

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Pearl Spears Gray for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
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Abstract Approved:

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Maintenance of one's self and one's people in a free society requires educational, cultural, and economic literacy. This is fully as imperative in a democracy as the maintenance of ignorance of slaves is required in an oppressive society. The requisite skills needed both to sustain one's self and become a contributor to one's society are learned from the home, school, and community. For the African-American, there have been many detours along the educational road.

This study examined one aspect of teaching by African-American women whose classrooms were one-room, rural, segregated Southern schools in the early 1900's. The research questions were:

(1) What is the West African Oral Tradition in Folklore?

(2) Was there a transfer to and rebirth of that tradition among African slaves in the southern United States?

(3) Were there any educational applications of a West African derived folkloric oral tradition by African-American female teachers in one-room, segregated schools in the rural South?

The ethnographic research technique was used because it enabled the researcher to take a culture oriented approach based in anthropology. The informants were interviewed using an open-ended question format. Other sources were archival materials, newspapers, periodicals, books, records, and telephone contacts.

This research was undertaken because of a personal interest by the researcher and the literature was devoid of any previous studies making the link between a West African Oral Tradition in Folklore, and African-American women teachers in rural, one-room, segregated Southern schools.

This study is not predictive, but rather an ethnographic exploration to uncover the previously unstudied educational applications of a West African Folkloric Oral Tradition. Folklore was used in a significant way by the informants in their classes. In addition, this folklore had its roots in the African-American slave experience, thereby leading to the conclusion that it has a West African foundation. The similarities of motifs and usage demonstrate the links between the African-American and his West African ancestor.

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African-American Folkloric Form and Function  
in Segregated One-Room Schools

by

Pearl Spears Gray

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To the following five people whose lives touched mine and whose faith in me never wavered, I say, your death has left a void, but your legacy will remain a significant force in my spiritual and cognitive development for the remainder of my life:

Mrs. Pearl Jackson - Grandmother

Mr. Hobart William Spears - Father

Mr. Clayton L. Jones - Stepfather

Mr. Azel Savage - Adopted Grandfather

Dr. Thomas C. Hogg - Friend and Mentor

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"Everybody wants to tell us what a Negro  
Is...But if you would tell me who I am, at  
least take the trouble to discover What I  
Have Been!

Ralph Ellison

## Prologue

The "Black Man" as he is today in the United States is an amalgamation of what he had to become. Black people in the United States are an adaptive people. They had to be, having been snatched from their homes, tortured, ravaged, told they were sub-human, fit only to toil in the fields and to serve in the kitchens of white people (Hunt, 1863). An alien in a hostile environment takes one of three positions: (1) The individual submits totally, losing all of his or her cultural identity. (2) The individual rebels for a new order and/or dies. (3) The individual watches, waits, and learns to take what he needs to make what he wants. Many African-Americans in the United States chose quite early, and to this day are following, the third alternative (Ellison, 1947). Out of this vigilance has come an African-American culture deeply rooted in the West African homeland. James Baldwin in his book, The Fire Next Time (1964), asserted that, "Black people have a joy and zest for life and a capacity for facing, absorbing, and surviving disaster which is moving, rare and uncanny."

Thomas Jefferson, one of the United States' most revered founding fathers and a pioneer in the field of democratic principles, stated, "But never yet can I find that a Black had offered a thought above the level of plain narration (Ballard, 1973). Jefferson's view was the prevailing "scientifically-based" attitude in Europe and the United States for over three centuries. That philosophy led

to the development of a system of lies, distortions, and massive deletions concerning the pre-colonial history, culture, traditions, and government of Africa (Davidson, 1961).

In Lawrence Levine's (1977) view, "Black Americans and Africans have been rendered historically inarticulate." Levine further asserted this non-history of a continent resulted from a world view in which European historians considered records written by others like themselves to be the only accurate ones. Therefore, most of the orally transmitted culture, history, customs, and traditions of Africans and African-Americans were rejected. The Euro-American historians, writing about topics they considered important, produced little understanding of those groups which had not left traditional written remains or had not been in the mainstream of American society (Levine, 1977; Woodson, 1969).

From the beginning, the mandate for public education in the United States has been to produce "Americanized" products as well as to produce persons with the capabilities that fit the needs of an expanding industrial-urban economy (Peshkin, 1978). Black slaves and cheap labor were supposed to be the end result, rather than education of Black people. Since, in the European view, African slaves had no history and culture and had made no contribution to the civilization, there was little need to educate them.

George Spindler, an anthropologist at Stanford University, has pointed out an interesting paradox. He states that behavior will change to survive and accommodate a system. However, Spindler notes that the Black experience in America has been both a forced and an externally imposed condition rather than a community-generated directive for change. This kind of change has actually stabilized the very actions, feelings, and beliefs which the externally imposed norms and outward behaviors were designed to correct (Spindler, 1982).

The public school systems offer numerous examples of externally diagnosed and prescribed "remedies" implemented without affirmation by the minority communities. Neither the content nor the structure of the change has been generated or sanctioned by the African-American community. Public education demonstrates the paradox in race relations in the United States. The public school systems for African-Americans offer an excellent microscopic view of systems within systems designed to do good, yet systematically, financially, and institutionally compelled to do the opposite. Much of the paradox and antithetical results derive from an ignorance of the culture, most especially ignorance of folkloric elements in the ongoing social fabric of groups who are not Caucasian.

The need for scholarly investigations by African-American researchers into the relationships between educative processes, on the one hand, and social structure, on the other hand, is long overdue.

# AFRICAN-AMERICAN FOLKLORIC FORM AND FUNCTION IN SEGREGATED ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS

## Chapter I

### The Search Begins: Why, How, Which Tool?

#### Introduction

Culture and how it is transmitted and changed is the backbone of anthropology. The process through which individuals pass on the way to becoming culturally competent and informed about their role in society is called enculturation. From a folkloric point of view, world view can be conceived of as the result of efforts to transmit those pervasive truths deemed important to the maintenance of a group (Roberts, 1982).

Since education is one of the instruments through which cultures perpetuate themselves, schooling is a significant cultural activity. It is the process through which the members of a society ensure that the behavior necessary to continue their culture is learned (Spindler, 1982). The commitment to education as a cultural process necessitates a broader perspective on schooling, education, teaching, and learning than that obtained by confining one's attention to only those events within a particular school building. Educational anthropology provides that broader perspective.

## Education and Anthropology

### Transmission of Culture

In the United States, the public school acts as a cultural agent which frequently transmits only one view -- the Euro-American one (Woodson, 1926; Cortez, 1973; Glazer, 1961). An anthropological view of schooling propels one toward the concept of education as cultural transmission, functioning to maintain communities, social structures, and values (Peshkin, 1978). The concept of schooling as a cultural transmittor and disseminator of the status-quo runs in direct opposition to the concept of schools that is shared by many colleges of education, teachers, school administrators, and members of the general public. Many of these agencies and individuals believe that schools are instruments of reform and mediators of change (Wilcox, 1982).

The perceptual differences between educational anthropologists and school personnel as well as the general public sometimes lead to different problem diagnoses, prescriptions, and tactical strategies. Of significance for this study, different opinions abound regarding the curriculum implications of the reciprocal process (or lack of it) between the native culture, the larger racially different society, and the school.

### Educational Anthropology

The application of the concept of culture to schools and the totality of the educative process has led to the



development of the field of educational anthropology within the discipline of anthropology. In this view, education also occurs in the home, family, and community.

The anthropology of education is an attempt to understand better what the teacher is doing and of what the educational process consists, by studying the teacher as a process of cultural transmission. Education is a pan-human process, but one that varies sharply from culture to culture. Each individual teacher's world view is somehow encapsulated in each gesture, admonition, indoctrination, or explanation (Spindler, 1982).

In cultural anthropology, much of what has been written about educational practices in traditional society comes from reviewing monographs depicting enculturation within the intricate mosaic of group life (Blackwood, 1935; Firth, 1936; Opler, 1941; Powdermaker, 1933; Statyt, 1931). Looking at culture as the cornerstone of social continuity were Raum, 1940; Whiting, 1941; and Herskovits as early as 1932. Margaret Mead took these themes further through her investigation of child rearing and adolescence from 1928 through 1935 among Samoans.

During these early years, cultural anthropologists strongly focused on field work in preliterate and non-industrialized groups and societies. Several stressed the cultural context of educational processes within those groups and recommended a central role for anthropology in the development of educational theory, research, and teacher training (Vandersalker, 1898; Hewett, 1904; Montessori, 1913). Investigations of schooling and teaching in Africa

from a non-colonist perspective were made during this period by some cultural anthropologists (Murray, 1929; Watkins, 1943; Laye, 1959).

Jules Henry's writing from 1955 through 1963 provided a major thrust for the analysis of schools and schooling in industrial societies. Examining ritual, culture, and social structure, Henry treated elementary school classrooms and high schools as if they were tribes. From his observation in United States suburban schools, Henry inferred patterns derived from and supportive of the wider cultural context of his participants. Many of these patterns were drawn from Henry's own knowledge and experience as a member of the culture, rather than from extensive fieldwork to establish the linkages he posited; but such inferences demonstrated unequivocally how schools and schooling were integrated within their cultural context.

Solon Kimball and George Spindler have been active in the newly established field of educational anthropology. In 1974, Kimball published his comprehensive review of educational anthropology. Kimball and Burnett also produced an anthology of investigations into the influence of culture on human learning and cognition.

George Spindler, a leader in the fields of educational anthropology and ethnographic research methodology, advocates culture theory and anthropological perspectives in educational decision making, in curriculum content, and teacher training. Spindler believes the natural bridge from

anthropology to education to educational anthropology is the phenomenon of cultural transmission.

Given that the schools are the natural and societially designated guardians and dispensers of culture, the teacher surfaces as the pivotal force ultimately responsible for the what, how, and to whom education will be shared. To gain a clearer picture of the "what," "how," and "to whom" questions being raised by cultural anthropologists, parents, Black people, school boards, and (a few) administrators, many educational anthropologists have revived ethnographic research methods for use in analyzing the culture of the school. In 1973, the National Institute of Education encouraged the use of the ethnographic approach in the school research it funded, maintaining that these anthropological techniques gathered information about human behavior that is impossible to obtain by more quantitative methods (Wilson, 1977).

#### Ethnography as a Research Methodology

Ethnography is the field arm of cultural anthropology (Spindler, 1982) and involves field work looking for cultural patterns and cultural forms shared by members of a social system or subsystem. The components included in the educative process and the subcultures within them provide a rich environment for a creative humanistic research technique. Ethnography--frequently historically oriented, people centered, and anthropologically grounded--provides a

tool for investigating the complex social system called "public education."

One cannot study subjective beings with detachment. In fact, that attitude of aloofness would have kept this researcher out of the homes, parties, church, and other centers (gatherings) of African-Americans for which her attendance was needed to obtain information. A comment often heard about African-Americans displaying these attitudes is, "What's wrong with ----. Is she/he trying to be a snob or trying to be white?".

At the center of the ethnographic research methodology are several basic maxims which form the orientation and philosophical foundation:

(1) The process is conducted in a culturally sensitive manner and particularly attuned to the observation of group and individual dynamics (Tutman, 1970).

(2) The researcher encourages the informant to make connections showing the impact and importance of past events on the present.

(3) Individuals live, work, and act within parameters, both real and imagined. There is an acknowledgement by the researcher of the intrinsic worth of the people and culture being studied. The individual action is recognized as having meaning for the group.

(4) The ethnographer suspends making stereotypical comparisons and analysis which would place the individual group, community, and/or school being researched on a

continuum showing them to be less than civilized, important, or intelligent in comparison to another culture, group, or standard. As William Tutman (1971) explained in a seminar at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, different from is not less than or better than; it is what is. An ethnography is a cultural description which conveys how it is to walk in someone else's shoes, as well as representing the perspective, attitudes, beliefs, values, and importance of the researched group (Wolcott, 1975).

(5) The ethnographic world view believes that any classroom, any school, any group or community is a variational adaptation within a regional, national, and world-wide variant in culture and social organization (Spindler, 1982). This is especially significant for this particular research study because it means that individuals can and do have an impact upon major societal events. Studying a few individuals can offer insights for the larger society.

