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SYMBOLISM IN AFRO-AMERICAN SLAVE SONGS
IN THE PRE-CIVIL WAR SOUTH

THESIS

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By

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This thesis examines the symbolism of thirty-five slave songs that existed in the pre-Civil War South in the United States in order to gain a more profound insight into the values of the slaves. The songs chosen were representative of the 300 songs reviewed. The methodology used in the analysis was adapted from Ralph K. White's Value Analysis: The Nature and Use of the Method.

The slave songs provided the slaves with an opportunity to express their feelings on matters they deemed important, often by using Biblical symbols to "mask" the true meanings of their songs from whites.

The major values of the slaves as found in their songs were independence, justice, determination, religion, hope, family love, and group unity.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

May 30, 1876, was a momentous date in Negro History. On that date a notice appeared in the New York Nation concerning the first attempt to collect and understand Negro spirituals. In announcing the forthcoming book, Slave Songs of the United States, one of the compilers added: "No one up to this time has explored for preservation the wild, beautiful, and pathetic melodies of the Southern slaves."¹ Since then, many authors have concerned themselves with various aspects of the spirituals (i.e., defenses, praises, and interpretations), and for many years musicologists have studied the important role which Negro slave songs have played in the evolution of American music. Yet, a very important area of research has frequently been overlooked. According to John Lovell, an accomplished researcher and author in the field of slave songs, "The vast wealth of the spiritual in terms of the social mind of a very powerful cultural unit has just been scratched."² Lovell requested that more studies be performed, analyzing the song texts for their social implications.

This thesis has analyzed the song texts of the Afro-American slaves. By doing so, it has been possible to learn something about the basic concepts of the slave culture.

Song texts are keys to understanding how a folk community feels about its most intense concerns. According to Alan P. Merriam in the Anthropology of Music, anthropologists have been drawn towards the belief that song texts clearly reflect the culture in which they are embedded. He also suggested that "an important function of gatherings for community singing was to emphasize the values stressed by the culture."³ Thus, folksongs are capable of expressing values.

The terms "spirituals" and "folksongs" have been used interchangeably in this thesis. Bernard Katz found that the slaves called nearly all of their songs spirituals, even those that were secular in nature.⁴ The term folksong has been defined as the song of the folk, the song created by the people. Folksongs are "echoes of the heartbeats of the vast folk; and in them are preserved feelings, beliefs, and habits of vast antiquity."⁵

The slave was accustomed to inventing and singing folksongs. In Africa, singing was interwoven into his everyday life. Each tribe encouraged its members to enjoy the art of music making.⁶ The songs were a means of appraising contemporary happenings, promoting religion, and commenting upon everyday occurrences.⁷

Perhaps because the slaves sang so frequently, they were perceived as being contented with their station in life. This has also been assumed in regard to other oppressed cultures. In

Sterling Brown's The Negro in American Fiction appears this quotation: "I swear their nature is beyond my comprehension. A strange people! Merry 'mid their misery - laughing through their tears, like the sun shining through the rain. Yet what simple philosophers they! They tread life's path as if 'twere strewn with roses devoid of thorns, and make the most of life with natures of sunshine and song."⁸

Brown stated that most American readers would think this referred to the Negro, but it referred to the Irish in a play about one of Ireland's most desperate periods. Frederick Douglass once noted that he had never heard a song comparable to the sorrow songs of the slaves except in Ireland during the famine of 1845 to 1846.⁹

Brown's quotation could easily be applied to the Negro for this is the way the Negro has been pictured by those who pointed to the songs as proof of the slaves' humane treatment and childlike acceptance of slavery. Many ex-slaves, including Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, refuted these theories. Douglass was astounded at the persons in the South and the North who held the view that singing among the slaves was evidence of their contentment. Douglass wrote that he often sang to drown his sorrow, but seldom to express his happiness.¹⁰ He and Harriet Tubman both testified that many of the spirituals deemed as purely religious songs had social meanings; for example, deliverance for the Israelites meant freedom for the slaves.¹¹ Harriet Tubman, who with a \$40,000 price on her head journeyed into the South and brought parties of slaves to

freedom, used as signals many of the religious songs the slave owners were so pleased to hear. According to this deliverer of freedom, "Slaves must not be seen talking together and so it came about that their communication was often made by singing, and the words of their familiar hymns, telling of the heavenly journey, and the land of Canaan, while they did not attract the attention of the masters, conveyed to their brethren and sisters in bondage something more than met the ear."¹²

It might be possible to look upon the religious elements of the spirituals and say that their social contribution is nil. However, many of the spirituals, as pointed out by Tubman and Douglass, had latent meanings. The real meanings were hidden by the use of symbols invented by the slaves.

The characteristic of using symbols in songs can be traced to the earliest primitive music where symbols were used to criticize rulers and established ways.¹³ John Lovell, in Black Song: The Forge and the Flame, said that traits of the songs sung by Africans remained with the slaves when they were brought to America. Two of the traits are relevant to this thesis. One is the ability the songs had to evaluate and criticize life.¹⁴ The other is the use of "mask and symbol" employed in the songs.¹⁵ The slaves had to hide or "mask" their true thoughts and feelings by developing symbols for use in their songs.

The secrecy of the symbolism, generally used for protection against whites, was a binding element for the slaves. Effective

use of symbolism enabled the slaves to create songs that dealt with every phase of slave life and to do so without fear of being punished by the white man. According to Russell Ames in The Story of American Folk Song, anyone who sang or said exactly what he thought could be certain he was in trouble.¹⁶ Ames wrote of a Southern Negro who reported that "the white man talks with the back of his head, but the Negro just talks with the front of his head."¹⁷ In other words, the white man is willing to show you his mind from front to back; but the Negro will only show the surface of his.

Through their songs, the Negroes developed a vocabulary and means of expression that were unique to their culture. They had two languages; one for themselves and one for their masters. According to Miles Mark Fisher, in Negro Slave Songs in the United States, "by developing this symbolism as a universal language among themselves, they were able to harbor and express thoughts that were not understandable to others."¹⁸

Understanding the songs and their symbolism helps reveal the innermost thoughts of the slaves on religion, slavery, relations with their masters, and aspirations for the future,¹⁹ all of which are clues to the slave's basic values. It is understandable why Fisher refers to the spiritual as a "master index to the mind of the slave."²⁰

In a study of African music, J. H. Kwabena Nketia found that African songs acted as "an avenue of creative expression,

social comment, and criticism."²¹ He also discovered that he could gain insights into the values held by a culture if he understood the symbols and masks they used. If the slave brought with him from Africa the trait of using symbols in his songs, is it not possible he also brought with him the ability to symbolize or mask his values in his songs? It is possible to delve into the mind of the slave by analyzing his songs, for it was in these songs he concealed his most profound thoughts and ideas, his hopes, and his dreams.²²

This thesis could not begin to analyze every aspect of the slave's mind, but it does attempt to grasp the slave's basic values by studying many of his ideas and hopes found in his songs.

The idea that the field of rhetorical criticism should broaden its range to examine other fields besides public address is discussed several times in The Prospect of Rhetoric, a report of the speech Communication Association's study of new developments in contemporary rhetoric. The three major aspects of this thesis (songs, symbols, and values) were discussed in the committee meetings that led to the publication of the book. One of the recommendations stated that "rhetorical criticism must broaden its scope to examine the full range of rhetorical transactions."²³ Singing and cultural symbols were both mentioned as meeting these criteria. Another committee recommendation was that an important part of a study could be the ways in which "different people use symbols and define themselves by their symbols."²⁴ The conferees also

encouraged the expansion of research into the area of social values in various periods and places.²⁵

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to study the symbolism of the slave songs that existed in the pre-Civil War South in the United States in order to gain a more profound insight into the values of the slaves.

Survey of the Literature

A thorough examination of available material revealed that no theses or dissertations have ever been written on the values of the slaves as implied in their songs.

There is, however, much information available on slave songs. The songs themselves have been most frequently taken from two valuable sources, Slave Songs of the United States, edited by William Allen, Charles Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, and American Negro Songs, edited by John W. Work. These books offered the most comprehensive selections this author found. Slave Songs was published in 1867 when many of the songs were still fresh in the minds of the ex-slaves. According to the editors of the book, the majority of the songs were taken from the Negroes themselves. American Negro Songs is a comprehensive collection of 230 folk songs, many of them obtained from sources written between 1844 and 1919.

John Lovell's Black Song: The Forge and the Flame and his article, "The Social Implications of the Negro Spiritual,"

supplied an extensive amount of information relevant to this thesis. Lovell, in his quest for knowledge on the slave songs, traveled all over the United States to investigate information available in regular and special libraries and to talk with people with revealing viewpoints. He also visited nine African countries, and, because Europeans have become major interpreters of the songs, he visited five European countries.

Since an extensive amount of the thesis dealt with the historical aspect of slavery, it was necessary to seek the advice of a scholar in the field of history. Donald W. Zacharias is a professor of speech and communication, as well as assistant to the President at the University of Texas in Austin. Zacharias has a minor in history with his major field of study in the Civil War era. His dissertation was on the speechmaking of John J. Crittenden, a Kentucky senator who, in 1860, offered a compromise he hoped would avert secession of the Southern states.

Zacharias encouraged the use of the Harvard Guide to American History; he felt the editors of this book had selected the most useful material available in the area of American history. One of the works most often mentioned was Kenneth Stamp's The Peculiar Institution, deemed by Zacharias as one of the most valuable works written about slavery. An article by Stamp entitled "The Historian and Southern Negro Slavery," also listed in the Harvard Guide,

offered some insights into slavery not mentioned in Stamp's book.

Eugene Genovese's works appeared frequently in different areas concerning slavery, but his work most relevant to this thesis was Roll, Jordan, Roll. Both Stamp and Genovese offered great insight into the lives of the slaves. They wrote of the master-slave relationship, an important facet of slavery. They were both concerned with the various aspects of slave life such as family relationships, religion, work and leisure, and punishment and revenge. The writers were able to see the frailties and strengths of both the slaves and their masters.

The narratives of Frederick Douglass, also mentioned in the Harvard Guide, offered personal insights into slavery by an ex-slave. My Bondage and My Freedom by Douglass was useful in substantiating some of the facts revealed by Stamp and Genovese.

Another bibliography mentioned was Frances A. Kemble's Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839, which presented a vivid picture of slave life on a plantation. Frances Kemble was an actress who gave up her career to marry Pierce Butler, whose fortune derived from his family's cotton and rice plantation on the Sea Islands of Georgia. The treatment of the slaves horrified Fanny, but she was unable to alter her husband's views concerning slavery, and this eventually led to their divorce in 1849.

Oscar Handlin's Race and Nationality in American Life, also mentioned in the Harvard Guide, was helpful in the study of the history of slavery in the United States. Handlin showed how slavery in the United States began and how the white man came to the conclusion that black slavery was much more beneficial to him than white servitude.

One other work that revealed information about slavery as well as slave songs was Miles Mark Fisher's Negro Slave Songs in the United States, mentioned in the Harvard Guide. Fisher's work dealt with the purposes of the slave songs.

The Story of American Folk Song by Russell Ames also offered an interesting look into the slave songs and their purposes.

Methods and Procedures

The method used in this study has been both historical and analytical. Before the analysis of the slave songs could be approached, it was necessary to review the circumstances that instigated the creation of the songs. According to Jane Blankenship, "the context of the situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words;"²⁶ in this case the words in the songs.

The historical study has centered on three areas:

- 1) The lifestyle of the slaves
- 2) Slaves' relations with their masters that eventually led to revolts, both mentally and physically.

3) Background of the spiritual

- a) It has been important in this study to show proof that the songs were not of purely religious origins, but were much more socially profound.
- b) It has been necessary to reveal proof that the songs were of Black origin.

Since the songs to be evaluated are symbolic, it is necessary to understand the importance of symbolism before explaining the method that has been used to analyze these songs. The major source of information on symbols has been Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations by William H. Rueckert.

A symbol is something that stands for something else. A symbol may be explicit or implicit. Theodore Thass-Thienemann in his book Symbolic Behavior wrote that "a symbol is charged with many connotations. It denotes one thing, but means something else not overtly expressed."²⁷ The slaves understood the connotative meaning of the symbolic terms used, but the whites only understood the denotative meaning of the terms.

Kenneth Burke made several observations about symbols that have been useful in this analysis. He said that "symbols are interpretations of life,"²⁸ as well as interpretations of situations. He also stated that a symbol can be relevant to an immediate problem;²⁹ it can be useful to a person depending on that person's situation in life. One other point Burke made is that a symbol is both a "technical device and a formula for defining our experiences."³⁰

By using Burke's analysis of symbols, it has been possible to analyze the symbolic slave songs for their social implications. It is not possible to know what the slaves' values were without having some knowledge of how they felt about their lives and their situations. These feelings, implied in the slave songs, are the basis for the values that have been analyzed.

One of the major Burkeian theories that has been employed in this thesis is that of catharsis through symbolism. Burke said that a poem (in this case, a song) is a kind of purgation, "an unloading, an unburdening in which something undesirable, filthy, or abhorrent is transferred to a symbolic equivalent and expelled."³¹ Thus, through the slave songs, the singers were able to purge themselves as well as stimulate a catharsis in any slave who understood the song. Nketia, in his African study, recognized the fact that songs can perform both a social and cathartic function.³²

In examining the songs for their value implications, it has been helpful to utilize Burke's concept of catharsis. A Burkeian analysis has indicated that the slaves were capable of purging themselves of the undesired through their songs. By filtering through the songs it has been possible to discover what the slaves did desire.

In this thesis, "value" has been defined as "any goal or standard of judgment which in a given culture is ordinarily referred to as if it were self-evidently desirable (or undesirable)."³³ The term "goal" refers to anything the

slaves could more or less directly and selfishly enjoy and desire (end state goals). The term "standard of judgment" refers to some sort of criteria by which the slaves judged themselves or other persons (mode of conduct). The term "desire," or some form of it, is important in defining values; what is desired is the value. In explaining "self-evident," it will be best to give an example. If a person said, "This politician is truthful," he would assume that his listener approved of truthfulness in politicians. In other words, truthfulness is a "self-evident" value in the eyes of his culture.

The methodology that has been used in the value analysis has been adapted mainly from Ralph K. White's Value Analysis: The Nature and Use of the Method. Ralph White's article "Hitler, Roosevelt, and the Nature of War Propaganda"³⁴ was helpful in seeing how the method can be applied. Nicholas Rescher's Introduction to Value Theory was useful in its explanations of values.

