsensical chants, and catches and hallelujah songs of their own composing; and when they sing, which is very often while about their business or of an evening in their houses, they will have something profitable to sing."⁵⁰ The planter Henry William Ravenel remembered that after the 1830s and 1840s slave Christmas festivities continued to be marked by "dancing and merrymaking . . . but it was in a more subdued form, and under protest from some of the elders."⁵¹

These pressures were certainly important but they were not primarily responsible for the primacy of the spirituals in antebellum slave culture.

Spirituals were not merely quantitatively but qualitatively the antebellum slaves' most significant musical creation. Contemporaries found the slaves' secular music less impressive than their religious songs, I suspect, because in reality it was less impressive. Secular song was more strictly occasional music: as varied, as narrow, as fleeting as life itself. Afro-American religious music seemed far superior because slaves used it to articulate many of their deepest and most enduring feelings and certainties. As valuable as secular songs are as a record of slave consciousness, it is to the spirituals that historians must look to comprehend the antebellum slaves' world view, for it was in the spirituals that slaves found a medium which resembled in many crucial ways the cosmology they had brought with them from Africa and afforded them the possibility of both adapting to and transcending their situation.

A QUESTION OF ORIGINS

The subject of slave religious music has produced a large and varied literature, the bulk of which has focused upon matters of structure and origin. This latter question especially has given rise to a long and heated debate.¹ The earliest collectors and students of slave music were impressed by how different that music was from anything familiar to them. Following a visit to the Sea Islands in 1862, Lucy McKim sounded a note which generations of folklorists were to echo when she despaired of being able "to express the entire character of these negro ballads by mere musical notes and signs. The odd turns made in the throat; and that curious rhythmic effect produced by single voices chiming in at different irregular intervals, seem almost as impossible to place on score, as the singing of birds, or the tones of an Aeolian Harp."² Although some of these early collectors maintained, as did William Francis Allen in 1865, that much of the slaves' music "might no doubt be traced to tunes which they have heard from the whites, and transformed to their own use, . . . their music . . . is rather European than African in its character,"³ they more often stressed the distinctiveness of the Negro's music and attributed it to racial characteristics, African origins, and indigenous developments from the slaves' unique experience in the New World.

This tradition, which has had many influential twentieth-century ad-

herents,⁴ was increasingly challenged in the early decades of this century. Such scholars as Newman White, Guy Johnson, and George Pullen Jackson argued that the earlier school lacked a comparative grounding in Anglo-American folk song. Comparing Negro spirituals with Methodist and Baptist evangelical religious music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, White, Johnson, and Jackson found similarities in words, subject matter, tunes, and musical structure.⁵ Although they tended to exaggerate the degree of similarity, their comparisons were often a persuasive and important corrective to the work of their predecessors. They proved without question the existence of significant relationships between white and black religious song. But their work was weakened inevitably by their ethnocentric assumption that similarities alone settled the argument over origins. In 1918, for instance, Louise Pound totally dismissed H. E. Krehbiel's claim that the spiritual *Weeping Mary* was an Afro-American song, solely on the ground that her grandmother had learned a similar spiritual from a white woman who had heard it at a Methodist camp meeting in Hamilton, New York, sometime between 1826 and 1830.⁶ This was evidence enough for Miss Pound. If whites knew the song it must have been they who originated and disseminated it. Neither she nor many of her fellow scholars could contemplate the possibility that the direction of cultural diffusion might have been from black to white as well as the other way. At the heart of their inability to give credence to such a possibility was the attitude articulated by Frederick W. Root in his introductory address to the International Folk-Lore Congress of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Armed with the fashionable and comfortable evolutionary predispositions of his day, Root envisioned the panorama of music as a development "from the formless and untutored sounds of savage people to the refined utterances of our highest civilization." Therefore, he told those gathered to hear the Congress' Concert of Folk Songs and National Music: "Excepting some selections representative of the music of our North American Indians, the utterances of the savage peoples were omitted, these being hardly developed to the point at which they might be called music."⁷

In fact, insofar as white evangelical music departed from traditional Protestant hymnology and embodied or approached the complex rhythmic structure, the percussive qualities, the polymeter, the syncopation, the emphasis on overlapping call and response patterns that characterized Negro music both in West Africa and the New World, the probability

that it was influenced by the slaves who attended and joined in the singing at religious meetings is quite high. The contemporary accounts of one observer after another make it indisputably clear that during the period when the spirituals were being forged and were beginning to supplement or even supplant the established psalms and hymns, black men and women, slave and free, were commonly present at religious revivals and regular church services alongside whites throughout the South, and that the contributions of the black singers were often distinctive enough to be noted.

The Reverend Samuel Davies, who preached to whites and blacks in Virginia between 1747 and 1774, wrote a friend in London that "The Negroes, above all the human species that ever I knew, have an ear for music and a kind of extatic delight in psalmody," and described to another correspondent the pleasure he took during Sabbath services listening to the slaves in their segregated gallery "breaking out in a torrent of sacred harmony, enough to bear away the whole congregation to heaven."⁸ The Reverend Lucius Bellinger described a quarterly Methodist meeting during the 1820s in South Carolina: "The crowd continues to increase, and song after song climbs the hills of heaven, . . . The negroes are out in great crowds, and sing with voices that make the woods ring."⁹ At a camp meeting attended by seven thousand near Hagerstown, Maryland, in 1838, an observer reported that after the preaching the black participants formed a circle: "Their shouts and singing was so very boisterous that the singing of the white congregation was often completely drowned in the echoes and reverberations of the colored people's tumultuous strains."¹⁰ Fredrika Bremer mingled with the thousands attending a Georgia camp meeting in 1850 and marveled at the music: "They sang hymns—a superb choir! Strongest of all was the singing of the black portion of the assembly, as they were three times as many as the whites, and their voices are naturally pure and beautiful."¹¹ On the eve of the Civil War D. R. Hundley observed that "the loudest and most fervent camp-meeting singers amongst the whites are constrained to surrender to the darkeys in *The Old Ship of Zion, or I Want to Go to Glory*."¹² "Our white folks," an ex-slave recalled, "when they have camp meeting would have all the colored come up and sing over the mourners. You know they still say that colored can beat the white folks singing."¹³ For blacks and whites who were commonly, though not invariably, separated at southern camp meetings, song easily breached the bounds of racial barriers and became the chief means of communication. Even at those camp meetings where the