(6) Educational ethnography recognizes that one of the basic functions of schooling is to transmit culture. Implicit within this view is the understanding that schools in the public domain transmit "what is," rather than what should be, and the "what is" is determined by the dominant group and includes more than the formal curriculum.

The common indigenous conception of what is transmitted in schools is curriculum content - a body of academic skills which it is generally agreed the schools should transmit. Ethnographers have focused instead on what has been referred to as the

hidden curriculum, or that which is implicit in the culture can be thought of as including a set of skills different from those taught in the formal curriculum, of values, or motivational strategies and goals, or self-images, or relationships to peers and authorities (Wilcox, 1982, page 464).

John Ogbu, in his book, Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective (1978), using ethnographic methods, revealed that the hierarchical stratification of roles in schools based on race, sex, and social class was no accident. The recurring hierarchical stratification by race was a functional necessity for maintenance of existing economic and political structures.

So long as caste remains the principal of social organization, no efforts to use the schools to equalize the social and occupational status of different minority and majority castes can succeed because the social system demands that both desirable and undesirable social and occupational positions be filled on an ascriptive basis. The schools therefore continue to prepare a disproportionate number of lower-caste groups for their traditional menial positions, although they may not do this consciously. To change this situation-to eliminate Black academic retardation-requires first a total destruction of the caste system-that is the creation of a new social order in which Blacks do not occupy a subordinate position vis-a-vis whites. If we destroy the caste system, both schools and Blacks will begin to manifest order, and academic retardation will disappear. Under the new social order, schools have no choice but to change their policies and practices and train Blacks as effectively as they train whites because then society will demand the same degree of competence from both (Ogbu, 1978, pages 358-360).

(7) The importance of the informant is stressed. These people, groups, and/or individuals are the primary source

material. In ethnography, people are not subjects; they are the experts and are therefore treated with respect and kindness (Spindler, 1982). Ideally, a trust relationship must be developed and, as the investigator is doing this, he must not violate any of the standards of appropriate behavior, customs, and laws as defined by his informant or the person, community, or organization. Another vital element is to be sure not to violate the people through falsifying or writing misleading data.

### Ethnography as Distinguished From Other Research Designs

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) discuss the differences between the ethnographic research design and the more traditional experimental and statistical designs. Their analysis is based on assumptive modes for identifying, organizing, and processing data and the ideas that explain them. In order to conceptualize these assumptions, they framed them in four dimensions:

(1) Inductive--Deductive Purely deductive research begins with a theoretical system, develops operational definitions of the propositions and concepts of the theory, and matches them empirically to some body of data (Popper, 1968). Purely inductive research begins with collections of data - empirical observations or measurements of some kind, and then builds theoretical categories and propositions from relationships discovered among the data (Becker, 1958; Kaplan, 1964). In a sense, deductive researchers hope to

find data to match a theory; inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data.

(2) Generative--Verificative In this dimension, the generality of the research results and the placement of evidence are important (Denzin, 1978). Verificative research tests various propositions which are developed elsewhere; it then attempts to provide proof that a hypothesis usefully applies to several data sets. One goal of verificative research is to establish not only the extent to which a proposition pertains, but also the universe of populations to which it is applicable (Zetterberg, 1966). Generative research, in contrast, attempts to discover constructs and propositions using multiple data bases as evidence sources (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Smith, 1974). Glaser and Strauss in 1967 described the advantages of their open approach over a pre-structured study:

The consequence of the traditional approach is often a forcing of data as well as a neglect of relevant concepts and hypotheses that may emerge...Our approach allowing substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first, on their own, enables the analyst to ascertain which, if any, existing formal theory may help him generate his substantive theories. He can then be more objective and less theoretically biased.

Generative research is frequently inductive and verificative is frequently deductive.

(3) Constructive--Enumerative Using constructive design, the researcher tries to determine what analytic constructs or categories can be gleaned from the observed behaviors; it is a process of abstraction in which units of



analysis come to the surface during observation and description (Zelditch, 1962). Using the enumerative process, previously determined or defined units of analysis are subjected to systematic counting; this comes after the constructive process (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984).

(4) Subjective--Objective The researcher allows the individual and/or group under investigation to freely describe cultural and behavioral phenomena. The goal becomes the reconstruction of the specific categories that participants use to conceptualize their own experiences and world view (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). This is different from a strictly objective position which applies conceptual categories and explanatory relationships injected by external observers to the analysis of unique populations. The participant is allowed to place events in space, time, and sequence appropriate to his view. The social scientist cannot understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which the subjects themselves interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Wilson, 1977).

To summarize these four approaches to research, it is appropriate to note that they each offer a continuum and that, as with any scale, items placed in relationship to it will have some overlap; both individually and collectively. Viewing them as continua denote their relationships to each other, thereby lessening their review and/or interpretation as mutually exclusive dichotomies.

By quantitative research, people mean that a study is deductive, verificative, enumerative,

and objective; qualitative research is understood to denote inductive, generative, constructive, and subjective process. Our position, informed by our experience, is that the quantitative-qualitative distinction is inexact and artificial. Any one of the four assumptive modes may be found in combination with the other three (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, page 7).

Ethnographic research is systematic, organized, rigorous, and justifiable within the bounds of social science.

Ethnography as a research tool enables the researcher to use observation, description, contextual analysis and open-ended questions in his pursuit of information.

#### Ethnographic Study of Educational Processes

Educational ethnographers study the whys and wherefores of teaching and learning; the intended and unintended consequences of observed interaction patterns; the relationships among parents, teachers, students, and administrators; and the sociocultural contexts within which nurturing, teaching, and learning take place. They investigate the variety of forms and phases education takes across cultures and among sub-groups and subsystems. Within society, the covert and overt functions of educational structures, programs, and procedures, and the conflicts generated when socializing agents, governments, and special interest groups confront them demanding social change, often lead to counterproductive activities. The documentation of the lives of individual teachers, students, administrators, and their extracurricular activities provides fertile ground

for unique and communal patterns of experience, outlook, and response.

The outcome of educational ethnography contribute to improvement in educational and school practice in several ways. They strengthen the overall research upon which many innovations and policies are based. Ethnographic and other qualitative accounts convey to teachers, administrators, and parents the diversity to be expected from children, students, and school communities and encourage these educators to respond more flexibly to their charges. The ethnographer's focus on the vagaries of everyday life and on the perspectives of those involved confirm the reality experienced by educators and demonstrate concretely the connections among research activity, educational theory, and pragmatic concerns. This is facilitated by the rich, descriptive data of ethnographic reports, traditionally written so as to be accessible to the public. Finally, the complexity of educational phenomenon and their entrenchment within broader sociocultural milieus are revealed consistently in ethnographic accounts. These allow policymakers and educational consumers to formulate more accurate and judicious expectations about what schools, families, and other agencies can do to direct and enhance education and socialization (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, pages 31-32)).

The ethnographic research technique does not disregard cultural continuity and it has respect for and recognition of individuals as culture conveyors. Through its use, the researcher is able to look at contemporary relationships in a historical context. Primarily for these reasons, it was selected as the primary research tool for this study.

## The Study

### Research Focus

This research is part of an investigative continuum that recognizes the present and the past as a continuous melding, separating, and reconstitution of ideas and behaviors. Crucial to that process is the idea that orally transmitted customs, beliefs, histories, and culture constitute a significant body of information for academic analysis of the West African Oral Tradition in Folklore as used by four African-American female teachers in one-room schools in the rural South. The link in the cultural chain is the West African Oral Tradition in Folklore. Only one aspect of the Oral Tradition was reviewed--folkloric tradition--because it appeared to be the most applicable both as a teaching technique and as a source of content.

Today with all the emphasis on multicultural education, desegregation, opening schools to community input, and diversifying school curriculum to reflect all segments of society, it is unfortunate that there have not been any studies on the West African Oral Tradition and its use by African-American teachers in classrooms. Specifically, the African-American female educator has not been studied for her impact upon the educational system during segregation.

African-American women teachers comprised a group who were told to make productive people out of individuals who had the will and innate intelligence to learn, but very little else. These early African-American women teachers

who taught from the 1930's to the 1960's played many roles in and out of the classroom. These women were told to produce students capable of being good, useful citizens, but had to work in school systems that were designed to keep them second class. They did the unexpected and to many whites, the unacceptable; they produced good students and citizens. These women were educational paradoxes. What did they call up from their cultural archives to help them? Before this question can be answered, it is necessary to place their work in its historical and cultural context.

This involves a look at West Africa itself, along with the cultural patterns in education and folklore, the transmission of the West African from his homeland to the New World, slavery, and folkloric survivals in the New World and their rebirth in the southern United States.

West African culture relies upon and accepts the intrinsic value of oral traditions as a cornerstone of daily life. A Ghanaian proverb says it best: Ancient things remain in the ear (Daaku, 1973, page 42).

Jan Vansina (1984), a pioneer in the field of oral tradition as a research tool and as a source of data writes:

No one in oral societies doubts that memories can be faithful repositories which contain the sum total of past human experience and explain the how and why of present condition.

...culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds.

Traditions must always be understood as reflecting both past and present in a

single breath (Vansina, 1984, pages xi-xii).

The intertwining of oral tradition, West Africa, and culture forms an interesting triangle upon which one can analyze various cultural components of the descendants of those West Africans who were brought to the United States. On one corner of the triangle one could place folklore as a cultural component. The second corner could be the southeastern United States, the initial site of the largest concentration of West Africans and their descendants. The third corner could be the issue of early schooling as the societally designated transmitter of information. The center of the triangle is the individual who links the ends, rounds them off to form an object that will not stab society, but will roll tangential to it.

#### Research Questions

This study explored three questions:

- (1) What is the West African Oral Tradition in Folklore?
- (2) Was there a transference to and rebirth of that tradition among African slaves in the southern United States?
- (3) Were there any educational applications of a West African-derived folkloric oral tradition by African-American female teachers in one-room segregated schools in the rural South?

### Rationale for the Study

The primary thesis of this study is to demonstrate that there was a strong, active, and educationally effective oral tradition indigenous to West Africa; that the European slave trade interrupted but did not destroy this tradition; that this tradition surfaced again in the southern United States and became an integral part of the African-American's life both pre- and post-slavery. The educational application of this folkloric tradition is a logical next step in the chain.

A review of literature in education, history, and cultural anthropology revealed that nothing had been written making these connections. Discussions with leading historians, anthropologists, Africanists, and curriculum specialists confirmed findings that this indeed was an uninvestigated, but academically sound, research topic. Finally, this topic was selected because the researcher's maternal grandmother was a teacher in a one-room segregated southern school in the early 1900's. She taught the researcher the alphabet without using a textbooks. Also, research studies investigating the processes of education as cultural transmission are devoid of any studies which investigate the manner, technique, usefulness, and accomplishments of African-American women teachers in rural segregated one-room schools in the South.

### The Informants

Mrs. Maggie Reese, born Maggie Halbert in 1901 in Paris, Texas, taught a total of thirty-eight (38) years in schools in that area. Her career began in 1930 at New Bethal, Texas, a one-room, rural, segregated school. She then taught a year in Pine Creek, Texas, from 1932-1933, also in a one-room, rural, segregated school. In both New Bethal and Pine Creek, she taught preprimary through seventh grade. From 1933-1934, Mrs. Reese taught the same grades in Reedsprairie and in 1934-35, in Skidmore Prairie. She continued to teach in Paris, Texas from 1935 until her retirement. Upon retirement, Mrs. Reese could remember a career during which she had taught all grades and most subjects.

Mrs. Reese attended the segregated public schools of Paris. Her collegiate experiences included attendance of Wilberforce University and graduation from Wiley College in Texas. She remained current in her profession through numerous short courses, summer institutes, and reading. She is a highly respected member of the Paris community, active in her church and civic organizations.