The songs chosen for study in this thesis are representative of the slave songs from the years 1800 to 1865. The heyday of the Negro spiritual was from approximately 1835 to 1865,³⁵ and a large portion of the songs have been from these years. The songs have been taken from various regions of the South in order to get a random sampling.

In order to gain sufficient insight into the values of the slaves, it has been necessary to study at least thirty

songs. The author has two major reasons for this:

- 1) Some of the songs have as few as four lines.
- 2) Some of the songs employ only one symbol; some use several symbols, but often these are representative of only one value.

Before concentrating on the steps of the value-analysis, it will be helpful to examine a list by White of several psychological factors that are beneficial in obtaining data for an analysis.³⁶ Questions asked in each of these categories have been helpful in searching for values. The following are four of the factors listed by White; each one will be briefly discussed:

Hostility to others

The hostility may be openly admitted or may be prudently concealed.

The questions asked here were towards whom was the slave hostile and why? According to White, "There is no more important aspect of a given personality . . . than the character of a person's hostilities and the ways in which he is able to express them."³⁷

Stereotypes

A stereotype is a "picture in our heads," a mental image of what we perceive a group to be like.

The questions posed here were what group or groups did the slaves stereotype and what values were given to the stereotypes? The slaves were stereotyped themselves by the

Southern white. The "mental picture" held by the whites is relevant to this study and is discussed in the historical investigation.

The self-picture and the ego ideal

This involves the perception of the self. What sort of person did the slave think he was; which of his traits were most important to him? What would he like to be?

Areas of frustration

This refers to areas in which tension or frustration exists. The major question here is: What does the slave want that he is not getting? Which desires are not being fulfilled?

The value analysis utilized consists of three steps adapted from Ralph K. White and Thomas F. Carney.³⁸ The steps are:

1) Take note of every goal and value judgment mentioned in the songs by placing a symbol corresponding to each goal or judgment next to the line being analyzed.

An example:

"See the wives and husbands sold apart, L'Se

Their children's screams will break my heart. Lo'Se

There's a better day acoming . . ." ³⁹ Ha

The symbol L represents love between husband and wife, and the symbol Lo represents family love. The Se means safety and the apostrophe not (not safe). The Ha stands for hope. The goals and judgments and their symbols are listed later.

An important part of this stage has been to define what the slave was trying to convey and not take the material at its face value. White felt that a grave danger in value analysis is that the material is often taken literally, "as if it were somehow an end in itself rather than a means to an understanding of the underlying emotional dynamics."⁴⁰

2) Tabulate the proceeds. Two charts have been formulated for this purpose. One chart lists the values in the order of the frequency with which they occur. The other is a chart of value clusters which shows that a relationship exists between two values.

3) "Interpret each result in the light of the picture as a whole, with special attention to the person's possible reasons for conscious concealment."⁴¹ In this stage, it has been necessary to refer to the data concerning the slave's environment in order to understand the "picture as a whole." According to Rescher, man values because he is "a goal oriented organism seeking to achieve satisfactions and avoid dissatisfactions."⁴² His values are founded upon the vision of the "good life," how life ought to be lived. He comes to view positively the objects or conditions which contribute to his satisfactions and place him on the road to the "good life." The objects or conditions which interfere with his well-being or stand in his way of the "good life" will become negatively viewed.

In analyzing the slave songs, it has been possible to obtain a glimpse of what the slaves envisioned as the "good life." What did they want from life? In other words, what were their positive values? This can be answered by looking at the tabulation charts to see which values were expressed in the songs. The ones expressed most frequently are the ones on which the slaves placed the main emphasis.

White, after eight years of research, derived a list of fifty basic values and value symbols. This list has been a valuable guideline in searching for values in the slave songs. The following is a list of White's basic values and value symbols:⁴³

1. Goals

A. Physiological

Food (Fo)	Eating or drinking. Satisfying hunger or thirst.
Sex (Sx)	Sex in the physical sense.
Rest (Re)	Absence of work or effort; absence of fatigue.
Activity (Ac)	Physical (not mental) activity.
Health (He)	Absence of disease.
Safety (S)	Physical security; absence of pain, injury, or death, and no fear.
Comfort (Co)	A miscellaneous category for all bodily satisfactions not already mentioned: warmth when cold, etc. Also a combination of other physiological goals.

B. Social

Sex-Love (L) Being liked or loved by the opposite sex.

Family-Love (Lo) The kind of love or companionship that is given by mother, father, sister, brother, or child.

Friendship (F) Having friends or being with friends, belonging to a group.

C. Egoistic

Independence (I) Freedom, liberty, not being dominated or interfered with.

Achievement (A) Success or superiority demonstrated in action.

Recognition (R) Respect, prestige, status, not being looked down upon or shamed.

Self-regard (Sf) Pride, self-confidence, self-respect, inner integrity.

Dominance (Do) Power over people.

Aggression (Ag) The goal which is implied when feelings of anger or hostility are admitted; punishing, retaliating.

D. Fearful

Emotional security (Se) A miscellaneous category representing the absence of any non-physical type of danger. Includes: peace of mind, not being worried or anxious; stability, no sudden change.

E. Playful

New Experience (N) The "interestingness" of any activity; change, variety, relief of boredom.

Excitement (Ex) A higher intensity of new experience; feeling or intensity of feeling. Fascination of what is dangerous or forbidden; a feeling of being re-born.

Beauty (B) Pleasure in sights or sounds.

Humor (H) Sense of humor, laughter, kidding.

Creative Self-expression (Cr) Imagination, fantasy.

F. Practical

Practicality (P) The elimination of means and ends which are unattainable.

Economic Value (E) Money, prosperity.

Ownership (O) Ownership, or the objects which are owned. As a standard of judgment, O means respecting the ownership of others - i.e., not stealing.

Work (W) Working long and hard, not being lazy.

G. Cognitive

Knowledge (K) Facts, understanding, books, education.

H. Miscellaneous

Happiness (Ha) Hope, joy, contentment.

Value-in-general (V) The most general value-concept; welfare, luck.

II. Standards of Judgment

A. Moral

Morality (M) "Good" in a moral sense, right vs. wrong.

Truthfulness (Tr) Truth-speaking and truth-acting. Not lying, keeping promises.

- Justice (J) Equality; fairness or equal opportunity.
- Obedience (Ob) Complying with the wishes of persons in authority.
- Purity (Pu) Sex morality.
- Religion (Rl) Prayer, worship, Christianity; any respectful reference to God, Christ, the Bible, etc.

B. Social

- Pleasant personality (Pl) The qualities that make a person a pleasant companion.
- Likeness or conformity (Li) Being like others in general.
- Manners (Ma) Politeness, courtesy, proper.
- Modesty (Mo) Not being conceited or snobbish.
- Giving, or Generosity (G) Acting in the interest of others, unselfishness, helping others.
- Tolerance (T) Absence of blame, anger, hostility.
- Group unity (U) Identifying with or cooperating with a group; loyalty, active participation in group activities.

C. Egoistic

- Strength (St) Physical strength.
- Determination (D) Intensity of motivation, especially in the face of difficulty or danger. Will, persistence, bravery, courage, patience, decisiveness.
- Intelligence (In) Mental ability.

Appearance (Ap) Good appearance; the appearance of one's own body, face, or clothes.

D. Miscellaneous

Carefulness (C) Caution, self-control, moderation, not going to extremes, neatness, orderliness.

Cleanliness (Cl) Absence of dirt.

Culture (Cu) Culture in the popular (not the anthropological) sense.

Adjustment (Ad) Mental health, balance, maturity.

Besides the value symbols used, it has been convenient to choose a simple set of symbols to represent persons, places, or events that are referred to in the songs. In general, the first letter is all that will be necessary. This list includes:

n	Negroes
s	Slaves
w	Whites
m	Master (of the plantation)
d	Deliverer of freedom
no	North
so	South
h	Heaven
sl	Slavery
dt	Death
e	Escape
mt	Meeting
hp	Hypocrite

There are several other important symbols that have been useful for this study:

1. (p) Possibly
2. (c) Code
3. ' Frustration; ordinarily corresponds to the word "no" or "not enough."
4. (A single parenthesis represents the desires or evaluations of some other person. It ordinarily corresponds to the word "wants."
Ex. s(R The slave wanted recognition.
5. A dash —, placed between two value symbols, means that the first is seen as a means to the second; ordinarily corresponds to the words "leading to."

By utilizing such symbols as stated above and by tabulating and evaluating the ones that are found, it has been possible to ascertain which values as reflected in the slave songs were important to the slaves and which ones were not. It has also been possible to discover how a given person or group was evaluated and stereotyped by the slaves.

SUMMARY OF DESIGN

This study is projected to include four chapters. Chapter I provides an introduction to the topic, a statement of purpose, a survey of the literature, and an explanation of the methods and procedures. Chapter II contains historical data centering on the lifestyle of the slave and the background of the spiritual. Chapter III is the value analysis. Chapter IV is the conclusion in which the findings are synthesized.

FOOTNOTES

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²Lovell, p. 129.

³Alan P. Merriam, The Anthropology of Music (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 205.

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⁶Hildred Roach, Black American Music: Past and Present (Boston: Crescendo Publishing Co., 1973), p. 17.

⁷Miles Mark Fisher, Negro Slave Songs in the United States (New York: Russell and Russell, 1953), p. viii.

⁸Katz, p. xii.

⁹Katz, p. xiii.

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¹¹Lovell, p. 130.

¹²Katz, p. xvi.

¹³John Lovell, Jr., Black Song: The Forge and the Flame (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1972), p. 45.

¹⁴Lovell, Forge, p. 42.

- ¹⁵ Lovell, Forge, p. 42.
- ¹⁶ Russell Ames, The Story of American Folk Song (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1960), p. 142.
- ¹⁷ Ames, p. 142.
- ¹⁸ Fisher, p. 11.
- ¹⁹ Fisher, p. viii.
- ²⁰ Fisher, p. viii.
- ²¹ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "The Music of Africa," Journal of Human Relations, VIII, 1960, p. 730.
- ²² Merriam, p. 205.
- ²³ Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black, eds., The Prospect of Rhetoric (Englewood Cliffs N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc.), p. 225.
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- ²⁵ Bitzer, p. 218.
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- ²⁷ Theodore Thass-Thienemann, Symbolic Behavior (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1968), p. 82.
- ²⁸ William H. Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 17.
- ²⁹ Rueckert, p. 19.
- ³⁰ Rueckert, p. 33.
- ³¹ Rueckert, p. 97.
- ³² Nketia, p. 730.

³³Ralph K. White, Value Analysis: The Nature and Use of the Method (Glen Gardner, N. J.: Libertarian Press, 1951), p. 13.

³⁴Ralph K. White, "Hitler, Roosevelt, and the Nature of War Propaganda," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 44, 1949, pp. 157-174.

³⁵Lovell, "Social Implications," p. 129.

³⁶White, pp. 4-9.

³⁷White, pp. 4-5.

³⁸Thomas F. Carney, Content Analysis (Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 1972), p. 182.

³⁹Lovell, Forge, p. 196.

⁴⁰White, p. 59.

⁴¹White, p. 2.

⁴²Nicholas Rescher, Introduction to Value Theory (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), pp. 9-10.

⁴³White, p. 12.

⁴⁴White, p. 17.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SLAVERY AND SLAVE SONGS

The Origins of Afro-American Slavery

Historians have supplied various reasons for the growth of slavery in the South, such as the climate and the geographical conditions of the South. Kenneth Stamp in The Peculiar Institution noted that such natural forces as the hot summers, the long growing seasons and the fertile soil compelled the South to be an agricultural economy, but did not require slavery to achieve this. According to Stamp, the southern plantation was older than slavery, and it also survived its abolition.¹

Stamp observed that there was no crop in the South that could not have been cultivated by forces other than slavery. He felt that the use of slaves "was a deliberate choice (among several alternatives) made by men who sought greater returns than they could obtain from their own labor alone, and who found other types of labor more expensive."²

Oscar Handlin in his book Race and Nationality in American Life concurred with Stamp's opinion that Black slavery was an unnecessary form of labor in the South.³ Handlin observed that when the Black man first came to America he came as a

servant, as did many whites. Through most of the seventeenth century, the Negroes, even in the South, were not numerous. Their lack of freedom was by no means unusual for a large portion of the population was to some degree unfree. Like many of the other servants, some Negroes became free. Some became artisans and a few became landowners. The Negroes were identified as servants, not as slaves.⁴

The word "slave" had no meaning in English law, but was used occasionally as a term of derogation. According to Handlin, "it was a popular description of a low form of service," and it applied to Englishmen and Indians as well as Blacks.⁵ It was not until the 1660's that Maryland and Virginia made the first legal distinctions between Negro and white servants. Statutes made during this decade laid the groundwork for the Negro slavery of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These statutes provided that Blacks were to be slaves for life, that the child was to inherit the mother's condition, and that Christian baptism did not change the slave's status as it did that of the white servants.⁶

It was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that the term "slavery" acquired a legal meaning that described a type of labor and referred mainly to Blacks. "By the eighteenth century," wrote Stamp, "color had become not only the evidence of slavery but also a badge of degradation. Thus, the master class, for its own purposes, wrote chattel

slavery, the caste system, and color prejudice into American custom and law."⁷ By 1700, it was evident that the Negroes were not to be governed by the laws of other men.

The Laws of Slavery

All servants had once been thought of as a sort of property and Negroes were no different from others. Eventually laws were made that improved the condition of the white servant, but with each law, the condition of the Negro servant deteriorated and made him more a chattel. The relationship between the white servant and his owner gradually converted from an ownership to more of a contractual relationship. None of the considerations given the whites applied to the Negro; on the contrary, he became "a chattel, a possession, a thing, a mere extension of his master's will."⁸ Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, slavery was defined in the law books as "that condition of a natural person, in which, by the operation of law, the application of his physical and mental powers depends . . . upon the will of another . . . and in which he is incapable . . . of . . . holding property (or any other rights) . . . except as the agent or instrument of another. In slavery . . . , in ignoring the personality of the slave . . . commits the control of his conduct . . . to the master, together with the power of transferring his authority to another."⁹

By 1800, an image of the Negro was formed by many whites. In his article concerning the mythology of racism, Robert Strom

noted that the Negro in the South was endowed by fiction "as a being somewhat less than human, a subhuman, a 'nigger' whose natural inferiority to man justified his servant stature and allowed whites to see themselves as benevolent caretakers."¹⁰ Since the Negroes were not fully men, it was inconceivable that they should possess the same rights as the whites; instead, they were subjected to different rules and separate standards of conduct than human persons. Strom suggested that the whites affixed the subhuman image to the Negro because "without it the whites would have found it emotionally unbearable to continue slave-holding."¹¹ Handlin agreed with Strom's theory when he wrote that Southerners were forced to conclude that the slave was "wholly unfree, . . . wholly a chattel" in order to justify the exploitation of slavery.¹² Thus, the Southerners passed laws that had the dehumanizing effect of reducing Negroes to what Stampf termed "chattels personal."¹³

In a society that purports to be one of laws, not of men, institutions generally acquire the force of legal sanction. For an institution as peculiar as that of slavery, it was imperative that it have laws written down to rationalize its existence and provide it with the appearance of legitimacy.

Many of the laws recognized the slave's status first as property by giving the master complete control over the slave and acknowledged the slave's status second as a person by requiring that masters be humane to their slaves. Throughout the

ante-bellum South "the cold language of statutes and judicial decisions made it evident that, legally, the slave was less a person than a thing."¹⁴

Though the slave was recognized as a person, he was at the disposal of his master legally. The Louisiana code proclaimed that "the master may sell him, dispose of his person, his industry, and his labor: he can do nothing, possess nothing, nor acquire anything but what must belong to his master." In Kentucky, slaves had "no rights secured to them by the constitution, except of trial by jury in cases of felony."¹⁵

A slave was forbidden by law to acquire title to property. Furthermore, he could not be a party to any contract. Therefore, no promise of freedom made by the master was binding. According to an Arkansas Supreme Court, "If the master contract . . . that the slave shall be emancipated upon his paying to his master a sum of money, or rendering him some stipulated amount of labor, although the slave may pay the money, . . . or perform the labor, yet he cannot compel his master to execute the contract because both the money and the labor of the slave belong to the master and could constitute no legal consideration for the contract."¹⁶

Since slaves could not make contracts, marriages between them could not be legally binding. The North Carolina Supreme Court ruled, "The relationship between slaves is essentially different from that of man and wife joined in lawful wedlock

for with slaves it may be dissolved at the pleasure of either party, or by the sale of one or both, depending upon the caprice or necessity of the owners."¹⁷

However, masters began to realize the social and economic utility of marriages among their slaves. Many of them performed the wedding ceremonies for the slaves. A few of the services were lavish, but the customary wedding was the broomstick wedding which consisted of having the couple jump over a broomstick.¹⁸

White ministers sometimes officiated at the weddings, especially at those of the house servants. But if the slaves had a choice, they usually opted for a black preacher. Even if a black preacher was used, the whites often had the wedding at the house or held festivities afterwards. However, as Kenneth Stampff noted, the whites' generosity had its less attractive side, "The weddings, balls, and other social functions which a generous master arranged for his slaves were equally 'irresistible'. The white family found it a pure delight to watch a bride and groom move awkwardly through the wedding ceremony, to hear a solemn preacher mispronounce and misuse polysyllabic words, or to witness the incredible maneuvers and gyrations of a 'shake-down' . . . these affairs were as much performances for the whites as celebrations for the slaves."¹⁹ But for the slaves the occasion was serious, and in the eyes of the slaves, their marriages were binding.²⁰

The word usage in the ceremonies given by masters differed from that of white weddings. The slave ceremony could not climax with "Till death do you part," but as one ex-slave remarked, "dey never would say dat. Just' say, 'Now you married.'"²¹

The ceremonies could legally have ended with the phrase "Till death or distance do you part," for a slave-holder could sell the members of a slave family separately whenever he chose to do so. One Virginia master read his slaves who wanted to be married a statement of warning that he might be forced to separate them.²² No state forbade masters to separate husbands and wives when placed on the market, and, in most of the states, owners could legally separate children at any age from their mothers.²³ Frederick Douglass went so far as to say that slavery did away with families, that it had no use for them since laws did not recognize their existence.²⁴

Many ex-slaves told of being separated from their families, some at an early age. William Wells Brown, an ex-slave, wrote of a fellow slave who revealed how his master had raised slaves to supply to the southern market and how his mother and brothers were sold and taken away from him. He told of husbands who were separated from their wives and children who were "torn from the arms of their agonizing mothers."²⁵

The slavemonger was one of the most hated men in the South by both the slaves and the whites. Southerners described traders as coarse, ill-bred, and hard-hearted, and spoke of their "greedy love of filthy lucre." The slavemonger "habitually separated mothers from their children, husbands from their wives, and brothers from their sisters."²⁶

Many of the speculators purchased slaves in family groups with promises that they would not be separated. They often pretended to buy them for personal use or for some planter desiring whole families. The promises were made "to win good will or to quiet the consciences of the sellers."²⁷ But it was known that it was a "daily occurrence" for these slaves to be sold individually usually, in the Deep South. Traders frequently advertised the fact that they had children under ten for sale apart from their mothers. A trader in North Carolina advertised for young Negroes from eight to twelve years old and promised "fair prices" for them.²⁸

Stampf referred to the dissolution of families as one of the "cardinal sins" of the slave traffic and said that all the blame did not belong to the slavemongers for the masters frequently sold their slaves knowing that families would be broken whenever the traders deemed it in their best interest to do so.²⁹ Stampf also noted that masters often agreed to dissolve families themselves by selling them.

The fact that the slaves had no control over the separation was obviously quite painful to them. A slave woman who

had been taken from her children "cried many a night about it; and went 'bout mazin' sorry-like all day, a wishing I was dead and buried."³⁰ Eugene Genovese found that next to fear or resentment of punishment, the attempt to find relatives was the major incentive for runaways.³¹

Each slave state gave the master sovereign power over the slaves in their slave codes. These codes established the property rights of those who owned slaves and provided safeguards for the whites against slave rebellions by supporting masters in maintaining discipline. Fundamentally, the slave codes were much alike with some being more severe in some states than others.³²

The major theme of every code was the requirement that slaves submit to their masters and respect white men. A lucid example of this was the Louisiana code of 1806 which proclaimed that "The condition of the slave being merely a passive one, his subordination to his master and to all who represent him is not susceptible of modification or restriction . . . he owes to his master, and to all his family, a respect without bounds, and an absolute obedience, and he is consequently to execute all the orders which he receives from him, his said master, or from them."³³

A slave was not allowed to lift a hand against a white man or use insulting or abusive language. A north Carolina judge wrote that many acts could be considered "insolence"-- it could be a look, a neglect to step out of the way when a

white person approached, or a mere pointing of a finger. "But each of such acts violates the rules of propriety, and if tolerated, would destroy that subordination, upon which our social system rests."³⁴

Frederick Douglass proclaimed "impudence" to be one of the most common and indefinite of offenses with which the slaves were charged. According to Douglass, impudence could mean almost anything according to the caprice of the overseer or master at the moment, and whoever was charged with it was certain to be flogged. "This offense," wrote Douglass, "may be committed in various ways; in the tone of an answer; in answering at all; in not answering; in the expression of countenance; in the motion of the head; in the gait, manner and bearing of the slave."³⁵ One of the first beatings Douglass witnessed was to a slave woman in order that the overseer could "teach the d-d b-h how to give a white man impudence."³⁶

The slaves' movements and their communications with others were rigidly controlled by the codes. The movement of all Negroes in the South was severely restricted because of the codes. Passes were required of all Blacks in the South. A Kentucky law of 1838 forbade slaves to travel. A Maryland law of 1841-42 made it a felony for free Blacks to receive any suspicious papers in the mail.³⁷ A gathering of more than a few slaves (usually five) was considered an "unlawful assembly" regardless of its purpose if it was away from home and was unattended by whites.³⁸

To reduce interplantation theft, discourage runaways, and prevent insurrections, the slave holders developed a system of patrols. These patrol parties usually consisted of a captain and three others who worked the roads and checked plantation quarters every few weeks or as often as was necessary. Slaves found without passes usually received about twenty lashes.³⁹

Both the slaves and the masters had complaints against the patrols. In ordinary times, the masters bought their way out of patrol duty and were replaced by poor whites whose brutality struck terror in the slaves, who sang: "Run, nigger run, De Patteroll git you."⁴⁰ According to Miles Mark Fisher, the patrolmen were sometimes recognized by law as being in an "unfit condition" to perform their duties and were fined for disorderly conduct. Fisher also noted that the poor whites often held an economic grudge against slaveholders. He felt that it was perhaps spite which made patrolmen "crucify" Negroes.⁴¹

However, it might have been hatred for the slave as well as the slaveholder that motivated patrolmen to terrorize slaves. John Blassingame noted that slaves viewed the poor whites as being lower in life than they were. The slaves were often better housed, fed, and clothed than the poor whites and often utilized these whites as the objects of "ridicule, pity, and scorn."⁴² Robert Anderson, an ex-slave,

wrote that "the colored person who would associate with the 'po' white trash' were practically outcasts, and held in very great contempt."⁴³

Not only did the codes regulate a slave's movements, they made it illegal for him to learn to read or write. No one, not even masters, were to give books or pamphlets to slaves.⁴⁴ The Southerners had the same reasons for not educating slaves as the English did for not wanting to educate members of the working class: "However specious in theory the project might be, of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would in effect be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants . . . instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them fractious and refractory . . . It would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, and . . . would render them insolent to their superiors."⁴⁵

The laws forbidding slaves to learn to read and write grew out of fears held by the whites, the simplest one being the capability of forging passes by runaways. The greatest fear concerned the dangers of incendiary literature.⁴⁶ Pro-slavery ideologues like J. H. Hammond and Chancellor Harper felt that only a madman would risk having his slaves read abolitionist literature. Harper thought the slave should "receive such instruction as qualifies him for his particular station."⁴⁷ Judge Lumpken of the Supreme Court of Georgia

was in favor of this law: "These severe restrictions . . . have my hearty and cordial approval . . . Everything must be interdicted which is calculated to render the slave discontented."⁴⁸ Indeed, one ex-slave, Thomas Jones, who learned to read secretly felt "that I was really beginning to be a man, preparing myself for a condition in life better and higher and happier than could belong to the ignorant slave."⁴⁹

Despite the strict codes, W. E. B. DuBois estimated that by 1860 about five per cent of the slaves had learned to read, and Genovese believed that statistic may be too low.⁵⁰ The slaves learned to read in various ways. Genovese found that throughout the South some masters and mistresses and even more white children ignored the law, and taught a few of their favorites. He also noted that most of the efforts came from the white children who often disregarded their parents' orders and taught their black playmates from whom they were not segregated.⁵¹

Through the aid of a white person, the slaves could attempt to teach each other. Sometimes a slave taught others with permission from his master, but usually without it. Some ex-slaves such as Frederick Douglass taught themselves to read "by sheer act of will."⁵² According to Genovese, few things so outraged a slave's sense of justice as did a whipping for trying to learn to read.⁵³

Fanny Kemble felt the law was outrageous:

If they are incapable of profiting by instruction, I do not see the necessity for laws inflicting heavy penalties on those who offer it to them . . . We have no laws forbidding us to teach our dogs and horses as much as they can comprehend; nobody is fined or imprisoned for reasoning upon knowledge and liberty to the beasts of the field, for they are incapable of such truths. But these themes are forbidden to slaves, not because they cannot, but because they can and would seize on them with avidity--receive them gladly, comprehend them quickly; and the masters' power over them would be annihilated at once and forever.⁵⁴

Violations of the state and local codes were misdemeanors or felonies subject to punishment, whipping being the most common form. In the Upper South, some states limited the number of stripes that could be administered at any one time to thirty-nine. Of course more could be given in a series of whippings over a certain period of time. Whippings could legally be more severe in the Deep South. In Alabama a slave who forged a pass or engaged in "riots, routs, unlawful assemblies, trespasses, and seditious speeches" could receive up to one hundred stripes.⁵⁵

Slaves and free Negroes were dealt with more severely than whites in the state criminal codes. According to Stamp, certain acts were felonious when committed by Negroes but not when committed by whites, and the Negroes were assigned heavier penalties than whites for committing the same crime. Stamp listed the following as being punishable by death if committed by a slave: murder of any degree, attempted murder, manslaughter, rebellion and attempted rebellion, robbery, arson,

poisoning, rape, and attempted rape upon a white woman.⁵⁶
No law existed that protected a black woman from rape; even if a black man raped a black woman he could only be punished by his master.

In the early nineteenth century, the southern codes were amended to try to protect slaves and provided for murder indictments against masters and other whites. They also demanded that masters provide necessary clothing and provisions under penalty of fine or imprisonment. As Genovese notes, these laws confirmed the power the master had over the slaves' bodies.⁵⁷

Stampp and Genovese both acknowledged the fact that masters were sometimes tried and convicted for the violations of one of the above laws, but found that prosecutions were infrequent. The difficulty in enforcing the laws against murder or mistreatment of slaves lay in a weakness of the law--it did not allow a slave to file a complaint or testify against whites.

By the 1850's, most of the southern codes had made cruelty a public offense, even if it did not result in death. But these laws also had qualifications. For example, it was not homicide if a slave died accidentally while receiving "moderate correction," and killing a slave who resisted legal arrest was "justifiable homicide." The South Carolina law against cruelty had a nullifying clause: "nothing herein contained shall be so construed as to prevent the owner or person having charge of any slave from inflicting on such slave such punishment as may be necessary for the good government of the same."⁵⁸

Under the majority of circumstances a slave had no legal power to defend himself against an assault by a white man. A Tennessee Supreme Court ruling held true in most of the South: it stated that if a master punished a slave "with or without cause, [and] the slave resist and slay him, it is murder . . . because the law cannot recognize the violence of the master as a legitimate cause of provocation"⁵⁹ The Virginia Court of Appeals decided, for the sake of securing "proper subordination and obedience," the master would not be disturbed even if his punishment was "malicious, cruel and excessive." But he "acts at his peril, and if death ensues in consequence of such punishment, the relation of master and slave affords no ground of excuse or palliation."⁶⁰

The most common punishment was the flogging inflicted by masters or overseers. Lovell related other tortures sometimes used on the slaves. One of his major sources of evidence was the runaway advertisements in southern newspapers in which a master would describe his runaway slave. The following is a list of descriptions he found:

A man named Jim with a piece cut from each ear and other scars.