Mrs. Heloise Hill, born May 29, 1912, in Paris, Texas, is a graduate of Wiley College in Marshall, Texas with a B.A. in English and Math. Her Masters in Education Administration is from Oregon State University. Her teaching career, beginning in 1934 at Jones Prairie, Texas, a one-room, rural, segregated school, lasted until 1977 when



she retired from the position as principal of an elementary school in Portland, Oregon. She was the second African-American female hired in Oregon, hired to work in Vanport in 1943. (Vanport was an all African-American community in Portland which was totally destroyed in a flood on May 30, 1948.) Mrs. Hill has the added distinction of being the first Black female principal hired in Portland, Oregon. Over the years, Mrs. Hill continued her educational development while maintaining a very active social, church, and community life.

Mrs. June Roe Key, born 1917, Paris, Texas, finished high school at the age of fifteen. She graduated from Wiley College (B.A.) and Oregon State University (M.A.). While at Wiley, she was a classmate and friend of civil rights leader James Farmer. Upon graduation from Wiley, she began teaching in the rural, segregated, one-room school in Skidmore Prairie, Texas. Mrs. Key taught in Paris, Texas; Roswell, New Mexico; in Germany; and retired from the position of Vice Principal in a Portland, Oregon, high school. Her teaching career spanned more than thirty years. Even today, she continues to assist new teachers and many use her strategies now in their classes. Her church, civic, and social responsibilities are many.

Mrs. Mary-Geneva Roe Savage, born 1921 in Paris, Texas, began her teaching career in La Mar County, Texas. She taught in the rural, segregated, one-room school in Skidmore Prairie, Texas, in 1941. Wiley College was her Alma Mater.

Mrs. Savage remained in the classrooms of Paris, Texas, and Rosewell, New Mexico, until her health caused early retirement. However, she has remained active in social, civic, and church work to this day. She has devoted her "retirement years" to making life better for the poor, indigent, and senior citizens. Currently in Portland, Oregon, she is the director of a Loaves and Fishes Senior Center.

### Fieldwork

The researcher did not have to develop a relationship specifically for this study with two of the informants -- Mrs. June Roe Key and Mrs. Mary-Geneva Roe Savage. Mrs. Key and Mrs. Savage were two of the first four people met by the investigator upon arrival in Portland, Oregon, twelve years before this study was formally undertaken. From that time until now, these two women and Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Bowman have provided the researcher entry into the older established African-American community of Portland, Oregon. Mrs. Key and Mrs. Savage introduced the researcher to Mrs. Heloise Hill. During a "Cousins Reunion" in Portland, organized by Mrs. Key and Mrs. Savage, the researcher was introduced to Mrs. Maggie Reese -- the only surviving aunt of Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Key.

The researcher conversed with Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Key about the general area of the topic, being careful not to lead them to conclusions. Several subsequent informal talks were held with them to explain the process of data

acquisition, timelines of the doctoral program, and the establishment of future dates for the formal structured interviews. Also, during those discussions, general areas of inquiry were mentioned -- their years of teaching, location, curriculum materials, school and community environment, and roles in school and community. Similar discussions were held with Mrs. Hill, including an initial visit in her home, during which the researcher was served homemade teacakes, a sign of true acceptance of the researcher. (In African-American southern culture, the serving of home-baked goods to a visitor signifies more than cordiality, it says you are welcomed as one of us.) There were numerous long distance phone interviews with Mrs. Hill and with Mrs. Reese in Paris, Texas. The researcher visited the home of Mrs. Reese for an extended interview. To conduct the formal interviews with Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Key, the researcher moved into their home for several weeks and interviewed them separately, initially, and then together.

The preliminary discussions with the informants allowed for 1) presentation of the broad area of research; 2) presentation of the kind of information to be requested; 3) an opportunity for the informants to ask questions of the researcher; 4) making of appointments for future meetings; 5) refinement of questions and suggestions of additional ones; and 6) practicing the interview technique.

The researcher used a combination of taped interviews and notes taken during the formal and informal meetings with

each researcher. The researcher exercised caution during each meeting in an effort not to project conclusions or signs of agreement with their responses.

An interview guide was used to provide the researcher with an organized framework in which to gather data. However, flexibility was allowed so that each lady could deviate from the investigator's written guide. Open-ended questions were used as well as questions derived from elicited comments. Neutral but probing questions were asked to assist the respondent's memory regarding specifics. The researcher used phrases such as "tell me more," or "explain that point," or "did that happen more than once," or "anything else."

This method of inquiry was designed to enable each respondent to find a comfort zone in which information would be freeflowing; to allow one idea, story, thought to trigger others; to generate information about the schools they taught in, the families of their students, the communities of the students, and the educational philosophies of each of the interviewees. Often during the writing of this study, the researcher listened to the tapes, organized and reorganized responses to determine their most logical presentation, and made long distance calls to clarify and expand the data.

Africa my Africa  
Africa of proud warriors on ancestral  
savannahs  
Africa that my grandmother sings  
On the banks of her distant river  
I have never known you  
But my face is full of your blood  
Your beautiful black blood which waters  
the wide fields.  
The blood of your sweat  
The sweat of your work  
The work of your slavery  
The slavery of your children  
Africa tell me Africa  
Is this really you this back which is bent  
And breaks under the load of insult  
This back trembling with red weals  
Which says yes to the whip on the hot roads  
of noon

Then gravely a voice replies to me  
Impetuous soon that tree robust and young  
That tree over there  
Splendidly alone amidst white and faded  
flowers  
That is Africa your Africa which grows  
Grows patiently obstinately  
And whose fruit little by little learn  
The bitter taste of liberty.

Splendidly Alone, by David Diop

## Chapter 2

### West African Foundations of the Black Oral Tradition in the New World

#### Introduction

Oral tradition will be the unifying construct in this chapter, as it was in West Africa. Reliance on oral tradition to transmit history, education, indeed all of the ingredients comprising stable cultures, can be found to be an important feature of the various nation-states of West Africa. Thus, the ancestors of 20th century African-Americans come from a heritage embodying the West African Oral Tradition. To establish its influence in the New World, it is necessary to define West Africa--geographically and culturally; to discuss the New World slave trade; to examine oral tradition in West Africa particularly in terms of its educational significance. It is also necessary to demonstrate survivals of African culture among New World Blacks in the southern United States, again emphasizing oral tradition; and to identify use of folklore as the oral medium in the actual application of West African Oral Tradition by African-Americans in the southern United States.

## What is West Africa?

### Geographically

Phillip Curtin (1971) stated that the "discovery of African history after 1950 can be likened to the discovery of Victoria Falls or Mount Kenya by a European 'explorer': its existence was suddenly publicized abroad, but the Africans knew it was there all along."

Africa is probably humankind's geographical center of origin (Leaky, Griffiths). During the period of the Roman empire, Africa was its granary. Many of Rome's highest officials, including an emperor, were African. R. G. Collingwood, in his book Roman Britain, wrote that Septimius Severus, born in Lepcis Magna 146 A.D. was Emperor of Rome 193-211 A.D. He is reported to have had wooly hair and a dark complexion. The foundations of Moorish Spain came from Africa. "At the beginning of their contact with Europeans, sub-Saharan Africa was politically, culturally, and artistically comparable to if not more advanced--especially in their treatment of people--than Europe" (Boahen, 1971).

Edward Blyden, a famous African-American nationalist of the nineteenth century wrote, "Africa is no vast island... She has been closely connected, both as a source and nourisher, with some of the most potent influences which have affected for good the history of the world."

In order to develop a perspective on West Africa, it is helpful first to have a broad view of the continent itself. In straddling the equator, Africa extends almost as far

south as it does north. This geographical fact is the basis for understanding the rather symmetrical climates, vegetation, and peoples (Griffiths, 1984). The Lake Victoria Basin contains the source of the Nile, the longest river in the world. Almost one third of Africa is desert; one third is drained by five great rivers, Nile, Zaire (Congo), Niger, Zambezi, and the Orange, and approximately one third is useful land. As a result of the plateau basin make-up of the African interior, none of the major rivers is navigable inland from the sea for any great distance, a major difference from the large rivers in Europe and the Americas. There are navigable stretches on the Niger, Nile, and the Zaire rivers; however, these are broken by falls and cataracts. Of significance for this study is the fact that "the absence of navigable waterways from the sea kept explorers, traders, and colonizers at bay for many years (Griffiths, 1984). It also meant that, as will be explained more fully later, the slaves came from a geographically limited area. To regard West Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa as a regional whole is in accord with historical, ethnic, cultural, geographic, and linguistic realities (Clarke, 1970; Franklin, 1974; Davidson, 1961).

West Africa, bounded to the north by the Sahara Desert, to the south by the Congo River, to the west by the Atlantic Ocean, and to the east by Lake Chad and modern day Cameroon, developed a number of independent states, empires, and nations during the period 500 through 1750 A.D. (Boahen,



1971). The most well-known of these nation states were Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Kanem-Bornu, and the Hausa states, which were centered along the southern frontier of the Sahara. The Mole-Dagabane states and the Mossi states arose between these states and the forest region. Finally, in the forest and nearby coastal zones of Guinea emerged the states of Takrur and Wolof in the region of the Senegal and Gambia rivers, or Senegambia; the Akan, Fante, and Ga states in the area of modern Ghana; and the states of Ife, Oyo, and Benin in Nigeria (Boahen, 1971).

Ibn Battuta wrote the following account after visiting Mali for an extended period during the 1350's and '60's. He began by saying that he observed peace, order, and racial tolerance.

The Negroes possess some admirable qualities. They are seldom unjust and have a greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people. Their Sultan shows no mercy to any one guilty of the least act of it. There is complete security in their country. Neither traveler nor inhabitant in it has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence. They do not confiscate the property of any white man who dies in their country, even if it be uncounted wealth. On the contrary, they give it into the charge of some trust-worthy person among the whites, until the rightful heir takes possession (quoted in Boahen, 1971, page 179).

Battuta's observations suggest that the Europeans found well-organized nations with laws, traditions, systems, art, and a sense of right and wrong.

By 1964, West Africa, including Equatorial Africa, comprised three sovereign Commonwealth nations - Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone; fourteen republics formerly under

French rule; the nation of Liberia; and a few fragmentary British, Portuguese, and Spanish dependencies (Boyd; Van Rensburg, 1965).

### Culturally

For purposes of scientific investigation and ease of study, the term culture-area is employed to depict in a broad sense the range of internal similarities among different groups of people in close geographical settings. It helps to indicate the modes of life and classifies the social groupings according to domestic traits and geographical locales while also looking at internal cohesives. This construct is made by outsiders trying to learn more about large numbers of people. It is a construct that those to whom it is applied would probably reject. It is a theoretical construct employed to classify the cultures found at a given period in time, in accordance with similarity of content over a geographical region (Herskovits; 1948). Of importance for this study are the culture areas Herskovits designates, the Guinea Coast and the Western Sudan. These areas have underlying similarities in culture, forged by centuries of contact among the people providing for similar systems. One overriding problem, the European slave trade, confronted each area and especially the inhabitants of the Guinea Coast. Scholars, missionaries, early explorers and European governments recognized the underlying unity of values, oral traditions, family and kinship structures, art, religion,

and governmental organizations in these areas. This does not mean that they were exactly the same. There were individual differences based on each nation's world view and governmental choice.

Taking a broad brush stroke over this area one would encounter the Akan-Ashanti people of the old Gold Coast, now called Ghana; the Dahomeans; the Yoruba of western Nigeria; and the Bini and Ibo of eastern Nigeria. The following discussion of cultural elements found among these people pertains to the time prior to massive European intervention and domination.

#### Cultural Components

The Economic Structure. In general, the economic life in each nation, empire, and/or nation-state was intricate and designed to support large populations. Agricultural endeavors were important. There was a considerable degree of specialization, from which are derived the arrangements for the exchange of goods that took the form principally of stated markets (Herskovits, 1958). Monetary systems used gold weights and/or cowry shells as mediums of exchange. The means of production were substantial enough to allow for large surpluses, used to support rulers, priests, teachers, armies. The class structure erected on this economic base tended to encourage the disciplined behavior which marked every phase of life (Davidson, 1961; Clarke, 1970; Bennett, 1969). There were patterns of cooperative labor and mutual self-help in many areas of daily life. [One of these is

easily discernable in the distributive phase of agriculture. A primary role was exercised by women, who for the most part were the sellers in the market and retained their gains for themselves, often becoming independently wealthy. The high economic status, along with their roles in the kinship/family structures, and in some instances high government offices, including becoming rulers, resulted in organizations to protect their interests in the markets. These organizations make up one of the primary price fixing agencies, with prices set on the foundation of supply and demand including the cost of transporting goods to market (Herskovits, 1958).]

Another basic cultural component was the use of cooperative labor with many people working on projects for the general good of everyone. Land was owned collectively and viewed as belonging to everyone. There was a clear division of labor and intricate craft guilds, ironworkers, cloth weavers, wood carvers, traders, potters, basketmakers, and other artisans.

Family and governmental structures. Descent and thus property rights, social status, and leadership rights were based on lines of descent in the polygamous family. Legal recognition of kinship was established through one line (Herskovits, 1948). In Dahomey and among the Yoruba, one finds a patrilineal system. Among the Ashanti, however, one finds a system wherein a person inherits his position in society on the maternal side and his spiritual affiliations

from the father. The extended family is, even today, a well recognized institution in West Africa.

Marriage. The existence of polygamy did not diminish the importance of or the respect accorded marriage in these societies. Qualifications of both partners were carefully analyzed by both families because marriage was a matter of family alliance:

In all this region the obligations of the man to the parents of his bride are paramount, not only before but after marriage. Yet the characterization of African marriage as bride purchase is absolutely not valid. As a matter of fact, in this region what the husband gives his parents-in-law is regarded essentially as a form of collateral for good behavior. (Herskovits, 1948, page 64).

The Elders. The elder was viewed in terms of his role within the context of the large family both immediate and extended. The power of the elder was based in part on the closeness of his relationship to the ancestors who gave him his wisdom and authority. Each family had its "oldest ancestor" who figured importantly in the daily life of each member of the group. Anthropologists who have specialized in Africa, African historians, and native-born African anthropologists have confirmed the role of the Elders and stated that their power was based on the closeness of their relationship to the ancestors, who ultimately invested their knowledge, wisdom, and skills in them (Fage, 1969; Herskovits, 1964; Vansiana, 1965).

Secret societies. Some of these have been found to be based on religious beliefs, others are large family groupings. Other cooperative associations existed as well,

such as mutual-aid societies, work groups, and insurance organizations. Each of these groups had an oral tradition used for instructing new members, requiring new members to remember and recite the history, rules, and procedures of the group.

#### Governmental structure.

In the northwestern portion of the slaving belt, among the Bambara and inland among the Wolof, kingdoms of some size had long been established when the period of slaving began, while farther to the east the Fulani kingdom was likewise of impressive dimensions. In Sierra Leone, Mandingo control has long been known, but in the rest of this territory and in Liberia and the Ivory Coast small autonomous units were the rule. Between the kingdoms of Ashanti and Dahomey numerous minute independent entities existed, while the Yoruba, who constitute a cultural unit, were divided into at least ten political subdivisions. Moving eastward one finds smaller units except for Benin with its priest-kings. Large kingdoms were not numerous in the Congo, though tightly knit political structures existed everywhere (Herskovits, 1958, page 83).

Stability in government was common. The rulers, regardless of whether they were chiefs, kings, or provincial administrators, functioned in consultation with the elders, priests, and other cabinet ministers. The elders and priests used the Oral Tradition to assist the leader in the decision-making process. The delegation of power included clearly delineated responsibility.

Governmental costs were met through the levying of direct and indirect taxes. For example, the Ashanti paid death dues and levies on goods in transit. In Dahomey all commodities were taxed, including having tollgates on roads where porters' taxes were collected.

The "legal genius of the African" is demonstrated in the universality of the institution of courts and the manner in which native courts functioned (Herskovits, 1958).

Interrelatedness of man, God, and nature. In Dahomey and among the Yoruba, the Great Gods are viewed as a series of family groupings--representing the forces of nature and functioning as agencies for the enforcement of right living, conceived in terms of conformity to the patterns of morality and probity (Herskovits, 1958). Among the Ashanti and the other nations in West Africa, there were also Great Gods, other deities and forces, such as Fate--the divine trickster. The ancestors were ever-present and involved in providing assistance or ill will to mankind. Magic was another widespread cultural element.

Music, art and folklore. These were all highly developed and were utilitarian as well as aesthetically important. Song and dance provided entertainment in addition to being a part of the Oral Tradition. These art forms were also used to educate the child as well as the adult. In musical style, instruments, rhythmic complexity and the widespread practice of alternation of leader and chorus in singing and the dramatic arts, the fundamental structures and uses are similar throughout West Africa (Jones, 1963).

Folklore, in a variety of forms comprised a significant portion of the general Oral Tradition. Other forms were myths, praise poems, riddles, proverbs, songs, and legends.

The functions of these art forms were to educate, to maintain an awareness of past events, to provide explanations of creation, to entertain, to make legal pronouncements, and to show prowess in speech and various other uses (Herskovits, 1948; Clarke, 1969; Hogg, 1975).

A summary of the connecting threads in the West African's approach to problems emanating from their cosmology is appropriate. One part of this is the deep-rooted belief which enables a man to refuse to accept any situation as inescapable.

The African, rather recognizes the fact that in reality there is no absolute good and no absolute evil, but that nothing can exert an influence for good without at the very least causing inconvenience elsewhere.

In situations of cultural contact wherein free choice is not allowed, the subservient group retains through the force of personal willpower and shared commitment to struggle among the oppressed the basic tenets of their cultures. In Africa, as in the New World, the cultural processes that will be operative will be those of addition and synthesis to achieve congruence with older forms, rather than of substraction and substitution with their resulting fragmentation (Herskovits, 1958).

#### West Africa and the New World Slave Trade

To its African-American citizens, the United States represents a nation of paradoxes. On paper, it is a democracy, while in its daily routine, it is both a class- and race-segregated society. It is a nation of wealth and extreme poverty. It makes heroes of men such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, General George Armstrong Custer, Davy Crockett, and many other white males while ignoring their prejudiced (against Blacks) beliefs and



actions. The United States has a long standing contradiction in its relationship to its African-American citizens.

This schizophrenic model was initiated in the early years of contact between the European and the African. Europe's first slice of Africa was obtained in 1415 with the Portuguese capture of the port of Ceuta which stands on the north Moroccan coast opposite Gibraltar. Encouraged by Prince Henry the Navigator, they swept down the West Coast of Africa and established forts [Cape Bojador (1434), Cape Blanco (1441), and Cape Verde (1444)] after much negotiating with the leaders of the African nations (Griffiths, 1984). When Prince Henry died in 1460, gold and slaves were two of the major trade items between Portugal and West Africa. From Sao Tome and Santiago, the Portuguese shipped slaves to their plantations in Brazil and to Spanish America. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to engage in transporting large numbers of slaves from Africa to the New World, but in subsequent centuries as the demand and profits grew, the Dutch, French, and English successively secured control of the trade (Collins, 1968). However, all of the European naval powers established posts on the West African coast to trade in slaves, gold, and ivory.

The Africans who became slaves were secured primarily from the West Coast of Africa from the Gambia to the Bight of Benin and North and South from the mouth of the Congo

(Collins, 1948). These Africans who became slaves and who were shipped to the Americas - both North and South

came from a people who for ten thousand years had raised and destroyed empires, provided a powerful African culture which dominated the Mediterranean and gave full-blooded Blacks and mulatto Pharoahs to the thrones of Egypt. Their ancestors were those who had given form to the culture of Ethiopia that ancient land which to the Mediterranean world was the home of gods and fairies - where love and Neptune banqueted each year among the blameless Ethiopians (Buckmaster, page 3).

These were the same people whose ancestors had discovered the smelting of iron, who had perfected the art of oral history and tradition and who had nurtured music, dance, art, painting, sculpture, and agriculture for nine thousand years.

By 1700, to borrow Basil Davidson's term, Africa had turned into the "Black Mother," producing slaves solely in the interest of the growing capitalist system in Europe and the New World (Davidson, 1961).

The slave trade required the European to rewrite history, to develop new systems of thought, and to institutionalize and sanction through church and state the genocide of African and African-American history and culture. Following this new logic, since Africans were accursed and inferior as the implicit argument ran, then they could not have produced anything that was not inherently inferior and tainted. Europeans in general held the view that slavery in the New World was better than savage barbarism in Africa (Clarke, 1971).

One of the many false "facts" circulated had to do with the application of the term slavery to what in Africa was more closely akin to indentured servitude. A "slave," to use the European designation, in African society was treated as a full member of the family for whom they worked and could own property, marry, and have children. The slave peoples of the coastal regions, like those of the Sudanese grasslands, were in truth serfs and vassals, often with wide-ranging responsibilities including the management of the family's estate and monetary oversight. They also enjoyed personal freedoms and individual rights (Davidson, 1970).

In Ashanti, Rattray found a "slave" might marry; own property; himself own a slave; swear an oath; be a competent witness; and ultimately become heir to his master...Such briefly were the rights of an Ashanti slave. An Ashanti "slave", in nine cases out of ten, possibly became an adopted member of the family, and in time his descendants so merged and intermarried with the owner's kinsmen that only a few would know their origin...Captives, that is to say became vassals, vassals became free men; free men became chiefs (Davidson, page 20).

The following quote, although extensive, explains the important differences between the system of servitude practiced in West Africa and the slave system practiced by Europeans in the New World. Martin Delany, an early African-American visitor to West Africa, commented that it was preposterous to discuss "slavery," as that term is understood in Europe and America, in the same vein in West Africa.

The legal position of slaves among the Ashanti was typical throughout West Africa.

R. S. Rattray pointed out that among the Ashanti 'a slave might marry; own property; himself own a slave; swear an oath; be a competent witness; and ultimately might become heir to his master.' Generally, a West African slave could run away if his master did not furnish him sufficient food. A slave could be killed only by the order of the chief of his village. With few exceptions, the master who killed a slave received the same punishment as for the murder of a freeman. Masters were punished for any crime (even murder) committed by their slaves.

Slaves acting as traders for their masters received a percentage of the profits from the goods they sold. Most scholars agree that the West African slave enjoyed more rights and received better treatment than bondsmen in most other areas of the world.

Throughout West Africa the slave also had a more stable family life than New World slaves. Often when a male was sold into slavery his wife accompanied him, although she retained her freedom. An unmarried slave obtained a mate either by purchasing one, by asking his master to do so, or by marrying a woman belonging to another master. More important, however, was the protection accorded the slave's wife from sexual abuse by his master. Among the Ashanti, for instance, a master committing adultery with his slave's wife had to make a public confession of his crime and pay a heavy fine. A chief committing the same offense could be removed from office. In addition, the slave could refuse to continue to serve his master when he violated his marriage bed.

There was a presumption in West Africa in favor of ultimate freedom.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of servitude in West Africa was the social mobility of the slaves and their descendants. Except among the Dahomey, for example, slaves could become soldiers, often rising to command positions. Bondsmen were ubiquitous as bodyguards for chiefs and kings, served as counselors to heads of state, often obtained great wealth, and sometimes were chosen as successors to chiefs. Charles K. Meek concluded from his study of slaves

among the Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Nupe, and Kanuri that 'their lot was by no means hard. They were not usually overworked, and enjoyed a considerable measure of freedom. They could - and did, in fact - frequently rise to occupy the highest positions in the state.' The condition of servitude did not follow a man or woman as doggedly in Africa as in other societies. Once a bondsman obtained his freedom, people would not publicly refer to his slave origin. Among the Ibo such a reference constituted libel, and the person making it was heavily fined. By the fourth generation most slaves were indistinguishable from freemen, even in those cultures in which slaves labored under the greatest disabilities, such as the Ashanti. R. S. Rattray contended that after a few years the rights of an Ashanti slave 'seemed in many instances practically the ordinary privileges of any Ashanti free man, with whom, in many respects, his position did not seem to compare so unfavourably...It seems probable that circumstances generally would have tended towards his kind treatment. An Ashanti slave, in nine cases out of ten, possibly became an adopted member of the family, and in time his descendants so merged and intermarried with the owner's kinsmen that only a few would know their origin. (Berry and Blassingame, 1982, pages 5-7)

Attitudes of contempt by whites toward Blacks continued to escalate forming a perpetual propaganda of white superiority. The famed nineteenth-century naturalist Louis Agassiz could declare with all of the authority of science that Africans never originated a regular organization among themselves and his logic was the prevailing logic. Political organization was a recognized human achievement, therefore, Africans had no political organization (Tillinghast, 1902). Thomas Jefferson articulated similar beliefs. Jefferson asserted that in "reasoning abilities the Negroes are much inferior to whites as I think one could

scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous" (cited in Davidson, 1961).