A man with the tip of his nose bit off.

A Negress Carolina with a collar which had one prong turned down.

Runaway Bill with a dog bite on his leg, scar over his eye, burn on his buttock from a piece of hot iron in the shape of a T.

A girl named Mary with an eye scar, many teeth missing, and the letter A branded on her cheek and forehead.

A mulatto with a pair of handcuffs and a pair of drawing chains.

A man named Henry, his left eye out, some scars from a dirk on and under his left arm, and many whipscars.⁶¹

Lovell added that some masters and overseers concluded a flogging by rubbing red pepper or salt into the wounds.

However, all masters were not so cruel. According to Genovese, masters "who were not slaves to their passions" tried to limit flogging as a means of punishment. When possible, some masters and overseers used as punitive action such things as withdrawing visiting privileges, scheduling extra work, forbidding a Saturday night dance or utilizing the stocks or solitary confinement for an offender.⁶²

Most masters found they could not completely refrain from utilizing the whip. It was often argued that "on a well run plantation the whip did not crack often or excessively; the threat of its use, in combination with other incentives and threats, preserved order."⁶³ A planter in 1866 thought back to the days of slavery and concluded "that the great secret of our success was the great motive power contained in that little instrument."⁶⁴

Beatings, separation of families, lack of freedom of movement, and subordination were all part of a slave's life. The codes of the South made certain that masters would always have complete control over their slaves. However, it must be stressed that not all masters adhered strictly to the codes; they felt that strict enforcement should be reserved for

periods of disquiet and when there were rumors of insurrectionary plots. This, wrote Genovese, confirmed the masters' power.⁶⁵ Many masters disregarded the laws concerning assembly of Negroes and permitted religious services, balls, and barbecues. As it has already been noted, slaves were sometimes taught to read by whites, although most slaveholders felt this was unwise.

There were even times when a slaveholding community intervened against a brutal master. Public opinion was vented more against a brutal overseer than against a master.⁶⁶ Some overseers were even fired for cruelty.⁶⁷ Of course one reason for some of the dismissals could have been that slaves often did not work well under an extremely cruel overseer. For whatever reason the overseer was released, the courts upheld masters in civil suits, and, occasionally, an overseer was sent to jail for his cruel acts.⁶⁸

In his lifetime a slave was normally owned by an average of three masters.⁶⁹ Consequently, the slaves realized the varying degree of differences that existed among the slaveholders. Henry Clay Bruce wrote that his experiences with many slaveholders taught him that while some masters were cruel and "whipped, half fed and overworked their slaves . . . others provided for their slaves with fatherly care."⁷⁰

In his article "The Historian and Southern Negro Slavery," Kenneth Stampp made it quite clear that the only generalizations that can be made concerning masters "is that some

masters were harsh and frugal, others were mild and generous, and the rest ran the whole gamut in between."⁷¹ But it must also be noted that the same master could be harsh on some occasions and mild on others. It must also be added here that a master did not treat all slaves equally; he developed personal affections for some and animosities for others.⁷²

Another major factor governing the treatment of slaves was the overseer, and his personality was as varied as that of the master. Thus, the slave might never have been certain what to expect in his relations with his superiors, but the one thing he knew not to expect from them was freedom from his subservient position. It was this, wrote W. E. B. DuBois, that distinguished the slave from the mass of laborers elsewhere:

But there was in 1863 a real meaning to slavery different from that we may apply to the laborer today. It was in part psychological, the enforced personal feeling of inferiority, the calling of another Master; the standing with hat in hand. It was the helplessness. It was the defenselessness of family life. It was the submergence below the arbitrary will of any sort of individual.⁷³

The Living Conditions of the Slaves

The slaves often complained about what their masters referred to as "adequate" housing. Austin Steward said that the slave cabins were not as good as Northern stables.⁷⁴ A minority of Southern planters and farmers provided decent housing for their slaves, but the average slave cabin was described as being crudely built, cramped, scantily furnished, unpainted,

dirty, and drafty. Besides being uncomfortable, the cabins were often overcrowded; even some of the more comfortable cabins had this problem. There were thirty-eight cabins in which two hundred and fifty people lived on a Maryland plantation where ex-slave Charles Ball lived.⁷⁵

Slaves usually made what furniture and utensils they had. The cabins generally contained tables of packing boxes and beds made of straw covered boards. Some slaves slept either on mattresses of corn shucks or on the ground, often without blankets.⁷⁶ Josiah Henson, a Black slave driver, wrote that their "favorite way of sleeping . . . was on a plank, our heads raised on an old jacket and our feet toasting before the smouldering fire."⁷⁷

The food situation was not much more adequate than the housing situation. A majority of the adult slaves had a basic weekly allowance of a peck of cornmeal and three or four pounds of salt pork or bacon. A large number of slaves lived on this diet throughout the year. Some masters were concerned enough about their slaves' health to add such items as milk, molasses, vegetables, and fruits. Some masters, rather than supplying fruits and vegetables, gave slaves small plots on which to cultivate a garden. The problem with this was that often slaves lacked the time or energy it took to cultivate their plots.⁷⁸

Many ex-slaves spoke of often being hungry. Douglass related the story of how he fought with his master's dog for

crumbs that fell from the kitchen table and how he eagerly awaited the shaking of the table cloth in order to retrieve the crumbs and bones flung out for the cats.⁷⁹

Mary Reynolds, an ex-slave from Dallas, Texas said the slaves on the plantation where she lived never got as much to eat as they needed and were served an inadequate supply of water while in the fields. She remembered that "plenty times they was only a half barrel of water, and it stale and hot, for all us niggers on the hottest days."⁸⁰

Clothing was another problem mentioned by Reynolds. She said that in hot weather all the "young-uns" wore were shirts that came below the knee and were split up the sides. One of her major complaints involved shoes that never fit. She still had scars left from the one pair she was allotted one winter. The shoes were not only too small, but they had brass trimmings that cut into her ankles.⁸¹

James H. Hammond's plantation manual described the clothing allowance commonly provided by masters:

Each man gets in the fall 2 shirts of cotton drilling, a pair of woolen pants and a woolen jacket. In the spring 2 shirts . . . and 2 pr. of cotton pants . . . Each woman gets in the fall 6 yds. of woolen cloth, 6 yds. of cotton drilling and a needle, skein of thread and 1/2 dozen buttons. In the spring 6 yds. of cotton shirting and 6 yds. of cotton cloth . . . needle thread and buttons. Each worker gets a stout pr. of shoes every fall, and a heavy blanket every third year.⁸²

The children on Hammond's plantation received two very long shirts each fall and spring, but like most slave children were given no shoes. Frederick Douglass "was kept almost in a state of nudity; no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers [sic]; nothing but coarse sackcloth or tow-linen made into a sort of shirt, reaching down to my knees."⁸³ He wore this day and night and changed it once a week. He spoke of the difficulty of staying warm; this was a problem that plagued most of the slaves, both adult and child. Many of the slaves had frostbitten feet in winter because they had no shoes.⁸⁴

A North Carolinian divided masters in his state into two classes. One class owned slaves whose needs were filled; the other owned slaves who were "ragged" and filthy."⁸⁵ This division applied throughout the South.

The House Slave

Many of the slaves who worked as domestics were not what Blassingame called the "plantation elite." Slaves were often owned by women, who frequently bought a single slave or a family to help in the house while the farmer worked his land. On farms and smaller plantations many of the domestic slaves divided their time between house and field labor. For example, a small Virginia planter owned a slave woman whom he expected "to be a good deal occupied about the house in cooking, etc. But she works in the field about half of every day."⁸⁶ According to Genovese, about 5 per cent of the total

number of adult slaves or 20 per cent of the total number of house slaves formed an elite status group.⁸⁷

On the larger plantations the house slaves lived with greater security than others because servants trained for elegant performance as butlers, dining-room attendants, and cooks were hard to obtain. "Will you please keep George . . . about the house," Charles Jones wrote to his father, "as I do not wish that he should forget his training. I want him to acquire a house look, which you know is not the acquisition of a day."⁸⁸

The masters of the more aristocratic plantations encouraged pride of caste in their house servants. When they succeeded, a sharp social line arose between the house slaves and the field slaves. Mary Colquitt of Georgia said that her mother, a cook, forbade her to play with the children of the field slaves. A male ex-slave reflected: "We house slaves thought we was better'n the others what worked in the field. We really was raised a little different, you know."⁸⁹ A small percentage of these slaves often kept the master informed of activities in the slave quarters. These slaves learned that by spying on fellow slaves and by speaking of their good treatment to Northern visitors, they would be materially rewarded.⁹⁰

Genovese noted that by expressing contempt for the field hands, the elite house servants tried to raise their own image in society at the expense of other slaves. The field

hands, however, "did not readily accept the pretensions of the house servants except in the most caste-ridden regions of the eastern low country" ⁹¹

Although some field hands envied house servants, others did not. Many preferred field work, and some house servants shared that preference. ⁹² One of the reasons for this was that field hands often enjoyed more leisure time and freedom of movement on Sundays and at the end of a day's work.

As Blassingame noted, the domestic servant had no regular hours, but was at the beck and call of his master day and night. Constantly being with the whites meant that the house servant was the subject of the white's "every capricious, vengeful, or sadistic whim." Domestic servants often "had their ears boxed or were flogged for trifling mistakes, ignorance, . . . 'insolent' behavior, or simply for being within striking distance when the master was disgruntled." ⁹³

Most house servants, however, fared better than field hands. They usually ate better food, wore better clothes, had more comfortable quarters, and received more personal consideration. They could eat leftovers from the planter's table and received hand-me-downs from his wardrobe. ⁹⁴ The wealthier planters dressed their domestics "without limit to insure a genteel and comfortable appearance." ⁹⁵

When well-treated house servants witnessed cruelty to field slaves, the majority of them acted sympathetically and compassionately. ⁹⁶ The house slaves and field slaves

often helped each other to run away. Genovese felt "the attitude of the house servants no doubt sometimes smacked of noblesse oblige and showed some caste feeling, but it also reflected a strong sense of racial identification and responsibility."⁹⁷ Blassingame called the domestic servants "the field slave's most important windows on the outside world."⁹⁸

Background of the Slave Song

The originality of spirituals by Blacks has been the subject of much debate. Some white authors have felt that the songs consisted of too much borrowing from the whites and were therefore not original. In her book on Black American music, Hildred Roach objected to this theory. She noted that composers have always been entitled to use elements which they have heard; this practice "has been noted throughout the history of both classical and popular music."⁹⁹ In fact, white composers have borrowed heavily from black material for the performance and construction of minstrels, jazz, blues, and popular music.

While it was true that some elements of white songs influenced black composers, it was also true that African Americans maintained some of the traits of their native land. Theodore Canot, a slaveship captain, confirmed that the Blacks brought both their songs and their musicianship with them from Africa.¹⁰⁰

In Africa, singing was interwoven into the African's everyday life. Roach observed that African tribes had music which reflected all facets of everyday living. Fisher noted that the Africans brought with them to America "their music of bodily rhythm, voice, and instrumentation. They possessed fixed songs for all life situations and had the ability to create impromptu ones."¹⁰¹

One of the traits of African songs was that they were "full of allusions and hidden meanings" and could not be translated without the help of an African, despite a knowledge of African words."¹⁰² This trait remained with the American Blacks for they were forced to hide many of their thoughts and emotions from their masters.

Genovese found that the slaves adopted from their African tradition the ability to create symbolic expressions "that not only defended them against those who would denigrate them but also delivered no few direct blows of their own."¹⁰³ Reverend C. C. Jones found this to be true of all Blacks, "They are one thing before the whites, and another before their own color. Deception toward the former is characteristic of them, whether bond or free, throughout the whole United States. It is habit--a long established custom which descends from generation to generation."¹⁰⁴

One planter went further and called the Blacks hypocrites. He found that the Negroes made dupes of the master and overseer by feigning stupidity, "The most general defect in the

character of the Negro is hypocrisy; and this hypocrisy frequently makes him pretend to more ignorance than he possesses; and if his master treats him as a fool, he will be sure to act the fool's part."¹⁰⁵

Many of the songs were embedded with these ambiguities; some of them using Biblical terms to conceal the real meanings. To sing songs that were both secular and otherworldly was not a new experience for Blacks. As Roach noted, "secular songs grew alongside religious songs with an interrelationship that was often indistinguishable."¹⁰⁶ Lovell found that the American and African Negro "mixed his social life and his religion so thoroughly that neither can be said to dominate perpetually."¹⁰⁷

The Slave's Religion

The slaves' religion and their knowledge of some Biblical terminology provided a basis for many of their songs, but these songs were not always completely religious in meaning. As Lovell noted, they did not show an acceptance of slavery and yearn for a life in Heaven.¹⁰⁸ Ex-slave Booker T.

Washington reinforces this view:

Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some references to freedom. True, they had sung those same verses before, but they had been careful to explain that the 'freedom' in these songs referred to the next world, and had no connection with life in this world. Now they gradually threw off the mask, and were not afraid to let it be known that the 'freedom' in their songs meant freedom of the body in this world.¹⁰⁹

When the slaves were allowed to hear sermons preached by whites, they usually heard censored sermons. They were taught the Biblical command that servants should obey their masters, and they heard of the punishment they would receive in the hereafter if they were disobedient. The sermons were usually preached after the white service to which the slaves were seldom admitted.¹¹⁰

Few slaves were deledued by such teachings. Many of the slaves, including Frederick Douglass, felt their master's religion was cheap, especially when it did not improve their attitudes toward the slaves. According to Douglass, most slaves felt that the highest evidence the slaveholder could give of his acceptance of God was to emancipate his slaves. Douglass also noted that a "settled point in the creed of every slave" is that the master could not get to Heaven "with our blood in his skirts."¹¹¹

Most slaves, repelled by the brand of religion their masters taught, formulated their own religion. The slave needed a religion that promised him that a better time was within his reach; he needed a religion that promised freedom and equality. He also needed a spiritual life in which he could vigorously participate. Since Christianity satisfied all these needs, he based his religious principles on it.¹¹²

The slaves held praise meetings, often secretly, in order to worship. Blassingame noted that the praise meeting

was "a syncretism of African and conventional religious beliefs."¹¹³ While whites sometimes got carried away by religious frenzy, slaves had an intense emotional involvement with their every praise meeting. A black plantation preacher testified to the uniqueness of the slaves' religion: "The way in which we worshipped is almost indescribable. The singing was accompanied by a certain ecstasy of motion, clapping of hands, tossing of heads, which would continue without cessation about half an hour; one would lead off in a kind of recitative style, others joining in the chorus. The old house partook of the ecstasy; it rang with the jubilant shouts, and shook in all its joints."¹¹⁴

Many whites who heard such services believed the slaves' interpretation of Christianity to contain more heathen superstition than Christianity.¹¹⁵

One of the best examples of the syncretism of African and conventional religious patterns appeared in the "ring shout" where the slaves danced in a ring as they sang. The shout was described as "a simple outburst and manifestation of religious fervor--a 'rejoicing in the Lord'--making a 'joyful noise unto the God of their salvation.'"¹¹⁶ The participants in the shout "begin first walking by-and-by shuffling around, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion, which agitates the entire shouter, and soon brings out streams of perspiration. Sometimes

they dance silently, sometimes as they shuffle they sing the chorus of the spiritual, and sometimes the song itself is sung by the dancers."¹¹⁷

Shouting, singing, and preaching enabled the slaves to release their despair and express their desires for freedom. Their expression of freedom was restricted when whites occasionally attended their meetings. Henry Bruce Clay recalled when a fellow slave, an old preacher, forgot about the white man who was present at the meeting and became so enthusiastic he prayed: "Free indeed, free from death, free from hell, free from work, free from white folks, free from everything."¹¹⁸

As mentioned earlier, the slaves were sometimes forced to have secret religious meetings. This happened when the slaves' masters forbade all religious meetings, when their masters forbade all except Sunday meetings, when rumors of rebellion led even the nicest masters to forbid them so as to protect them from trigger-happy patrollers, or when the slaves wanted to make sure that no white would hear them. When the meetings were to be held in secret, the slaves would often announce the event by singing songs designed for that specific purpose. To protect the meeting itself, the slaves would turn over a pot "to catch the sound" and keep it in the cabin or immediate area of the woods. This practice of turning over a pot has been linked to African origins and has also been linked to rituals designed to sanctify the ground.¹¹⁹

Thus, the slave took ideas from the Christian religion and ideas from his African tradition and combined them to form a religion of his own. This religion was preached in the praise meetings where everyone could participate by shouting, singing, and dancing.

FOOTNOTES

¹Kenneth M. Stamp, The Peculiar Institution (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), pp. 4-5.

²Stamp, p. 5.

³Oscar Handlin, Race and Nationality in American Life (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1957), p. 4.

⁴Handlin, p. 8.

⁵Handlin, p. 9.

⁶Stamp, p. 18.

⁷Stamp, p. 23.

⁸Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), p. 4.

⁹Handlin, p. 4.

¹⁰Robert Strom, ed., Values and Human Development, (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1973), p. 170.

¹¹Strom, pp. 170-171.

¹²Handlin, pp. 27-28.

¹³Stamp, p. 201.

¹⁴Stamp, p. 193.

¹⁵Stamp, p. 197.

¹⁶Stamp, p. 197.

¹⁷Stamp, p. 198.

¹⁸Genovese, p. 475.

¹⁹Stamp, p. 329.

²⁰Genovese, p. 476.

²¹Genovese, p. 481.

²²Stamp, p. 344.

²³Stamp, p. 252.

²⁴Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), p. 39.

²⁵William Wells Brown, The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), p. 280.

²⁶Stamp, pp. 256-257.

²⁷Stamp, p. 257.

²⁸Stamp, p. 258.

²⁹Stamp, p. 266.

³⁰Stamp, p. 348.

³¹Genovese, p. 451.

³²Stamp, p. 206.

³³Stamp, p. 207.

³⁴Stamp, p. 208.

³⁵Douglass, p. 71.

³⁶Douglass, p. 70.

³⁷John Lovell, Jr., Black Song: The Forge and the Flame (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1972), p. 158.

³⁸Stampf, p. 208.

³⁹Genovese, p. 618.

⁴⁰Genovese, p. 618.

⁴¹Miles Mark Fisher, Negro Slave Songs in the United States (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1953), p.81.

⁴²John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 202.

⁴³Blassingame, pp. 202-203.

⁴⁴Stampf, p. 208.

⁴⁵Genovese, p. 561.

⁴⁶Genovese, p. 561.

⁴⁷Genovese, p. 562.

⁴⁸Lovell, p. 157.

⁴⁹Blassingame, p. 207.

⁵⁰Genovese, p. 563.

⁵¹Genovese, pp. 563-564.

⁵²Genovese, p. 564.

⁵³Genovese, p. 565.

⁵⁴Frances Anne Kemble, Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁵Stampf, p. 211.

- ⁵⁶Stamp, p. 210.
- ⁵⁷Genovese, p. 32.
- ⁵⁸Stamp, p. 220.
- ⁵⁹Stamp, p. 220.
- ⁶⁰Stamp, p. 221.
- ⁶¹Lovell, p. 144.
- ⁶²Genovese, p. 64.
- ⁶³Genovese, p. 65.
- ⁶⁴Genovese, p. 65.
- ⁶⁵Genovese, p. 40.
- ⁶⁶Genovese, p. 41.
- ⁶⁷Genovese, p. 14.
- ⁶⁸Genovese, p. 14.
- ⁶⁹Blassingame, p. 190.
- ⁷⁰Blassingame, p. 191.
- ⁷¹Kenneth M. Stamp, "The Historian and Southern Negro Slavery," American Historical Review, 57, 1952, p. 616.
- ⁷²Stamp, "The Historian," p. 617.
- ⁷³Genovese, pp. 68-69.
- ⁷⁴Blassingame, p. 159.

⁷⁵E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 44.

⁷⁶Blassingame, p. 160.

⁷⁷Genovese, p. 529.

⁷⁸Stamp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 282-284.

⁷⁹Douglass, p. 58.

⁸⁰Thomas R. Frazier, ~~ed.~~, Afro-American History: Primary Sources (Atlanta: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1970), p. 77.

⁸¹Thomas R. Frazier, pp. 78-79.

⁸²Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 291.

⁸³Douglass, p. 103.

⁸⁴Stamp, *Peculiar Institution*, p. 292.

⁸⁵Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 292

⁸⁶Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 37.

⁸⁷Genovese, p. 328.

⁸⁸Genovese, p. 329.

⁸⁹Genovese, p. 329.

⁹⁰Blassingame, p. 161.

⁹¹Genovese, p. 330.

⁹²Genovese, pp. 330-331.

⁹³Blassingame, p. 158.

⁹⁴Blassingame, p. 155.

- ⁹⁵Stampf, Peculiar Institution, p. 289.
- ⁹⁶Genovese, p. 340.
- ⁹⁷Genovese, p. 340.
- ⁹⁸Blassingame, p. 210.
- ⁹⁹Hildred Roach, Black American Music: Past and Present (Boston: Crescendo Publishing Co., 1973), p. 38.
- ¹⁰⁰Bernard Katz, ed., The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. viii.
- ¹⁰¹Fisher, p. 10.
- ¹⁰²Roach, p. 28.
- ¹⁰³Genovese, p. 583.
- ¹⁰⁴Genovese, p. 583.
- ¹⁰⁵Genovese, p. 583.
- ¹⁰⁶Roach, p. 21.
- ¹⁰⁷John Lovell, Jr., "The Social Implications of the Negro Spiritual." The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States, edited by Bernard Katz (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 132.
- ¹⁰⁸Lovell, "Social Implications," p. 134.
- ¹⁰⁹Katz, p. XV.
- ¹¹⁰Kemble, p. 313.
- ¹¹¹Douglass, p. 152.
- ¹¹²Stampf, Peculiar Institution, p. 371.

113 Blassingame, p. 64.

114 Blassingame, p. 64.

115 Stamp, Peculiar Institution, p. 374.

116 Blassingame, p. 66.

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118 Blassingame, p. 66.

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CHAPTER III

VALUE ANALYSIS OF THE SLAVE SONGS

The thirty-five songs analyzed were selected from 300 songs, and they are representative of all the songs reviewed. The songs and their value symbols are located in the appendix. The thirty-five songs have been analyzed, and the findings are discussed in this chapter.

Certain values appeared more frequently than others, as can be seen in Table I.

TABLE I
FREQUENCY CHART

<u>Values</u>	<u>Number of Times Mentioned</u>
Independence	32
Religion	28
Determination	22
Happiness (hope)	19
Justice	15
Emotional Security	15
Group Unity	10
Family-Love	9
Recognition	7
Aggression	5
Self-Regard	5
Economic Value	4
Safety	4
Generosity	3
Knowledge	3
Food	3

<u>Values</u>	<u>Number of Times Mentioned</u>
Achievement	3
Comfort	2
Activity	2
Sex-Love	2
Excitement	2
Work	2
Ownership	2
Morality	1
Truthfulness	1
Obedience	1
Friendship	1
Creative Self-expression	0
Tolerance	0
Sex	0
Rest	0
Health	0
Dominance	0
New Experience	0
Beauty	0
Humor	0
Practicality	0
Value-in-general.	0
Purity	0
Pleasant personality	0
Conformity.	0
Manners	0
Modesty	0
Strength	0
Intelligence	0
Appearance	0
Carefulness	0
Cleanliness	0
Culture	0
Adjustment	0

All of the values that were found in the songs are discussed in this chapter. However, many of the values are not discussed separately because they only appear in relation to another value, forming a value cluster. These clusters are charted in Table II. Since the clusters are so prevalent in the songs, it has not always been possible to discuss the individual values separately from their clusters.

TABLE II
VALUE CLUSTERS

	Independence	Justice	Religion	Emotional Security	Recognition	Determination
Emotional Security	✓	○	✓	○	○	○
Family	✓	○	✓	✓	○	○
Self-regard	✓	✓	✓	○	✓	○
Comfort	✓	○	○	○	○	○
Activity	✓	○	○	○	○	✓
Friends	✓	○	○	✓	○	○
Justice	✓	○	✓	○	✓	✓
Religion	✓	✓	○	✓	✓	✓
Obedience	○	○	✓	○	○	○
Happiness (Hope)	✓	✓	✓	✓	○	✓
Determination	✓	✓	✓	○	○	○
Truthfulness	○	○	✓	○	○	○
Economic Value	○	✓	○	○	○	○
Knowledge	○	✓	✓	○	✓	○
Recognition	○	✓	✓	○	○	○
Food	✓	○	✓	○	○	○
Safety	✓	○	○	○	○	○
Aggression	✓	✓	✓	○	○	○
Group Unity	✓	○	✓	○	○	✓

✓ = a value cluster
○ = no value cluster

Independence

One of the themes that pervaded the spiritual was the desire the slaves had to change their situation in life; they were obsessed with the desire for independence.¹

Many slaves revolted against the system of slavery by running away. It was often believed that those slaves who were mistreated had the strongest desire for independence, but statistics prove this false. At least one-third of the runaways belonged to the ranks of the skilled and privileged slave.² Frederick Law Olmstead, who traveled through the South in the 1850's, was told by slaveholders that slaves who were fed properly, treated well, and worked moderately ran away even when they realized the hardship and possible severe punishment they might face.³ The domestic slaves, who often fared better than the field hands, were always at the beck-and-call of their masters or mistresses; they rarely had any time they could call their own. It could have been these house slaves who sang of freedom and "No more mistress' call for me!"⁴

Those who fled to freedom made a contribution to those they left behind. According to Genovese, "These were the slaves who, short of taking the path of insurrection, most clearly repudiated the regime; who dramatically chose freedom at the highest risk; who never let the others forget that there was an alternative to their condition."⁵

The others did not forget. The songs rang out with the desire to reject the authority which the slaves were supposed to respect. No song was more explicit of the Slave's desire for independence and relief than "Oh Freedom" (10),⁶ where the slave sang his desire for death over bondage.

The slave community rejoiced when a slave escaped. "Good News Member" (9)⁷ was sung by a slave when he heard the news that a brother slave had successfully escaped, thereby passing on the news to fellow slaves.⁸

Some of the songs announced the fact that the slave was either preparing for or hoping for escape. He sang that "Some of these mornings bright and fair, take my wings and cleave the air" (25).⁹ When the slave sang of landing on Canaan's shore (16),¹⁰ he was usually referring to the North.¹¹

One of the most powerful freedom songs was "Steal Away" (17).¹² This song was used by Nat Turner to call together his group of revolutionaries, and it was used by Harriet Tubman and others to call together slaves for escape purposes.¹³ The song reminded the slaves that independence was not impossible. The slaves had to be careful because they could not openly advocate escape and insurrection, but they knew that fellow slaves understood what they were trying to say when they sang to steal away home to Jesus. The thunder by which the slaves were being called was probably an escape code.

Religion

That the slaves relied on religion as a source of strength and inspiration is evident in numerous songs. In "No Man Can Hinder Me" (1),¹⁴ the Blacks sang of the miracles wrought by Jesus and asked him to walk into their lives. They sang of how they talked with God (2)¹⁵ and how God would answer prayers (14).¹⁶ They asked that they be saved (19)¹⁷ and go to Heaven (23).¹⁸ The slaves often spoke of their religion as being different from that of their masters. The fact that masters could profess to be Christians and believe in slavery at the same time seemed hypocritical to many of the slaves. The slaves were able to use their songs to satirize this hypocrisy. In "O Daniel" (13),¹⁸ the slaves were probably referring to their masters when they sang "you praise God with your glitt'ring tongue, but you leave all your heart behind." The slaves, unlike their masters, did not merely profess to be Christians, they were Christians in their hearts.

In his book, Long Black Song, Houston A. Baker differentiated between the religion of the white American and the black American. The white American looked to religion for such things as future heavenly reward, sanction for capitalistic enterprise and guidance in day-to-day life. The Blacks looked to religion "as a unifying myth which could provide social cohesion."²⁰ Baker proposed that the Blacks accomplished social cohesion by adopting the past of the Israelites.

Religion - Independence

That the black slaves seized the story of the Israelites and used it as their own is understandable. It is only common for persons to take what they need, and the slave, who was frustrated by bondage, needed to cling to the belief of the divine deliverance as set forth in the stories of the Israelites in bondage.

The slaves used the story of the Israelites to symbolize their own lives. The songs "Go Down, Moses" (6),²¹ "Go Down Moses" (second version) (28)²² and "Turn Back Pharaoh's Army" (33)²³ all reiterate the Hebrew theme. "Go Down Moses" (6)²⁴ is the most intense of these songs.