Berry and Blassingame (1984) assert that the first Africans arrived in the New World in 1502. In the three-volume work, The Negro In American History, one finds the following information in Volume III:

Negroes were with the Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century. They were active with explorers in pre-Columbian America. One of their number was Estevanico, who discovered the territory now included in Arizona and New Mexico. Professor Leo Wiener of Harvard suggests in his three-volume Africa and the Discovery of America that Negroes may have come prior to the Spanish discoverers as well as with them. Additional evidence leads to the conclusion that Negroes were with the Spanish explorer, De Ayllon, when he made a settlement within the present limits of the United States in Virginia in 1526, and that they began the first Negro revolt within the present United States in this settlement (Adler, general editor, 1969, pages xi-xii).

Another historian, John Hope Franklin, in the fourth edition of his book, From Slavery to Freedom, (1974) writes:

As early as 1501, Spain relinquished her earlier ban and permitted Negroes to go into the Spanish lands in the New World. Thirty Negroes, including Nuflo de Olano, were with Balboa when he discovered the Pacific Ocean. Cortes carried Negroes with him into Mexico, and one of them planted and harvested the first wheat crop in the New World. Two Negroes accompanied Velas in 1520. When Alvarado went to Quito, he carried two hundred Negroes with him. They were with Pizarro on his Peruvian expedition and carried him to the cathedral after he was murdered. The Negroes in the expedition of Almagro and Valdivia saved their Spanish masters from the Indians in 1525 (Franklin, 1974, pages 33-34).

A few of the first Africans who arrived in English North America, like many whites, were indentured servants. Upon completion of their servitude, some of the Africans became small farmers, artisans, storekeepers, seamen, and craftsmen.

With time, came the increased demand for cheap labor and from the beginning, came sanctions of slavery by both church and state. Becoming legally designated as chattel carried with it the loss of all human and civil rights. The ultimate leader in refining the laws, philosophy, and designing an entire system which implemented slavery of the African man, woman, and child was the European residing in the southern colonies of North America. As with any institution, the parameters were defined:

An African could be used both literally and figuratively as a beast of burden. He could be used in transactions as a horse, a cow; he could be mortgaged like a house or furniture; if he escaped he could be advertised for like any other property (Buckmaster, page 3).

The economic advantages of the slave trade were clearly visible. A triangular trade system existed which involved cheap goods from Europe, mainly England, being carried to the West Coast of Africa to be traded with African middlemen for people who became slave cargo on the middle passage to the Americas, where they were sold. The profits from the sale of this human cargo were used to purchase the products of slave labor--sugar, cotton, and tobacco--to be sold in Europe at an even higher profit (Griffiths, 1984).

This triangular trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was founded upon the sale of human beings from West Africa which began to take its toll on the populations of that region. Many of the African rulers sent protests to their European counterparts to cease the raids and the trading in human beings.

The King of the Congo, Nzenza Nkomo, sent this message to the Portuguese: it is our will that in these kingdoms of Congo there should not be any trade in slaves nor any market for slaves (Berry and Blassingame, 1982, page 7).

The European slave trade reached its zenith at a time that seeds of unrest sown by Europeans and Arabs were taking hold. Internal power struggles erupted within some of the West African nations. Also, African bravery was no match for a new force that had been introduced into the world--gun powder.

Africanists such as Clarke, Herskovits, Vansina, and historians such as Blassingame, Bennett, Franklin, and Davidson cite West Africa as the center of the transatlantic slave trade. The slaves came primarily from Ghana or the Gold Coast - the Ashanti and the Akan; from Nigeria came the Yoruba, the Ibo, the Hausa, the Fulani; others came from Dahomey, the countries of the Ivory Coast, Gambia, Senegal, (Senegambia), Togo, Guinea, an area around the mouth of the Niger River - Bonny and Calabar; and the Congo. Other peoples from this region who also became slaves were the Malinke, or Mandingo. It is important to recognize not only the geographical location of these early Africans but also



to recognize that different place and nation-state names in various ship manifests, captain's diaries and planter's logs use variations of the same names. For example, ship manifests loaded from Calabar and Bonny show large numbers of Ibos. Some slavers called the Ibos "Calabar Negroes" (Herskovits, 1958). Many from these ships were disembarked in the United States south. Henry Laurens wrote that in South Carolina the frequent suicides among Calabar slaves indicate the different degrees of sensitive and independent spirit among the various Negro groups (Herskovits, 1958). From the area of the Congo many of the Africans were sent to Brazil and today a group of Africans can be found in Bahia in Brazil following the lifestyles of their West African homeland. Religious practices and music including actual songs directly traceable to the Congo have been recorded in Brazil. Others from the Congo area were sent to the Carolinas and the Sea Islands off the Carolina Coast. Lorenzo Turner (1949), in his book Africanisms In the Gullah Dialect, made similar discoveries in the area of linguistics in the Sea Islands.

Other recognizable survivals in the New World and especially in the Southern United States are the many Ashanti-Akan-Fanti place names, names of deities, and day names which were passed down through an oral tradition. In the southern United States there is additional evidence that the sources of the slaves exported by the Fanti were in greatest proportion within the present boundaries of the

Gold Coast or present-day Ghana. Based on a number of historical, anthropological, and linguistic sources, it can be asserted that the ancestors of present day African Americans came from the following West African peoples: Ibo, Yoruba, Hausa, Ewe, Ibibis, Tshi, Edo, Ashanti, Mende, Timme, and Bakongo (Berry and Blassingame, 1982).

Historical fact has not borne out the assertion made by E. B. Reuter that slaves in large numbers were traded from nation to nation across the entire area of Central Africa. This view disregards not only the vast distances involved, nearly 3000 miles, but also the dangers attendant upon such journeys in terms of the hostility between many of the peoples or nation states in that area. Also, it disregards the lack of modern communication techniques as well as the lack of an economic incentive due to the severe fatigue factor the slaves would suffer, thus rendering them less valuable upon reaching the Congo ports. Herskovits suggests that there are no traditions among the Dahomeans to prove or illustrate that they acted as middlemen for traders farther inland. They were in fact avoided by other merchants because a stranger in their kingdom was himself fair game. The peoples raided by the Dahomeans lived no farther from the Coast than two hundred miles, while in fact most of their war captives came from much closer. Therefore, the Yoruba of Nigeria and the inhabitants of present day Togo are found to figure most prominently in native lists of these campaigns. The Europeans themselves raided all along.

The Dahomeans themselves were among the captive slaves as a result of the European raiding parties.

The point is not whether any slaves emanated from far inland, but whether enough of them could have been transported to the New World, especially the southern United States, in sufficient number to place their customs, beliefs, and traditions there. It can be stated unequivocally that survivals of the known customs of interior peoples are practically nonexistent in the Americas (Herskovits, 1958).

The Oral Tradition was significant in the daily life of the people of West Africa. The following quote provides modern testimony of the importance of this tradition.

Material gained during field work further reinforces my hypothesis that the coastal area of West Africa furnished the greater proportion of the slaves. This information was recorded in the Hausa city of Kano, in northern Nigeria, where by the kindness of the Emir, it was possible to query four old men who themselves like their forebears for many generations had been important slavers - merchants, as they insisted upon being called - trading with the Gold Coast. The route they traveled was some 1800 miles long, and is still traversed today; and every point on it could be checked with standard maps. The distance involved was largely a matter of East and West travel rather than southwardly to the Coast (Kano lies between 500 and 600 miles inward). Since it was necessary, were they to remain in friendly Hausa and allied territory, to strike far to the West before moving Southward - otherwise they would have encountered the hostile nation of Dahomey and the peoples of what today is western Nigeria. Slaves were taken to the Gold Coast for trade with the Ashanti only as an incident to the major purpose; it was goods, not human beings, that were the object of their attention, and the slaves in the caravans were burden-bearers. They were never, as far as these men knew traded directly to the whites intentionally to be slaves (Herskovits, 1958, pages 38 and 39).

The forced migration of Africans to the New World and the heavy concentration of them in the southern section of the United States provides the basis for further discussion of the significance and use of a West African oral tradition in West Africa and its subsequent use in the New World by those transplanted West African slaves.

### The Oral Tradition in West Africa

Oral traditions provide insight into the inner workings of a society. Oral traditions are historical sources which are unique (Vansina, 1961). Their preservation depends upon the development of memorization skills greater than those needed by societies which rely on a written tradition. In the nations of West Africa, sanctions and rewards often were distributed to those whose duty it was to correctly recite the traditions, customs, rules, laws, religious tenets, educational requirements and the other foundations of their cultures (Herskovits, 1948; Blassingame, 1982).

This custom of meting out sanctions and rewards was a direct outcome of the employment of specialists, and is an effective method of control for ensuring accurate repetition of the testimony (Vansina, 1961, page 33).

Recognizing the cultural, historical, and anthropological importance of the oral tradition, historian Bruce Catton has stated that one meaningful measure of society is the value it places on enriching and preserving its own heritage, or conserving human experiences. The people of West Africa not only understood the importance of cultural preservation, but also valued the art form of the oral

tradition as a means of passing on their customs and beliefs. Oral tradition held a significant position in every facet of their daily lives.

Europeans and those trained to believe only in the sanctity of the written word must give up their prejudices in order to understand and objectively study West African and African-American cultures. This will enable the researcher to rediscover the full wonder of spoken words and their shades of meaning (Vansina, 1963).

Most of the nations south of the Sahara in West Africa were oral societies (Herskovits, 1948; Vansina, 1963; Clarke, 1969) in which all of the important political, legal, social, religious, educational, and agricultural information was transmitted orally. The holistic study of culture is particularly relevant in the context of West African Oral Tradition and its African-American derivatives (Herskovits, 1948). Beidelman recommended to future researchers in his article entitled "Myth, Legend, Oral History: A Kaguru Traditional Text" that to evaluate and make academically nonbiased assessments of African contributions to civilization, the many social facets latent in oral traditions require researchers to have a keen sense of the total culture.

Oral tradition in West Africa encompasses more than history. It describes the manner in which vital knowledge was preserved and transmitted between and within nations and it describes particular literary and secular forms.

Africanists suggest that a student who is interested in analyzing and understanding any aspect of social behavior study the oral literature and history of the people under scrutiny, especially if they are West African or African-American. For the purposes of this research, it is appropriate to discuss the West African Oral Tradition in folklore in terms of its educational importance.

Professor John Henrik Clarke of Hunter College emphasizes the uses of African oral traditions and literature in the educational development of the people. Clarke points out the oral approach is used for children as well as for adults.

In the sense of education as the process whereby the knowledge of a people is passed from one generation to the next, a man or woman is fitted to carry on in his culture at an earlier age, and without the prolonged institutionalized training that exists where writing and the machine technology condition modes of living. Those who are charged with the direction of affairs continue to be taught by their elders, as long as there are those older than themselves. From them, they eventually learn the means whereby they themselves, and those for whose existence they are responsible, may live in harmony with the forces of their world, supernatural no less than human (Herskovits, 1948, page 326).

To avoid any negative connotations attached to the term folklore as being less than scholarly and therefore having no intellectual value, Herskovits often substituted the term narrative when referring to African oral traditions and folklore. Vansina incorporated the terms oral traditions, oral histories, and folklore into his many studies of societies south of the Sahara.