The slaves, who were in a hopeless position against the power of the slave master, identified with the Israelites, who had been in a hopeless position against the power of the Pharaoh. Both hopeless, except for the supreme power of the Lord who could demand that oppressors "Let my people go!" (6).²⁵

Kenneth Burke noted that a symbol serves as an interpretation of a situation. The slaves interpreted their lives in light of what happened to Moses and his people. Burke also perceived symbols to be relevant to an immediate problem.²⁶ The immediate problem for the slaves was oppression, and as Lovell stated, the "Pharaoh" in the songs symbolized oppression that was overcome and destroyed.²⁷ Martin Foss, in Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience, wrote that "symbols are tools."²⁸ The symbolic Pharaoh, whose army was drowned,

was a tool used by the slaves for, Burke's "purgative journey." In these songs, the slaves were able to purge themselves of some of the hostility and frustration they felt at not being able to overcome their oppression. By employing the Burkeian concept that a song is a kind of purgation, "an unloading, an unburdening in which something undesirable, filthy, or abhorrent is transferred to a symbolic equivalent and expelled,"²⁹ it is possible to realize the slave's hatred of oppression. Being a chattel, a subhuman with no rights, who was told how to live by his master was the "undesirable" and "filthy" characteristic that needed purging. By having their symbol of oppression punished in their songs, the slaves were able to purge themselves of some of their hatred and frustration they experienced in their oppression.

Determination - Independence

The spirituals stated again and again the determination the slaves had to be independent. There was a sense of fortitude that often ran through the songs. By definition, fortitude means "endurance in the face of misfortune, pain, and calamity; constant and firm courage."³⁰ Many of the songs specialized in these and similar characteristics. No words stated this better than the following: "We want no cowards in our band, we call for valiant hearted men" (12).³¹

The slaves were aware that they had a hard trial in their way, but they were determined to gain independence (2).³²

They sang to others who had reached independence before them to "Look out for me, I'm coming too"(22).³³

The slave was determined to walk the "miry road" to freedom (7)³⁴ for no man could hinder him there (14).³⁵ He knew that "many thousand" slaves would walk the road because they could take a life of bondage "no more" (3).³⁶

One song that symbolized the determination of the slave community was "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder" (18).³⁷ Jacob was a symbol of those who rise step by step. The song showed patience and determination on the part of the slaves; they must have realized freedom was something that did not come overnight, but was an uphill struggle. With news of slaves who had successfully escaped, the slaves surely felt that a small step had been taken climbing up "Jacob's Ladder."

One other song that referred to the patience and determination of the slave was "Jesus Will Come By-an'-By" (5).³⁹ In this song, the slave compared himself to a "poor inch-worm" whose progress was slow. The slave, like the inch-worm, could only "keep-a-inching along" in life, waiting for a chance to gain his independence.

The slave was willing to "stand the storm" (27),⁴⁰ the trials and tribulations of slavery, because he knew that one day he would be free. He sang to encourage his fellow slaves not to get weary because they would one day land on Canaan's shore (the North) (16).⁴¹

One of the most dominate songs concerning the slave's determination for independence is "Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveller: (34),⁴² the "traveller" being an escaped slave. The escaped slave symbolized the freedom that was so important to the slave community. In the song, the slave vowed to take his trumpet and begin to blow. According to Lovell, the slave used a trumpet because of the far-reaching effect it produces.⁴³ The idea the slave wanted to spread with his trumpet was that freedom was possible.

Happiness (Hope) - Independence

According to Lovell, the songs which mentioned or implied Heaven were created to encourage the slave group to look upward, to reach for higher goals. Lovell noted that "the slave never thought of himself as slavish in heart or mind. While he was struggling in slavery, he could not let his spirits droop. He had to think of the time when things would be better for him."⁴⁴ The hope the slave possessed seemed to be his major source of joy.

The slaves often used Biblical symbols in singing of the hope they held for the future. The slaves sang of the amazing feats Jesus performed that freed people from all types of disabilities: "Jesus make de cripple walk, Jesus give de blind his sight, Jesus do most anyting" (1).⁴⁵ The belief the slaves had in Jesus instilled in them a hope that in the future they would be free.

One of the greatest hero figures of the slaves was Moses who was a symbol of deliverance of a whole people and of the opportunity for each person to be free. The slaves sang of how Moses led the Israelites out of bondage (6, 28).⁴⁶ If God had once delivered people from bondage, why could He not do so again?

Daniel was another hero symbol for the slaves; he was a defier of kings (authority) and proof that all men could resist slavery and be delivered, with God's help. The slaves were encouraged by this and sang that "My Lord delivered Daniel, O why not deliver me too?" (13).⁴⁷

According to Carl Jung, the need for a hero symbol arises when "the conscious mind needs assistance in some task that it cannot accomplish unaided or without drawing on the sources of strength that lie in the unconscious mind."⁴⁸ The major task facing the slaves was freedom, but an important facet of this task was the hope that it could be completed.

The hero myth "always refers to a powerful man or god-man who vanquishes evil [slavery] and who liberates his people from destruction and death."⁴⁹ Such a conviction, noted Jung, will often sustain him for a long time and may even set the tone of a whole society.

The hope of freedom was strengthened in the slave community every time they learned of a fellow slave who had successfully escaped (9).⁵⁰ This offered slaves hope that their

suffering would not be much longer (7).⁵¹ They believed there was "a better day a-coming" (11),⁵² for "we need not always weep and moan, . . . and wear these slavery chains forlorn . . ." (28).⁵³

Justice - Religion

One of the important aspects of religion for the slaves was that there would be a day of judgment for every person on earth, and every person would be judged equally. In "The Day of Judgment" (31),⁵⁴ the slaves pictured this day, and they pictured being taken in by God, while the sinners (especially slaveholders) were turned away.

Another song that referred to the judgment day was "I Got a Home in Dat Rock" (32)⁵⁵ which was taken from the Biblical story of Lazarus and Dives (Luke 16: 19-31). Although the white man was not mentioned, Dives, the rich man who denied Lazarus the crumbs from his table, was probably a symbol of the masters. The slave identified with Lazarus whom Christ had cared enough about to weep for him and rescue him from death. Lazarus, like the slave, was accepted into Heaven even though he was poor; Dives, who had built up no spiritual security on earth, was forced to go to Hell.

The songs that praised the judgment days probably performed a cathartic function for the slaves. The slave, who was so repressed in life, was able to release some of

his tensions by purging himself of some of the hostility and frustration he felt by believing that the cruel masters would be held accountable for their misdeeds. Meanwhile, the slaves could rejoice in knowing they were assured a place in Heaven, where they could be secure forever.

The slaves were certain they would find justice in Heaven. They believed they would be accepted in Heaven for there was "nobody there for turn me out" (25).⁵⁶ They were encouraged to know that in God's eye they were not servants; "Jesus died for every man" (22),⁵⁷ not just for the white man. The ante-bellum Negro preacher, when not in hearing distance of the whites, preached one message repeatedly: "You are created in God's image. You are not slaves; you are not 'niggers,' you are God's children."⁵⁸ This was the opposite of what the slaves heard from the white preachers who mainly preached obedience to the master.

That the slaves pictured Heaven as a place of equality was probably one of the reasons they did not seem to fear death. Carl Jung said that although death has a sorrow about it, it also has a kind of joy surrounding it, an inward acknowledgment that death also leads to a new life. Jung perceived death to be the drama of new birth.⁵⁹ The slaves seemed to view death in this same light. The slaves associated death with rewards and deliverances. This is why the slave could sing "When I'm dead don't you grieve after me" (21).⁶⁰

According to Lovell, the fact that Death is an "under-current symbol" for the road to freedom and justice on earth makes him, many times, a positively welcome figure.⁶¹ The slaves were tired of their subservient position in life; they wanted equality, and they wanted this on earth as well as in Heaven. No words stated their desire for equality better than these: "You got a right, I got a right, we all got a right to de tree of life" (14).⁶² They even went so far as to imply they thought it just that they receive compensation for the years they had spent in bondage; they wanted to flee slavery with "Egypt's spoils" (6).⁶³

Emotional Security - Family-Love

One of the reasons that large numbers of slaves ran away was to rejoin loved ones from whom they had been separated. Newspaper advertisements often contained such words as "He is no doubt trying to reach his wife." Slaveholders often had trouble with newly acquired slaves who immediately fled to try to find parents, children, or spouses. Planters often kept a sharp eye on mothers, for few slaves would leave permanently if they had to leave their mothers behind to face the master's wrath.⁶⁴

The masters could sell members of slave families because the slaves were their possessions. Besides, the slaves were not human, so how could they value their families as much as the white man did? Many of the slave songs

proved this belief false; a number of them showed a desire for family security.

The emotional insecurity caused by the separation of families was as bad or worse than the physical insecurity faced by the slaves, and they sang their desire to be rid of it. They wanted to rid themselves of the auction block (3)⁶⁵ where they were sold like cattle away from their families and friends. That this separation was painful is shown in the lines: "See the wives and husbands sold apart, their childrens' screams will break my heart"(11).⁶⁶ The impending sorrow they sometimes felt can be found in the song "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child"(26).⁶⁷ The fact that many slaves knew what it was like to be a "motherless child . . . far away from home" made the sorrow worse.

The slaves knew that the only way their goal of family security could be achieved was by being free; they believed that if freedom was not found in this life, it would be found in Heaven. One spiritual (15)⁶⁸ rejoiced in going to Heaven after death because the family would be there.

There are facts that support the closeness of most slave families: After emancipation, there was a rush of the new freemen to legalize their marriages; the desertion of the plantations by families was widespread; the desertion of thousands of slaves who ran away to find children, parents, wives, or husbands from whom they had been separated by sale.⁶⁹

Group Unity - Independence

The number of slaves who ran could not have been so high if the runaways could not have counted on substantial help from fellow slaves. The sense of brotherhood, or group unity, that permeated the slave community was evident in the songs. One song suggested the slaves walk and talk together so they wouldn't get weary (24).⁷⁰ Another song encouraged the slaves to aid a runaway slave by cheering "the weary traveller, along the heavenly way [the escape route]" (34).⁷¹ The slaves were often able to conceal runaways and furnish them with food, and the literate slaves were able to write passes.⁷² House and field servants were often able to help each other in their attempts to escape.

In one song, the slave states that he does not want to be like Judas (20);⁷³ he is not going to be a traitor to his fellow slaves. Only a small percentage of the slaves ever betrayed fellow slaves trying to escape.

Many of the songs used the term "we." The slaves sang: "We all got a right, to de tree of life" (14)⁷⁴ and "We'll stand the storm . . . We'll anchor bye and bye" (27).⁷⁵ Standing the storms of life as a group is much easier than standing them individually. The group morale was probably built up by singing songs that reminded the slaves they were not alone. Even when the term "I" was used in the spirituals, it usually meant any slave present or future; it was "all for one and one for all."⁷⁶

Recognition - Self-regard

The slaves wanted to be recognized as individuals by having a name. They sang of how the angels in Heaven were going to write their names with a golden pen (30).⁷⁷ According to Lovell, the employment of the pen to keep the record of each individual straight, was a sign of eternal justice.⁷⁸ Desiring a name represented a striving toward personal identity and respect. The masters usually gave the slaves their surnames, only sometimes did they allow the slaves the "privilege" of choosing their own surname.⁷⁹ William Wells Brown recalled that he had "lost" his name, William, when his master's nephew who arrived to live with them had the same name. "This at the time, I thought to be one of the most cruel acts that could be committed upon my rights; and I received several severe whippings for telling people that my name was William, after orders were given to change it."⁸⁰ Later, when free, he took back the name of William because it had been given to him by his mother.

Aggression

The songs about Pharaoh being punished or destroyed were among the songs in which the slaves showed true aggressiveness towards their oppressors, the white masters, and possibly all whites who believed in slavery. The slave sings that "The waters came together, and drowned de Pharaoh's army" (33).⁸¹

The slave also sang that he would fight for liberty. This liberty might occur on earth or in Heaven (7).⁸²

Economic Value - Justice

The slave also desired economic equality. The song "Naught for the Nigger" (8)⁸³ showed the slaves working hard while the white man reaped the benefits of the bondmen's work, and the "nigger" received "naught." Another song that implied the same theme was "Walk Over" (29).⁸⁴ The slave could see no justice in a system that made him do all the work, and have so little benefits from it.

Safety - Independence

According to Genovese, the whip was one of the major reasons the slaves were prompted to flee. Many slaves ran in anticipation of some form of punishment, and others in anger after the task was done. In some cases, slaves ran from the torments that were regularly inflicted by cruel or sadistic masters or overseers. A planter who signed himself "Clod Thumper" had some "Maxims for Young Farmers and Overseers" that referred to such circumstances: "Africans are nothing but brutes, and they will love you the better for whipping, whether they deserve it or not. Besides, by this manly course you will show your spunk."⁸⁵

The slaves sang of running to freedom in order to escape punishment: "No more driver's lash for me . . . no more hundred lash for me." (3)⁸⁶ They knew they better run hard or the patrol would catch them. (4).⁸⁷

Generosity

The slave wanted to be more generous (20).⁸⁸ He did not want to be like his master who usually was unwilling to share his riches with the slaves (8).⁸⁹

Knowledge

An area in which the slaves desired improvement was knowledge, defined earlier as including such things as books and education. It was especially important to the slave to learn to read, and the song "I Know I Would Like to Read" (35)⁹⁰ stated this explicitly. The slave was also concerned with learning to write, and being able to see his name written (30).⁹¹ Although laws existed prohibiting the slave to learn to read or write, he sometimes found a way to learn anyway.⁹² Frederick Douglass felt that reading and writing and otherwise educating oneself were among the slave's sharpest weapons.⁹³

Food

One area in which the slaves felt they were lacking was in the area of food. For the most part, the slaves had to depend on their masters for food, and as three of the songs revealed, this was often inadequate. The slaves prayed for food (19)⁹⁴ and swore that when they were free, there would be "no more peck o' corn for me" (3).⁹⁵ They complained of raising and cooking the food and only receiving the scraps (29).⁹⁶

Achievement - Independence

The major achievement for the slave was to free himself from bondage. In the song "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder" (18),⁹⁷ the slave is seen as achieving his goal step-by-step.

Comfort

The only area of comfort found in the songs involved clothing. The slaves' clothing was often inadequate. In one spiritual (19)⁹⁸ they asked Jesus to clothe them.