Oral tradition is oral testimony transmitted verbally from one generation to the next one or more. Oral tradition is presented as the respected lore of the past; it has a tradition, whether it purports to tell specifically what happened in the past (historical traditions) or merely to take delight in the performance of oral wisdom, wit, or beauty of the past (literary traditions). Thus religious hymns, proverbs, and animal stories are just as much oral traditions as are lists of kings or royal chronicles (Vansina, page 415).

### African-American Folkloric Form, Function, and Technique in Black Education

The process was oral, yet the content varied depending upon the subject being taught. Cooper (1983), asserted that through the oral tradition, the African learned his history, his role in society, his crafts, duties, speaking skills, and the traditional myths and legends of his people. This tradition comprised both the formal schooling process wherein children were removed from the home, usually based on age, grade, and sex definitions, to places away from the compounds and/or cities for extended periods of time to be taught the customs, laws, mores, and responsibilities of manhood and womanhood. Systems were also established for apprenticeship training and here again, the teaching techniques and style were oral. There were also many informal opportunities for teaching and training. The value of the evening story-telling sessions as an important pedagogical tool was well understood, not only for imparting lore and teaching the art of communication, but for memory training as well (Herskovits, 1952).

At least twelve identifiable forms of folklore exist in the West African oral tradition. One can find reference to each of these throughout West Africa and evidence supports the fact that they were used as a part of the teaching-training process.

(1) The Lullaby is one of the least discussed forms of the West African oral tradition, although it served as the introduction to the history and traditions of one's own family and clan.

(2) Songs of Play accompanied games and some dances, explained one's place in the family, or taught rhythm and music. (3) Songs for other purposes conveyed a moral; gave a warning; showed social criticism; offered flattery and praise to rulers, important people, and Gods; made requests; offered thanks; gave abuse; made demands; or showed repulsion. There were also songs with a religious and/or cosmological focus.

(4) Riddles and (5) Proverbs are two of the more widely-known examples of the folkloric West African oral tradition. The popularity of the riddle is attributable not only to the delight one takes in solving it, but also in its double entendre, the play on words, and the demonstration of one's aptitude in this area. Prowess in the double entendre is highly valued in West Africa as well as in African-American society (Herskovits, 1948; Courlander, 1975).

In the Dahomean culture a period of riddling prefaces all storytelling sessions. For the adults it is a warming-up time, a keying to attention, that keeps them occupied until latecomers arrive. For the



children it has the special function of memory training and is so recognized by the adults. To be present at one of these children's storytelling sessions, presided over by one of their age mates, and listen to the answers to the riddles coming with lightning rapidity is like hearing a drill in the multiplication table. It is the double entendre that gives the riddle its importance in the rites for the dead. For the dead, who are being sent away from the world of the living, must savor all that gave them pleasure when alive; so at wakes the old men show their mastery in introducing riddles with the broadest innuendo, the greatest subtlety, and the sharpest suggestiveness (Courlander, 1975, page 182).

Proverbs also provided an index of the accepted fundamental precepts of thought and action (Herskovits, 1948). It was considered a mark of elegance to be able to use them correctly in general conversation. However, it was inappropriate for a younger man to use proverbs when talking to elders. In Yoruba culture, a boy had to ask permission before quoting a proverb in the presence of adults. In the educational process, proverbs were both a teaching technique and a curriculum source (Berry and Blassingame, 1982). Young people heard them as examples of right and wrong. Adults cited them in court cases much the same way Western lawyers cite legal precedent in their courts. Throughout West Africa, the proverb was used to instruct "servants" in manners, survival strategies, obedience, and etiquette. The Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, many of whom were slaves in the southern United States, provide an excellent example of the general uses of the Proverb in West Africa.

Proverbs express Yoruba morals and ethics. They are convenient standards for appraising behavior, and they are continually quoted in discussing an issue and in commenting on the behavior of others. In addition they are used to express social approval

and disapproval; conform to accepted social conventions and criticism; or ridicule of those who deviate; warning; defiance; derision of an enemy or rival; advice; counsel; warning to a friend - when either contemplates action which may lead to social friction, open hostilities or direct punishment (Bascom, 1975, page 98).

Every human civilization has created a body of knowledge to explain its origin. The people of West Africa were no exception. Each of the culture groups have in their folkloric traditions (6) Stories of Creation. These are often used by priests and griots to instruct the people in their relationship to the supernatural. Closely aligned with the Creation epics or poems are the (7) Sacred Tales. Under this umbrella one will find stories concerned with all aspects of cosmology. Busia (1969), a Ghanian of Ashanti origin, offers one example of how the creation stories and the sacred tales are interwoven to form guidelines for living.

The African has in his expression in conduct of awe, and reverence for nature, no less than in his use of natural resources, he demonstrates his own epistemology. I am not aware of an agreed Christian view of nature, but I submit that there is an African one which is that nature has power which may be revered as well as used for man's benefit. Physical death is not the end of men. Among the Ashanti - man as a biological being inherits his blood from his Mother; this gives him his status and membership within the lineage, clan, and family and his obligations as a citizen...As a spiritual being, a man receives a two-fold gift of the spirit: that which determines his character and individuality he receives through his father; but his soul, the undying part of him, he receives direct from the Supreme Being (Edt. Drachler, 1964, pages 149-150).

Other sacred tales relate the coming of the Gods; detail relations between man and Gods; relations between man and

man; and the nature of magic--its origin and controlling forces. (8) Myths and (9) Legends were often used to provide information about planting, changing of seasons, and the elements. Myths often were used to validate sacred beliefs and rituals; legends frequently had more secular motifs.

Continuing the discussion of folkloric forms of the West African oral tradition that were also used as a part of the teaching/learning process, one encounters the (10) Praise Poems. In some cultures, these poems were only recited by individuals whose responsibility it was to maintain the complete history of each ruler, wars, marriages, and other accomplishments pertaining to a particular household, clan or entire community.

In the Yoruba culture an official called the Baba Elegun of the town of Ketu is responsible for knowing the town's history by heart. The office is hereditary in the Oyede family, and the information is transmitted from father to son. The traditions are recited at the enthronement of each new ruler. On that occasion, the Baba Elegun receives a reward if he succeeds in reciting them without a mistake. If he fails, he is punished by supernatural sanctions (Biobaku, 1953, pages 18-19).

These poems provided information about both the glorious as well as the inglorious deeds of the rulers.

Similar to the Praise Poems but embodying a wider literary range are (11) the Historical Narratives. In addition to providing time, space, and place referents for the people they also gave the children a sense of stability based on their heritage, place within their culture, and an initial world view. Senghor (1972) wrote that traditional

history was not accessible in the French colonial schools, but in the setting of the African family and on special occasions, the griots sang the praises of African heroes of yesteryear. Thus, there was ample opportunity for the young originaire to learn of his African past.

In some of the West African nations, the griots were specially trained professional historians; in other places they were musicians--troubadors, poets, and often professional storytellers. Regardless of the medium used--prose, poetry, or music--the griots were teachers (Herskovits, 1948; Vansina, 1964; Clark, 1971). Niane (1960) published in Presence Africaine, "Soundjata ou l'epopee mandingue." This very significant example of the oral tradition of West Africa was later translated into English by Pickett (1965) Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali. The significance of this poem is historical and educational. The griot telling it to Niane was himself a member of the family of griots who could trace his family and his vocation to Sundiata Keita, the first great ruler of ancient Mali.

I am a griot. It is I, Djeli Mamoudou Kouyate, son of Bintou Kouyate and Djeli Kedian Kouyate, master in the art of eloquence. Since time immemorial the Kouyates have been in the service of the Keita princess of Mali; we are vessels of speech, we are the repositories which harbor secrets many centuries old...We are the memory of mankind; by the spoken word we bring to life the deeds and exploits of kings for younger generations (Clark, 1971, page 254).

Discussion of the many roles of the griots as storytellers and teachers leads appropriately to the final folkloric form in the West African oral tradition which also

functioned as a curriculum source in education, (12) Folk-tales, with a subcategory of animal stories. Even though there are many stories in West African folklore with animals as the main character (for example, the spider Anansi, as he is called in the West Indies), in reading almost any collection of West African tales, one will discover that the narratives in which people are primary actors are quite as numerous, if not more so, than those in which the trickster animal is the main character (Herskovits, 1948). The commercial popularity among whites in the United States of the tales collected by Joel Chandler Harris lent false credence to the assumption that African tales usually had animal characters. Harris, it must be remembered, was told what the newly freed slaves wanted him to hear. The uses, as has been noted, were many. It is a fact of life in African-American culture to tell white people only a little and only what you think they want to hear.

There is ample evidence to support the thesis of use of folktales as a teaching technique and curriculum source. One example is their use by mothers to teach children the dangers of leaving the familial compound and guarding children from unsupervised contact with strangers was part of the oral tradition everywhere in West Africa (Herskovits, 1948). Other explanatory and cautionary tales, some using animal characters, are found to have unity of form and function even though the tale was told in several West

African nations. Motifs were worked and reworked to fit the use and situation.

Identifiable elements are found in simple stories used to teach the young, and also in the most sacred myths. Although they served different purposes, they remained recognizable throughout the same country, as well as in other countries in the region and in the southern states among African-Americans (Herskovits, 1948). The moralizing and explanatory tale continued to be regarded as an educational device by descendants of southern United States slaves. The Br'er Rabbit stories provided excellent sources of curriculum both in West Africa and in the slave quarters of the South to demonstrate the relationship between the indigenous African society and the usurping Europeans. This genre allowed for the expression of thoughts by the slaves that, if expressed in regular discourse, would have meant severe punishment or even death.

Other unique and identifiable characteristics of the folktale in West Africa are unity of content, pattern of telling, such as beginning with a riddle; same responses by auditors; and the same interpolations of song and rhythmic patterns.

More often, one finds the kind of participation by an audience that is to be heard in American Negro shouting churches, where responses of the congregation to the preacher take the form of interjections such as "Yes, Lord!" "That's right!" "You're sayin' it!" almost as a litany. This pattern is deeply rooted in behavior, for not only do African listeners react to a storyteller in this way, but in general, African conventions of politeness do not approve of permitting anyone to talk into a void of silence. Hence the

affirmations by the audience as a story unfolds are essential to the telling of a tale (Herskovits, 1960, page 453).

The significance of the preceding Herskovits quotation will be emphasized even more in the following section on African retentions and survivals by African-Americans. Also, one finds a direct link here to the behavior of Black youngsters and adults today in school and in social interaction.

An analysis of the folkloric oral tradition in West Africa demonstrates how completely these people achieved a highly developed art form providing both an aesthetic as well as a functional-educational milestone.

The dramatic quality and the wealth of creative imagination that has gone into these tales is apparent in whatever form they may be experienced. This together with the logic of plot and consistency of action that characterize them, mark them as artistic achievements of no inconsiderable order (Herskovits, 1960, page 456).

In summary, research demonstrates the validity of the West African Oral Tradition as an educational tool. The specific applications of folkloric forms, functions, and techniques in traditional teaching and learning endeavors served to amuse, to instruct, to guide toward moral virtues, to admonish, to provide skill in memorization, to facilitate recreation, to show one's place in history, to warn, to reprove, to praise, to encourage, to set limits, to regularize relations of an individual to his fellows, to motivate, to explain the Gods, nature, lines of succession, and to offer ethical standards of conduct and behavior.

## Survivals of African Culture Among New World Blacks

### Survival Issues

A scholarly record has developed which shows that West African customs, traditions, and cultures did survive the slave system and stubbornly persisted in the New World.

Once in the New World, African peoples were often strong and numerous enough to revive and re-create the customs and beliefs of their homeland (Davidson, 1961; page 104).

Herskovits established direct correlations and primary evidence of African survivals in the New World. He also provided a research methodology and framework using multidisciplinary ethnologies and other scientific research. Language, history, slang, tone, gestures, and geographic idiosyncracies are all critical factors which can affect research outcomes if not taken into account by the researcher when African survivals are being researched.

Only when the scrutiny of the documents was complemented by acquaintance with the ethnography of Old and New World Negro communities and the traits of the cultures of these groups were correlated with data from Africa to discover correspondences, did the question of African origins previously held to be sacrosanct become susceptible to attack (Herskovits, 1970, page 34).