Activity - Independence

The slaves wanted their activity to be independent activity. They wanted to walk the "road where pleasure never dies," and "walk de golden streets" (7).⁹⁹ This they wanted to do on their own, without being told to do so.

Excitement

Excitement was earlier defined as being a fascination of what is dangerous or forbidden. This is implied in "Steal Away" (17).¹⁰⁰ When the slave sings of stealing away to freedom, he knows what is going to happen to him if he is caught, but he is willing to take that risk.

Ownership

The slaves often stole meat and vegetables from the whites (4).¹⁰¹ The slaves had a theory concerning stealing; they stole from each other, but merely took from their

masters. They felt that if they belonged to the master, as he said, and were his chattels, what they were doing was not stealing. Olmstead said that "even the religious feel justified in using 'massa's property' for their own temporal benefit."¹⁰²

Truthfulness - Religion

In "O Daniel" (13),¹⁰³ the slaves saterized the hypocrites who were untruthful in the sense that they professed to be Christians when they actually were not. This trait was frowned at by the slave community.

Obedience - Religion

The only time the songs mentioned obedience was in connection with religion. They might not have been willing to serve their masters, but they were willing to serve Jesus (18).¹⁰⁴

Friendship - Independence

The slave usually sang of group unity instead of friendship. However, in one song, he sang of friends who had escaped to freedom, and he was going to try to meet them.¹⁰⁵

Values Not Found

There were values listed in Table I that were not found in the slave songs. This does not necessarily mean these were not values held by the slave community, but it is a good indication that they were not major values.

FOOTNOTES

¹John Lovell, Jr., "The Social Implications of the Negro Spiritual." The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States, edited by Bernard Katz (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 134.

²Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), p. 648.

³Kenneth M. Stamp, The Peculiar Institution (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 111.

⁴For the song text, see Appendix, p. (Future references to the song texts will merely state "See Appendix" and give the page number of the Appendix on which the texts are located).

⁵Genovese, p. 657.

⁶See Appendix, p. 104.

⁷See Appendix, p. 104.

⁸John Lovell, Black Song: The Forge and the Flame (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1972), p. 196.

⁹See Appendix, p. 109.

¹⁰See Appendix, p. 106.

¹¹Lovell, Forge, p. 258.

¹²See Appendix, p. 106.

¹³Lovell, Forge, p. 329.

¹⁴See Appendix, p. 100

¹⁵See Appendix, p. 101

¹⁶See Appendix, p. 105

- ¹⁷See Appendix, p. 107.
- ¹⁸See Appendix, pp. 107-108.
- ¹⁹See Appendix, p. 105.
- ²⁰Houston A. Baker, Jr., Long Black Song (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1972), p. 44.
- ²¹See Appendix, p. 102.
- ²²See Appendix, p. 110.
- ²³See Appendix, p. 112.
- ²⁴See Appendix, p. 109.
- ²⁵See Appendix, p. 102.
- ²⁶William H. Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 19.
- ²⁷Lovell, Forge, p. 259.
- ²⁸Martin Foss, Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1949), p. 10.
- ²⁹Rueckert, p. 97
- ³⁰Lovell, Forge, p. 259.
- ³¹See Appendix, p. 105.
- ³²See Appendix, p. 101.
- ³³See Appendix, p. 108.
- ³⁴See Appendix, p. 103.
- ³⁵See Appendix, p. 105

- ³⁶See Appendix, p. 101
- ³⁷See Appendix, pp. 106-107
- ³⁸Lovell, Forge, p. 259.
- ³⁹See Appendix, p. 102.
- ⁴⁰See Appendix, p. 110.
- ⁴¹See Appendix, p. 106.
- ⁴²See Appendix, pp. 112-113
- ⁴³Lovell, Forge, p. 283.
- ⁴⁴Lovell, Forge, p. 277.
- ⁴⁵See Appendix, p. 100.
- ⁴⁶See Appendix, pp. 102;110.
- ⁴⁷See Appendix, p. 105.
- ⁴⁸Carl Jung, Man and His Symbols (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1964), p. 122.
- ⁴⁹Jung, p. 79
- ⁵⁰See Appendix, p. 104.
- ⁵¹See Appendix, p. 103.
- ⁵²See Appendix, p. 104.
- ⁵³See Appendix, p. 110.
- ⁵⁴See Appendix, pp.111-112.
- ⁵⁵See Appendix, p. 112.
- ⁵⁶See Appendix, p. 109.

⁵⁷ See Appendix, p. 108.

⁵⁸ Howard Thurman, "The Meaning of Spirituals," The Negro in Music and Art, edited by Lindsay Patterson (New York: Publishers Co., Inc., 1967), p. 3.

⁵⁹ Jung, pp. 122-123.

⁶⁰ See Appendix, p. 108.

⁶¹ Lovell, Forge, p. 306.

⁶² See Appendix, p. 105.

⁶³ See Appendix, p. 102.

⁶⁴ Genovese, p. 650.

⁶⁵ See Appendix, p. 101.

⁶⁶ See Appendix, p. 104.

⁶⁷ See Appendix, pp. 109-110.

⁶⁸ See Appendix, p. 106.

⁶⁹ Genovese, p. 541.

⁷⁰ See Appendix, p. 109.

⁷¹ See Appendix, pp. 112-113.

⁷² Stamp, p. 115.

⁷³ See Appendix, p. 107.

⁷⁴ See Appendix, p. 105.

⁷⁵ See Appendix, p. 110.

⁷⁶ Lovell, Social Implications, pp. 135-136.

- ⁷⁷ See Appendix, p. 111.
- ⁷⁸ Lovell, Forge, p. 246.
- ⁷⁹ Genovese, p. 445.
- ⁸⁰ Genovese, p. 445.
- ⁸¹ See Appendix, p. 112.
- ⁸² See Appendix, p. 103.
- ⁸³ See Appendix, p. 103.
- ⁸⁴ See Appendix, p. 111.
- ⁸⁵ Genovese, p. 649.
- ⁸⁶ See Appendix, p. 101.
- ⁸⁷ See Appendix, p. 102.
- ⁸⁸ See Appendix, p. 107.
- ⁸⁹ See Appendix, p. 103.
- ⁹⁰ See Appendix, p. 113.
- ⁹¹ See Appendix, p. 111.
- ⁹² Genovese, p. 563.
- ⁹³ Lovell, Forge, p. 167.
- ⁹⁴ See Appendix, p. 107.
- ⁹⁵ See Appendix, p. 101.
- ⁹⁶ See Appendix, p. 111.
- ⁹⁷ See Appendix, pp. 106-107

⁹⁸See Appendix, p. 107.

⁹⁹See Appendix, p. 103.

¹⁰⁰See Appendix, p. 106.

¹⁰¹See Appendix, p. 102.

¹⁰²Genovese, p. 602.

¹⁰³See Appendix, p. 105.

¹⁰⁴
See Appendix, p. 107.

¹⁰⁵
See Appendix, p. 109.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to study the symbolism of the slave songs that existed in the pre-Civil War South in the United States in order to gain a more profound insight into the values of the slaves.

The method used in this study was both historical and analytical. Before the songs could be analyzed, it was necessary to review the circumstances that instigated the creation of the songs.

The methodology used in the value analysis was adapted mainly from Ralph K. White's Value Analysis: The Nature and Use of the Method. This method was chosen after testing it on several sample songs. The method was found to be quite thorough and relevant to a study of this kind.

Value was defined as "any goal or standard of judgment which in a given culture is ordinarily referred to as if it were self-evidently desirable (or undesirable)"¹ The term "goal" referred to anything the slaves could more or less directly enjoy (end state goals). The term "standard of judgment" referred to some sort of criteria by which the slaves judged themselves or other persons (mode of conduct).

The thirty-five spirituals analyzed in this study were representative of the 300 songs reviewed. The songs analyzed

were symbol-laden. The symbolism enabled the slaves to create songs that dealt with every phase of slave life and to do so without fear of being punished by the white man.

Slave Life in the South

The Negro in the South in the 1800's was seen "as a being somewhat less than human, a subhuman."² Since the Negroes were "subhuman," they were subjected to different rules than human persons.

Each slave state adopted its own slave codes, with the codes for each state being very similar. The codes established the property rights of those who owned slaves by giving the masters sovereign power over the slaves. The slave was not to lift a hand against a white man, use insulting language, or be insubordinate in any way.

The slave had no legal rights. He could not possess or "acquire anything but what must belong to his master."³ Since the master owned the slave, he could sell him whenever he pleased, even though it often meant separating families.

The slave was legally forbidden to acquire title to property, and he could not be a party to any contract. Since slaves could not make contracts, marriages between them were not legally binding.

The codes also made it illegal for a slave to learn to read or write. Not even masters could legally give books or pamphlets to slaves.⁴

Violations of the codes were misdemeanors or felonies subject to punishment, whipping being the dominant form.

Since the master owned the slave, he decided upon the living conditions of the slave, and the slave often complained about the choices made by the master. The average slave did not have adequate food, housing, or clothing.

The masters tried to control the religious beliefs of the Blacks. The white preacher usually preached a "censored sermon," and the theme was always the same: "servants obey your masters." Most slaves, repelled by the white sermons, formulated their own practices. They worshiped in their praise meetings where they could sing, dance, and shout. In his book, The Slave Community, John Blassingame noted that the praise meeting was a combination of African and conventional religious beliefs.⁵

The slaves formed a framework for their religious beliefs based on Christianity. The Christian religion fit the needs of the slave. It promised a better life in a world after death, and it gave hope for a better life on earth.

THE VALUES

The value that was most prevalent in the thirty-five songs analyzed was independence. In order to gain their independence, many slaves ran to freedom, and at least one third of these runaways belonged to the ranks of the skilled and privileged slave.

The slaves had several reasons for running to freedom. One reason was to escape the lash. By fleeing to freedom, the slave sought physical security.

A large number of slaves ran to rejoin family members from whom they had been separated. The emotional insecurity caused by the separation was as bad or worse than any physical insecurity.

Many of the slaves' attempts to reach freedom were successful because of group unity. That a strong sense of brotherhood permeated the slave community was evident in several of the songs.

One area in which the slaves desired freedom was religion. The slaves sang of their desire to be good Christians; they did not want to be hypocrites like their masters.

The slaves took several stories from the Bible and used them to fit their own needs. The story most often referred to was the plight of the Israelites. The Israelites had freed themselves from their oppressors by working through God, and the slaves felt it was possible the same event could occur again.

An important aspect of religion for the slaves was that there would be a day of judgment for every person on earth, and everyone would be judged equally. The slave's concept of God was that he was a God of justice; He did not differentiate between the Whites and the Blacks, or the rich and the poor. Therefore, when the day of judgment came, a person

could only get into Heaven if he had been a good Christian. The slaves often felt the slaveholders would not be allowed into Heaven because they were not true Christians.

The slave wanted equality on earth as well as in Heaven. He wanted respect and a personal identity. He also desired educational and economic equality.

Determination was an important value for the slave community. The slave knew that the road to freedom was long and hard, but he was determined not to give up hope that one day he would be free. Although freedom might not have been near, the slave was patient: he knew that if he did not find freedom on earth, he would find it in Heaven.

Through many of the songs there exists a hope, a faith in the ultimate justice of things. There is a confidence that runs through the songs. It may stem from faith in life or faith in death, but it is an assurance of a boundless justice that exists somewhere. This hope is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will not be judged by the color of their skins, but by their souls.

The Value of the Method

By using White's method of analysis, it was possible to locate and highlight some of the major values of the slave community. This method did not allow the subject material to be taken at its face value; it required that the researcher get to the root of what the persons being researched were trying to convey. This proved an absolute necessity in a study of the slave songs.

The categories offered by White were relative to the subject matter studied. However, after charting the values, it appeared that the list could have been shortened for this particular study.

This method left little to the imagination. Facts were required to substantiate any findings made by the analyst.

White's method can be very valuable in a value analysis study, whether it be a study of a culture or a person. This author feels that it was adequate for this particular study.

Relevancy of the Spiritual for Now

In the early 1900's, Kelly Miller, an Afro-American sociologist, commented on the relevancy of the songs in an article entitled "The Artistic Gifts of the Negro." He addressed himself to the Negro who was ashamed of these melodies by declaring that the spirituals were the Negro's "chief contribution to purifying influences that soften and solace the human spirit." He said that they possessed the quality of endurance, and strongly urged that the "rising Afro-American carry them along on his upward climb as an indispensable item of baggage."⁶

B. A. Botkin, in his article "Tradition Challenges the Negro" (1946), wrote that the will to be free and the will to survive were the heritage of all oppressed people. Botkin showed how the Negro's stubborn and rebellious desire for freedom was expressed in his folk songs. He suggested that

these characteristics were germane to the time and people for whom he was writing, and it appears that the same holds true today.

Botkin made one other important suggestion. He believed that the Negro could destroy the myth of Negro inferiority and acquiescence only by constantly examining and asserting his tradition.⁷

In a more recent article (1969) on traditions in Afro-American Literature, Gerald W. Haslam quoted Ralph Ellison on the contribution of "black folk stuff." Ellison said that it had much to tell about the humor, faith, and adaptability to reality "necessary to live in a world which has taken on much of the insecurity and blues-like absurdity known to those who brought it into being."⁸

For the many Blacks who still feel enslaved by the racism that exists today, these songs that speak of freedom, determination, and unity could be extremely relevant.

FOOTNOTES

¹Ralph K. White, Value Analysis: The Nature and Use of the Method (Glen Gardner, N. J.: Liberation Press, 1951), p. 13.

²Robert Strom, ed., Values and Human Development (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1973), p. 170.

³Kenneth M. Stamp, The Peculiar Institution (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 197.

⁴Stamp, p. 208.

⁵John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 64.

⁶John Lovell, Jr., Black Song: The Forge and the Flame (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1972), p. 383.

⁷Lovell, p. 384.

⁸Lovell, p. 384.

APPENDIX

The thirty-five songs analyzed in the following pages are representative of the 300 songs from which they were selected. To facilitate the reading of the songs, the symbol abbreviations and their meanings used in analyzing the songs have been alphabetically arranged.