African culture does not fade with contact with other cultures. Quite the contrary. African culture, instead of being weak under contact, is strong and resilient (Herskovits, 1948; Hillard, 1984). One example of this resilience is provided by the Negroes of Dutch Guiana. There, African retentions are an integral part of daily life.



But to one expecting a modicum of Africanisms in the Bush, and an absence of them in the coastal city of Paramaribo, where the Negroes have had close and continuous contact not alone with Europeans, but with Caribs, Japanese, British, Indians, and Chinese as well, the results of close study were startling. In the interior, a full-blown African religious system, a smoothly functioning African clan organization, African place and personal names, African elements in economic life, a style of wood carving that could be traced to African sources showed what might be looked for in the institutions of any isolated culture that is a going concern (Herskovits, 1948, page 15).

In keeping with the researcher's need to answer the question of why survivals are more abundant in some areas than in others, one must remember the conditions and constraints of total servitude.

It is apparent that African forms of technology, economic life, and political organization had but a relatively slight chance of survival. ...nor could more than a few of the most rudimentary economic devices be carried on outside the all-encompassing dictates of the master (Herskovits, 1948, page 137).

A contradiction occurred during the earlier period of slavery both in South America and in the southern United States. This was in terms of political strategy and the utilization of the African's legal genius. The organizational abilities of the African slave were significant factors in the development and implementation of slave revolts. However, with each revolt the slave owners closed ranks and became more determined to crush the ideas of freedom through extreme punishment of all those involved. One paradoxical result of this escalation of cruelty was the refinement of the slave's personal communication system.

Blacks, to avoid dangers and to protect their own interests, appeased the cruel expectations of their owners by shrewdly and skillfully manipulating their own rhetorical responses (Logue, 1981, page 31).

### Folkloric Survivals

Song. Both the content and the apparatus of communication became a combination of West African, New World adaptations, and situational necessity. Music served as an important vehicle for aesthetic expression, slave communication, and as a means of instruction. Also, music was a foundation for several of the forms of the slave's folkloric oral tradition. Music offers many examples of survivals of the West African oral tradition among African-American slaves in the southern United States.

Singing and dancing served many purposes in West Africa. Songs provided a frequent accompaniment to work of all kinds in the homeland of the slaves. These songs of fishing, weaving, hunting, carving, and farming took on new meaning on the cotton and sugar plantations in the New World.

The diverse labors of the African, which were the sources of this kind of song, had been funneled quite suddenly into one labor, the cultivation of the white man's fields. The African slave continued to chant his native chants, sing his native songs, at work, even though the singing of them might be forbidden or completely out of context. But being forbidden, the songs were after a time changed into other forms that weren't forbidden in contexts that were contemporary (Jones, 1968, page 20).

In the minds of the master, a singing slave was a happy slave. The slave's use of this sanctioned mode of

expression demonstrates the survival of one of the forms of the West African oral tradition known as the "double-entendre." The use of the double-entendre was discussed earlier in this chapter in terms of its use in riddles, proverbs, and folktales. The transition of this style of talking when employed musically by the slaves in the U. S. south did not lose its original meaning. It was merely given another carrier. Significant meanings were hidden in both music and lyric. Which one of two contradictory meanings one attached to the "cheerful and nonsensical songs" depended upon one's status - slave or master.

Febe Rogers repeated words from one song she and others had sung: Run, nigger, run, de patteroller get you, Slip over de fence slick as a eel, White man ketch you by de heel, Run, nigger run! (Logue, 1981, page 44).

One particular song, "Go Down Moses", used in this manner by the slaves in the southern states became known to whites as a message song and was outlawed. Harriet Tubman used this melody to alert the slaves when she would be making a run. John Lowell, Jr., gives an extensive explanation of the use of mask and symbol as used by the slaves in their spirituals. He further explains that "Mask and Symbol" are his terms for what other authors call the West African's use of the double entendre. In general, song was available to the West African slave to manipulate as needed. Ian Cameron, writing on "Negro Songs" in the Musical Times of London in 1922 said:

No self respecting negro of the old type will ever be sassy to a white gen'lman, but he will by sly innuendo of saying and song express his opinions, his wishes, and his sarcasm (Lovell, 1972, page 191).

The ethnohistorical research of Gonzalo Aguirre-Beltran on the Negro population of Mexico; the work of Taylor and Coelho on the Black Caribs of Honduras; and the studies by J. H. Nketia of Akan (Ghana) dirges give further musico-logical and ethnographic evidence that there are basic West African patterns undergirding music and songs created by the transplanted West African slaves and their descendants in the New World (Herskovits, 1948). E. Kurayana, an expert in Guyanese folklore, informed John Lovell, Jr., that even though Christian missionaries outlawed African religious societies, many examples of African songs and drumming techniques had survived to the present (Lovell, 1972).

The African Sports Club of Manchester operates a friendly burial society; they will play drums for you if you get married, have a christening, or die (Lovell, 1972, page 58).

P. A. Brathwaite's book, Musical Traditions, depicts the African as a pioneer in Guyanese music. He found African traditions among the Guyanese people in their musical instruments, dances, and religious rituals. Two examples are the Cumfa ritual involving the drums of Kabango and ceremonies of moon worship. African groups or peoples still functioning as cultural units in Guyana, are the Congos, the Ashanti, the Angolas, the Dromanti, the Yoruba, the Oku, and the Mazumbo (Lovell, 1972).

The West African folkloric oral tradition can be found also in the West Indian islands of Trinidad and Tobago. M. P. Alladin, Director of Culture at the National Museum and Art Gallery in Trinidad says that the Calypso which is at least two-hundred years old, the Limbo, and the steel bands all derive from African backgrounds. Professor Jacob D. Elder of the University of the West Indies, an authority on Trinidadian folklore, told Professor John Lovell of Howard University that:

Trinidad has striking relics of the Housas, the Yorubas (through Shango elements), the Congos (through levitation by corncobs and magical escapes), and the Mandingoes.

In addition to songs and Song Games, African Cultural habits in Trinidad are found in the preparation of food, ritual dancing, drum making and drumming, rainmaking exercises, and language. Overlap and other African elements are still present in the singing (Lovell, 1972, page 60).

Dance. Some very specific West African dance forms and dances have taken root in the southern United States. One of the most famous whose history and origin were obscured is an Ashanti ancestor dance known to whites as the Charleston (Jones, 1968).

...it is a commonplace that many American Negro forms of dancing are essentially African; and this is confirmed by motion pictures taken of the Kwaside rites for the ancestors of the chief of the Ashanti village of Asokore, which include a perfect example of the Charleston, or by the resemblance to other styles of Negro dancing well known in this country included in films taken in Dahomey and among the Yoruba (Herskovits, 1958, page 146).

Other recognizable African dances were witnessed in New Orleans - the Calinda, the Vodun dances, the Conga, and the Bamboula.

Ring Games and Group Singing. Continuing the search for West African survivals of the oral tradition in folklore in the New World, one encounters ring games and group singing. Both were used to instruct the young and as a form of entertainment in the antebellum South.

The children's games, 'Ring Around the Rosie' or 'Bob a Needle'; each with its accompanying song, have counterparts in Africa, such as the 'Akpakolo' of Igbo children in West Africa (Berry and Blassingame, 1982, page 23).

The Language Issue. At the center of the questions of what survived and what did not is the issue of language and the diversity of language among the West African slaves.

Evidence from history and anthropology reveals that the West African slave was quite adept in the retention of his own language, whenever possible, arriving in the New World as a bilingual and trilingual individual and being resourceful enough to develop a survival patois. Blassingame wrote that "when newly imported Africans were on large plantations where they had little contact with whites and thus little need to use a European language, they were very successful in retaining elements of their native languages." As a result of research and personal travel, W. E. B. DuBois documented both the variety and unity underlying the languages spoken by West Africans. He further asserted, as did Lovell, Herskovits, Davidson, and others that it was

necessary in trade and commerce to be proficient in the tongue of the trading partners. Therefore, Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French were not totally unknown to the West African who entered this country as a slave.

In the United States, one center of African linguistic survivals to the present day is along the Georgia-South Carolina sea coast. More than four thousand (4,000) words from the languages of more than twenty-one (21) African groups were found in use by the Gullah Blacks as late as the 1940's (Blassingame, 1972; Turner, 1958).

Folktales. One of the more significant evidences of folkloric survivals is the folktale. Professor Lorenzo Turner's (1958) article "African Survivals in the New World with Special Emphasis on the Arts" documented that African slaves in the Americas retained much African culture and, of the retentions, he insisted language, folk literature, religion, art, dance, and music were the most tenacious. In situations of cultural contact where free choice is not allowed, the conquered or oppressed group retains elements of their culture which served as focal points prior to their subjugation either in unchanged or reinterpreted form, more tenaciously than those of other aspects (Herskovits, 1958). One of the most important cultural forms in West Africa was the folktale. Kenneth M. Stamp wrote that the folklore of the slave in the southern United States provided evidence of the blending of African traditions with new experiences; it preserved legends of their own past; it explained natural

phenomena; it described a spirit world; and through the use of symbolism, told the story of endless warfare between Black and white. Folklore and specifically the folktale, served other purposes in the antebellum South--education for the young slaves and an oral communication network for the adult slave. L. W. Levine recognized the reliance on the oral forms of communication by African-Americans in his comments that Afro-Americans have an oral culture which is distinctive in content, structure, and sound. These distinctions can be found both in the content-subject matter and in the manner of telling. In West Africa, storytelling was an art form which required the teller, be it an elder, griot, or priest--to be adept in memorization, acting, singing, and the use of gestures.

So cleverly can the storyteller act out the parts of the characters that the only way fully to convey how these stories are told would be to have a talking motion picture, which would capture the total setting of teller and audience, the gestures, the play of facial expression, and in total effect would not be very dissimilar from drama as we know it on the stage (Herskovits, 1940, page 454).

This form of storytelling is evident in the Caribbean and the United States south. It also has variations in the African-American folk cultures of today. Talley's Corner, for example, points out that "rapping sessions" in the African American neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. pool halls, front porches, back fences, playgrounds, and street corners in Black neighborhoods both North and South serve as stages for individuals to engage others in the spinning of



tales. The audience participates with shouts of "Amen," "Right-On," "Teach," and other comments which assures the teller that his audience is with him.

This pattern is deeply rooted in behavior, for not only do African listeners react to a storyteller in this way, but, in general, African conventions of politeness do not approve of permitting anyone to talk into a void of silence. Hence the affirmations by the audience as a story unfolds are essential to the telling of a tale (Herskovits, 1940, page 454).

### Slave Tales

Additional evidence supporting the belief that the African-American slave and his descendants have an oral tradition deeply rooted in West African folkloric tradition are findings by William Owen in 1877. He wrote that "the slave's tales are as purely African as are their faces or their own plaintive melodies - the same wild stories of Buh Rabbit, Buh Wolf, and other Buhs are to be heard to this day in Africa, differing only in the drapery necessary to the change of scene." In 1892, A. Gerber compared African American and African folklore and asserted that not only the plots of the majority of the stories, but even the principal actors, are of African origin (Berry and Blassingame, 1982).

Two hundred slave tales that were recorded by Abigail Christensen in South Carolina; Joel Chandler Harris and Charles C. Jones, Jr., in Georgia; Alcee Fortier in Louisiana; and the Hampton Institute's Black folklorists throughout the South between 1872 and 1900 were mostly identical in structure, detail, function, motif, attitudes, and thought patterns to African ones (Berry and Blassingame,

1982). Hugh Anthony Johnston (1966) reviewed over one thousand traditional Hausa and Fulani folktales in Nigeria. Upon completion of this review, he wrote that Brer Rabbit is undoubtedly the direct descendant of the hare of African folktales. Both the plots and characteristics are exactly the same as those of the Hausa Zomo and thirteen of the plots of the Uncle Remus stories are exactly parallel to Hausa stories. The fact that many folklorists cite Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus stories in total and as the only ones coming from the slaves necessitates that a distinction be made between Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit can trace his roots to the West African oral traditions in folklore. Uncle Remus, on the other hand, is the clear brainchild of Joel Chandler Harris. Harris created him in the columns of the Atlanta Constitution in the early 1880's.