A	Achievement	L	Sex-Love
Ac	Physical Activity	Li	Likeness or conformity
Ad	Adjustment	Lo	Family-love
Ag	Aggression	M	Morality
Ap	Appearance	Ma	Manners
B	Beauty	Mo	Modesty
C	Caution	N	New Experience
Cl	Cleanliness	O	Ownership
Co	Comfort	Ob	Obedience
Cr	Creative Self-expression	P	Practicality
Cu	Culture	Pl	Pleasant Personality
D	Determination	Pu	Purity
Do	Dominance	R	Recognition
E	Economic Value	Re	Rest
Ex	Excitement	Rl	Religion
F	Friendship	S	Safety
Fo	Food	Se	Emotional Security
G	Generosity	Sf	Self-regard
H	Humor	St	Physical Strength
Ha	Happiness	Sx	Sex
He	Health	T	Tolerance
I	Independence	Tr	Truthfulness
In	Intelligence	U	Group Unity
J	Justice	V	Value-in-general
K	Knowledge	W	Work

The other symbols that have been employed in the analysis are:

1. (p) Possibly
2. (c) Code
3. ' Frustration; ordinarily corresponds to the word "no" or "not enough."
4. (A single parenthesis represents the desires or evaluations of some other person. It ordinarily corresponds to the word "wants."
Ex. s(R The slave wanted recognition.
5. A dash —, placed between two value symbols, means that the first is seen as a means to the second; ordinarily corresponds to the words "leading to."

The Slave Songs

No Man Can Hinder Me

Walk in, kind Saviour, *R*
No man can hinder me! *D*

Walk in sweet Jesus,
No man can hinder me!

See what wonder Jesus done, *Ha*
O no man can hinder me!

See what wonder Jesus done,
O no man can hinder me!

O no man, no man, no man can hinder me!

Jesus make de dumb to speak. *Ha*

Jesus make de cripple walk. *Ha*

Jesus give de blind his sight. *Ha*

Jesus do most anyting. Ha

Rise, poor Lazarus, from de tomb. E4

2) Poor Rosey

Poor Rosy, poor gal; poor Rosy, poor gal;
Rosy break my heart

Heav'n shall a be my home. (p) no D

I cannot stay in Hell one day, (p)so

Heav'n shall-a be my home.

I'll sing and pray my soul a-way,

Heav'n shall-a be my home. I

Got hard trial in my way, D

Heav'n shall-a be my home.

O when I talk, I talk wid God, R1

Heav'n shall-a be my home.

I dunno what de Massa want of me, I

Heav'n shall-a be my home

3) Many Thousand Go

No more peck o' corn for me, 'Fo

No more, no more; D

No more peck o' corn for me,

Many tousand go. Ha we

No more drivers lash for me. 'S

No more pint o' salt for me. 'Fo

No more hundred lash for me. 'S

No more mistress' call for me. 'I

No more auction block for me. 'I Lo'Se

'Sf

4) Run, Nigger, Run

O some tell me that a Nigger won't steal O
 But I've seen a nigger in my cornfield; n'O
 O run, nigger, run, for the patrol will catch you, 'S
 O run, nigger, run, for 'tis almost day.

5) Jesus Will Come Bye-an-Bye

Keep a-inching along, Keep a-inching along, p
 Jesuw will come by-and-by. Ha } (p) (c) e
 Keep a-inching along, like a poor inch-worm.
 Jesus will come by-and-by.

6) Go Down, Moses

When Israel was in Egypt's land, so
 Let my poeple go! I
 Oppressed so hard they could not stand, 'I
 Let my people go!
 Go down Moses, 'Way down in Egypt's Land, d
 Tell old (or "ole") Pharaoh, Let my people go! m (c) e
 "Thus saith (spoke) the Lord," bold Moses said, Rl Ha
 Let my people go!
 "If not I'll smite your first-born dead." #g
 Let my people go!
 No more in bondage shall they toil, I
 Let my people go!
 Let them come out with Egypt's spoin, J
 Let my people go!
 Go down, Moses, 'Way down in Egypt's Land,
 Tell old Pharaoh, Let my people go!

7) My Father, How Long

My father, how long, My father, how long,

My father, how long,

Poor sinner suffer here? cp) S (p)so

And it won't be long, And it won't be long,

And it won't be long,

Poor sinner suffer here

} (c)e I

We'll soon be free, I

De Lord will call us home. Rl

We'll walk de miry road D I Ac

Where pleasure never dies. Ha

We'll walk de golden streets

of de New Jerusalem.

I Ac D

My brudders do sing

De praises of de Lord. Rl

We'll fight for liberty Ag-I

When de Lord will call us home. h or so ; I

8) Naught for the Nigger

Nigger plows the cotton,

Nigger picks it out;

White man pockets money, w (E Se

Nigger does without. 'E Se 'J

Aught's an Aught,

Figger's a figger;

All for the white man,

Naught for the nigger.

w (E Se
'E Se 'J

9) Good News, Member

Goon news, member, good news, member, (c)e
 Don't you mind what Satan say; (p) m o r w
 Good news member, good news,
 And I heared from heav'n to-day. no

My brudder have a seat and I so glad, I-Ha
 Good news, member, good news.
 My brudder have a seat and I so glad, } (c)e
 And I heared from heav'n to-day.

10) O Freedom!

Oh Freedom! Oh freedom! I
 Oh freedom over me!
 An befo' I'd be a slave, D
 I'd be buried in my grave
 An' go home to my Lord an' be free. h; I

11) There's a Better Day A-Coming

A few more beatings of the wind and rain,
 Ere the winter will be over-- (p) s/
 Glory, Hallelujah!
 Some friends has gone before me,-- F}I (c)e
 I must try to go and meet them--
 Glovy, Hallelujah!
 A few more risings and settings of the sun,
 Ere the winter will be over--
 Glory Hallelujah!
 See the wives and husbands sold apart, L'se
 Their childrens' screams will break my heart. Lo'se
 There's a better day a-coming . . . Ha

12) Great Day

Great day! Great day, de righteous marchin', (c)e
 Great day! God's gwineter build up Zion's walls. J

Dis is de day of jubilee, . . . (c)e
 De Lord has set his people free, . . . I; RI
 God's gwineter build up Zion's walls.

We want no cowards in our band, D
 We call for valiant-hearted men. D

13) O Daniel

You call yourself church member, (p)w
 You hold your head so high, hp
 You praise God with your glitt'ring tongue,
 But you leave all your heart behind. 'RI; 'Tc

O my Lord delivered Daniel, O Daniel, RI
 O Daniel,
 O my Lord delivered Daniel,
 O why not deliver me too? Ha

14) You Got a Right

You got a right, I got a right, } J; u
 We all got a right, to de tree of life. }
 De very time I thought I was los' 'Ha
 De dungeon shuck an' de chain fell off.
 You may hinder me here, But you cannot dere, so j no orh; D
 'Cause God in de heav'n gwineter answer prayer. RI
 O brethern,
 O sisteren, You got a right, I got a right, } J; u
 We all got a right to de tree of life. }

15) When We All Meet in Heaven

When we all meet in Heaven, h or no
 There is no parting there;
 When we all meet in Heaven, } U; Lo Se (p) (c)e I
 There is parting no more.

16) O Brothers, Don't Get Weary

O brothers, don't get weary, U; D
 O brothers, don't get weary,
 O brothers, don't get weary,
 We're waiting for the Lord. D
 We'll land on Canaan's shore, so } (c)e I
 We'll land on Canaan's shore,
 When we land on Canaan's shore,
 We'll meet forever more. L' Se Lo' Se

17) Steal Away

My Lord, He calls me,
 He calls me by the thunder, I
 The trumpet sounds it in my soul,
 I hain't got long to stay here. so
 Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus! E4
 Steal Away, steal away home, no-I
 I hain't got long to stay here.

(c)e
 or
 (c) mt

18) We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder

We are climbing Jacob's ladder, D-A j u
 We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
 We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
 Soldier of the cross.

Every round goes higher'n' higher. *A*
 Every round goes higher'n' higher.

Brother do you love my Jesus: *RI*

If you love him why not serve him? *RI Ob*

19) O Lord I'm Hungry

O Lord I'm hungry

I want to be fed, *'Fo*

O Lord I'm hungry

I want to be fed.

O feed me Jesus feed me,

Feed me all my days,

O feed me all the days of my life.

O feed me Jesus feed me, feed me all my days, *RI*

O feed me all the days of my life.

O Lord I'm naked *'Co*

I want to be clothed . . . *Co*

O Lord I'm sinful *'M*

I want to be saved . . . *RI*

20) Lord I Want To Be a Christian *RI*

Lord, I want to be a Christian

In a my heart, in a my heart,

Lord I want to be a Christian

In a my heart.

Refrain: In a my heart, _____ *ω 'Rishp*
 In a my heart, _____
 Lord, I want to be a Christian
 In a my heart.

Lord, I want to be more loving . . . *G*

Lord, I want to be more holy . . . *RI*

I don't want to be like Judas . . . *'U*

Lord, I want to be like Jesus . . . *RI*

21) When I'm Dead

When I'm dead don't you grieve after me,
 When I'm dead don't you grieve after me,
 When I'm dead don't you grieve after me,
 By and by don't you grieve after me.

} dt-I

Pale horse and Rider have taken my mother away dt or sl;
 Lo'se

Pale horse and Rider--stop at every door dt or sl

Cold icy hand _____ took my father away dt or sl; Lo'se

22) My Name's Written On High

O hallelujah to the lamb!

My name's written on high; R; Sf

King Jesus died for every man, J; Rl

My name's written on high. K

If you get there before I do, h or no

My name's written on high;

Look out for me I'm coming too, D

My name's written on high.

Shout, my sister, you are free, I

My name's written on high;

Christ has bought your liberty, Rl-I

My name's written on high.

23) Want To Go To Heaven When I Die

Want to go to Heaven when I die,

Want to go to Heaven when I die,

Want to go to Heaven when I die;

Good Lord, when I die . . .

} Rl-I

Want to see my mother when I did . . . Lo

Want to see my father when I did . . . Lo

Want to see my sister when I did . . . Lo

24) There's A Great Camp Meeting

O walk together children U

Don't you get weary, D

Walk together children

Don't you get weary . . .

There's a great camp meeting in the Promised Land. No

(c)mt
(c)e

Talk together children

Don't you get weary,

} U, D

Talk together children

Don't you get weary . . .

There's a great camp meeting in the Promised Land.

25) O Mary Don't You Weep Don't You Mourn,

Chorus: O Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn, ' Ha

O Mary, don't you weep; don't you mourn;

Pharaoh's army got drowned, Ag

O Mary, don't you weep.

Some of these mornings bright and fair

Take my wings and cleave the air. I (c)e

When I get to Heaven goin' to sing and shout, h or no Ha

Nobody there for turn me out. J

26) Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, 'Se; ' Ha

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,

Far, far away from home 'Se
 A long, long ways from home.
 Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone, 'Sj 'Se
 Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
 Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
 Far, Far away from home
 A long, long ways from home.
 Then I get down on my knees an' pray. R1- Ha
 Get down on my knees and pray.

27) Stand the Storm

O stand the storm, it won't be long, slj D (c)e
 We'll anchor bye and bye, O trethern! U
 Stand the storm, it won't be long,
 We'll anchor bye and bye. D, I, Ha

My ship is on the ocean,
 We'll anchor bye and bye, } (c)e
 My ship is on the ocean,
 We'll anchor bye and bye.

Whe's making for the kingdom, no
 We'll anchor bye and bye . . .

I've a mother in the kingdom, Lo
 We'll anchor bye and bye . . .

28) "Go Down Moses" (2nd version)

O, let us all from bondage flee, . . . I
 And let us all in Christ be free, . . . R1-I
 We need not always weep and moan, . . . 'Ha
 And wear these slavery chains forlorn, . . . 'I
 This world's a wilderness of woe, . . .
 O, let us all to Canaan go, . . . noj (c)e I

29) Walk Over

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,
 De gib us de liquor; } W; 'G; 'J
 And say dat's good enough for nigger. 'R
 Walk over! Walk over!
 Ybur butter and de fat;
 Poor nigger, you can't git over dat! 'Sf; 'R

30) De Angels in Heab'n Gwineter Write My Name

O; write my name,
 O, write my name; R
 O, write my name,
 De Angels in de heab'n gwineter write my name, R
 Write my name when-a you get home, R
 De Angels in de heab'n gwineter write my name.
 Yes write my name wid-a golden pen . . . R; R; J

31) The Day of Judgment

And de moon will turn to blood, } R1-J
 And de moon will turn to blood, }
 And de moon will turn to blood.
 In dat day - O - Yoy^{*}, in my soul!.

And de moon will tuen to blood in dat day.

And you'll see de stars a-fallin',

And de world will be on fire.

And you'll hear de saints a-singing:

And de Lord will say to do sheep S

for to go to Him right hand;

But de goats must go to de left. m

} RIJ

*A sort of prolonged wail.

32) I got a Home in Dat Rock

Poor old Lazarus, poor as I; Don't you see? Don't you see?
 Poor old Lazarus, poor as I; Don't you see? Don't you see?
 Poor old Lazarus, poor as I, when he died had a home on high.
 He had a home in-a that Rock, Don't you see? R, RI, J

Rich man, Dives, lived so well, Don't you see? Don't you see?
 Rich man, Dives, lived so well, Don't you see? Don't you see?
 Rich man, Dives, lived so well, when he died found home in hell,
 Had no home in that Rock, don't you see? RI, J

33) Turn Back Pharaoh's Army

When the children were in bondage, 'I
 They cried unto the Lord, RI
 To turn back Pharaoh's army, m
 He turned back Pharaoh's army. Ha

When Pharaoh crossed the water, } Ag
 The waters came together,
 And drowned de Pharaoh's army,
 Hallelu!

34) Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveller

Let us cheer the weary traveller, U
 Cheer the weary traveller,

Let us cheer the weary traveller,
 Along the heavenly way. (c)e *it*
 I'll take my gospel trumpet,
 and I'll begin to blow, } *D*
 And if my saviour helps me,
 I'll blow wherever I go.

And if you meet with crosses *D*
 And trials on the way,
 Just keep your trust in Jesus, *R/*
 And don't forget to pray.

If you cannot sing like Angels
 If you cannot pray like Paul
 You can tell the love of Jesus *R/*
 And say he died for all. *J*

35) I Know I Would Like to Read

There is a school on earth begun
 Supported by the Holy One. *R/*

I had a little book and read it through, *K*
 I got my Jesus as well as you; *R/*

I know I would like to read, like to read, *K*
 Like to read a sweet story of old;

I got a letter this mornin'
 . . . Aye, Lawd. } (c)e
 My Lord's writing all the time.

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