There is a significant difference in ages - some hundreds of years - between Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit. The Rabbit had been the hero of animal stories popular among Negroes from the early days of slavery; these were genuine folk tales told by Negroes to Negroes and handed down in oral form. Uncle Remus was added only when Harris, in packaging the stories - using the Negro grin for gift-wrapping - invented the Negro narrator to sustain the dialect. Harris all his life was a very poor inventor; his career was built on a merciless, systematic plagiarizing of the folk-Negro (Wolfe, 1949, pages 205 and 213).

However, these stories even with the addition of Uncle Remus offer many insights into the slave and post-slave South. They also provide an opportunity to compare the versions in terms of pre- and post-Joel Chandler Harris.

Richard Dorson, in his book African Folklore (1972), wrote that while talking to African friends in Africa, he discovered that tales he had heard in the United States South were exactly the same as the ones his friends were telling him. Other stories he heard in West Africa were very similar in storyline, characters, and even uses to those coming from the slave quarters in the Cotton Belt in the United States. Further confirmation of the transatlantic crossing of the West African oral tradition in folktales comes from Martha Warren Beckwith (1924) in her book Jamaica Anansi Stories. She writes that the Anansi stories told in Jamaica can be traced to those told in Ghana and Brer Rabbit linked to the Hare stories of the Bantu people. In this way, she continues, the original style of the story-telling, which in some instances mingles story, song, and dance, is as nearly as possible preserved.

The use of animals as characters shows a clever and highly sophisticated mind. Whether the stories are found in West Africa, South America, West Indies, or the southern United States, the tortoise, spider, and rabbit are wise, patient, boastful, mischievous, roguish, guileful, cunning, and they always outwit their stronger foes and triumph over evil (Blassingame, 1972). There is humor in many of these tales and they were also told for fun.

Following the West African tradition of using these stories to teach, slave narratives reveal that lessons in morality, survival techniques, plantation etiquette, and

spirituality were often woven into the stories, thereby forming the basis for an oral curriculum.

The tales also represented the distillation of folk wisdom and were used as an instructional device to teach young slaves to survive (Blassingame, 1972, page 57).

The searing vignettes passed on by old sages to youth made memory itself an instrument of survival. Each generation, then, built on the lessons learned by preceding ones about Africa, slavery, free Negroes, economic and political oppression and opportunity, sexual myths and exploitation, the enduring value of the family, church, and school, white proscriptions and Black protests, law and injustice, Black nationalism, and military service (Berry and Blassingame, 1982).

### Proverbs

The proverb as used by African-American slaves and their descendants assisted them in the perfection of a keen sense of rhetorical readiness. This included a rhetorical disguise of their role as defined by the white masters (Logue, 1981). When responding to questions from whites or just by being in their presence, a critical linguistic choice was necessary for African-Americans both in content and manner of delivery.

Blacks responded with a spontaneity and decisiveness perceived by whites as being natural, but which actually resulted from intense self-control, conscious choice, and communicative agility. These beguiling symbols served as a protective shield for slaves, a linguistic barrier between Black and white - language often perceived by whites as confirmation of their servants' loyalty and obedience (Logue, 1981, page 39).

In West Africa, as in the Southern United States, the proverb served many functions - not the least of which was

educational. Examples of West African derived proverbs heard in South America and the southern United States are as follows:

1. He who waits patiently lives long.
2. Slaves do not break everything for their masters.
3. A job or work is not the slave's first care.
4. The master's work has the first claim on his time.
5. A dog does not bark at his master.
6. To break everything when working is not good.
7. The slave is naturally the guilty party.
8. If a man powerful in authority should mistreat you smile at him.
9. A slave does not choose his master.
10. A slave's wisdom is in his master's head (Berry and Blassingame, 1982, page 9).

Riddles. Closely aligned with proverbs as a West African folkloric survival among New World Africans is the riddle. It's use paralleled the proverb and was extended to the courtship ritual.

The courthip ritual consisted of riddles, poetic boasting, innuendos, put downs, figurative speech, repartee, circumlocution, and a test of wit. According to the former slave Frank D. Banks, on the plantation the ability to understand and answer the figurative speeches of her lover was the test of wit and culture by which the slave girl was judged in the society of the quarters. In the slave quarters, old men taught the young the art of courtship (Berry and Blassingame, 1982, page 28).

The folklorist William Ferris interviewed African-Americans in the rural South in the 1970's and found a formalized courtship ritual which involved asking questions veiled in flowery language, plays on words, wit, and other mental gymnastics reminiscent of the slave quarters.

Spirituals and Religion: Freedom on Earth and in Heaven.

The creative instincts and drives of the West African

surfaced again in the slave quarters of the South in their adaptations of Christianity and in their invention of the "Spiritual." The Spiritual, in particular, represented the slave's ability to retain his West African heritage while molding it into a unique African-American phenomenon.

Religion to the traditional West African was all encompassing and was present in every aspect of life (Herskovits, 1948; Lovell, 1972). John Lovell (1972) wrote "the transition of African-American from African religious beliefs to American is, therefore, a lateral, not a forward, pass." In the Americas, the West African often wove together his original belief system of practicality and spirituality with the less racially tainted elements of Christianity.

Using the concept of cultural focus it became clear that the high degree of retention of African religious elements in pure or reinterpreted form, as empirically established for African-American cultures everywhere could not be due to chance (Herskovits, 1948, page xxvi).

The idea of one god was not an alien one for many West Africans. According to Equiano (Gustavus Vassa) 1967, the Supreme God of the Ibos was Chukwu. A belief in one creator was general. Mungo Park wrote that the Mandingoes universally believed in one god. Among those nations which allowed for multiple deities as well as those with one principle god, there is documentation of the African's ability to accept new gods, especially of their conquerors. Brazilian anthropologist, Arthur Ramos, confirmed this idea

by describing how the descendants of former African slaves in Bahia, Brazil have carefully preserved their African culture but some who adopted the Catholic church identify the saints of that faith by the names of their original African deities (Herskovits, 1948). Logic dictates that if they are strong enough to conquer, then their gods must be stronger.

Queen Nzingha of Ndongo - later called Angola - began to weigh the merits of her own God, Tem-Bon-Dumba, as compared to the God of the Portuguese. After becoming Queen in 1623, she asked was it possible that the Catholic God was stronger? She had heard the Jesuits maintain that the Christian God was just and an enemy of all suffering. Why then, did he assist the invaders of her country? Why were the Portuguese building forts in her country without her consent? With her questions still unresolved, she decided to join this religion and test its strength in her favor. For the remainder of her long life, she used this religion as a political tool - when it suited her (Diop, 1978, pages xii-xiii).

The political utilization of religion was transferred to the New World and found active recruits in such African-Americans as Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey. These two leaders of slave revolts in the North American south combined their knowledge of the Bible with their desire to free their people and produced fiery sermons of insurrection. Carriers of the words of these men and other African-American freedom fighters were the Spirituals.

The Spirituals were not written by an ignorant people under the inspiration of a white schizophrenic pattern of religion. The planter aristocracy prayed on the "Seventh" Day and brutalized African-American slaves on the other six

days. The slaves recognized the use the whites were making of religion each time they were told to obey their masters in the name of God.

The authors of the Negro Spirituals were African in their attitudes toward religion and music (Lovell, 1972). Janheinz Jahn (Muntu, 1961) wrote "on the basis of African philosophy there can be no strict separation of sacred and profane. Everything sacred has a secular counterpart, and everything secular a relevance to religion." As a group of songs--both secular and sacred--the Spiritual forms another link in the chain of West African folkloric survivals in the United States. The medium of music, including song and instrumentation became the Black heartbeat - framing the complete tapestry of life, woven from their cares, fears, suffering, sorrows, strengths, faith, triumphs, and world view.

A definition placing folk music as a segment of folklore was adopted by the International Folk Music Council during its 1954 Sao Paulo, Brazil conference. This definitional umbrella also encompasses a branch for the Negro Spiritual.

1. Folk music is a branch of folklore;
2. Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are (i) continuity which links the present with the past; (ii) variation which springs from the creative individual or group (iii) selection by the community - which determines the forms in which the music survives (Lovell, 1972, page 12).



Using this definition as a yardstick, the findings of M. Kilinski help to authenticate the music of West Africa as the precursive foundation of music developed by the slaves and their descendants in North and South America. Kilinski found thirty-six spirituals to be identical or closely related in tonal structure to West African songs. The song "Cyan Ride" was shown to have an exact Nigerian counterpart and "No More Auction Block" has a twin in Ashanti. With only slight variation, thirty-four spirituals were like songs found in Dahomey and the Gold Coast. In addition, Dr. Kolinski found fifty additional spirituals to have identical formal structures of certain West African songs (Lovell, 1972; M. J. Herskovits, 1936; F. S. Herskovits, 1936).

Frederick Hall (1949) traced the spiritual to Africa in other ways. He cites the peculiar use of pentatonic, hexatonic, and heptatonic scales, of lowered thirds, raised sixths, and lowered sevenths. His review includes an analysis of the perpetual motion activity of the rhythm. Rhythm, he explains, is the "servant of feeling rather than accurately measured accent." Here also, scale conforms to song rather than song to scale (Lovell, 1972). Overlap, alternation, and polyphony appear in African-American music precisely as they do in the native African.

Musical Instruments and Adaptations. Drums, their design, usage, and types along with handclapping are distinctive in their similarities in West Africa and among Africans in the New World. As words do, they produce images, commands,

conjures, speak in imperatives, and force respect.

Doris McGinty cites handclapping as one of the four major sources of African rhythmic complexity; the other three being accents of singers (or the melody instrument), movement of the dancers, and beating of the drums (Lovell, 1972).

Handclapping was used in the educational process especially as an accompaniment for songs used in ring games. "Patting Juba," a specific kind of handclapping, was defined to Solomon Northrup, himself an accomplished slave musician, thusly:

When slaves did not have musical instruments, they achieved a high degree of rhythmic complexity by clapping their hands; in Juba the clapping involved striking the hands on the knees, then striking the hands together, then striking the right shoulder with one hand, the left with the other - all the while keeping time with the feet, and singing (Blassingame, 1972, page 55).

This music was a forerunner of the blues and jazz. Using this West African oral tradition, the slave looked at his situation in terms of oppressive whites, bouts with the slave catchers, beatings, and conflicts with masters and overseers and wove these themes into new music and song. In the pre-Civil War South, these songs often employed one of the formulas of the West African Folkloric tradition, the double entendre or principle of indirection. In so doing, these songs often contained comments satirically veiling the hypocrisy and brutality of both slave master and slave

system. Frederick Douglas included the following song in his book My Bondage and My Freedom (1855:

We raise de wheat,  
 Dey gib us de corn,  
 We bake de bread,  
 Dey gib us de cruss;  
 We sif de meal,  
 Dey gib us de huss;  
 We peal de meat,  
 Dey gib us de skin;  
 And dat's de way  
 They takes us in.

Another example is this one:

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

Intricate rhythmic patterns, tone, pitch, and the tense, slightly hoarse-sounding vocal techniques prevalent in the Blues are all traceable to West African musical traditions. The antiphonal singing technique, in which the lead singer sings a theme with a response from the chorus wherein the answers are comments on the leader's theme or comments on the answers themselves using improvised verses, represents another African survival among New World Africans (Jones, 1963).

The Church. The search for West African survivals among African-Americans moves naturally from music to the church. The need to release one's self in a spiritual manner spawned several unique methods of worship. The spiritual as a sacred song was one manifestation of the slave's need to

communicate with a divine authority. The worship service often consisted of slaves huddling in a grove of trees praying with their heads on the ground to muffle the sound. Other times, there were large meetings held on some plantations and still other services were in a church presided over by white ministers. West African survivals can be found most frequently among the Southern Baptists, some Methodist denominations, and some Holiness churches. In the northern United States, storefront churches in African-American neighborhoods demonstrate similar characteristics. Some of these characteristics are emotional services with the congregation punctuating the sermon with "Yes, Lord; Amen; Preach;" getting the Spirit - fainting; speaking in tongues; handclapping; and the use of drums and tamborines.

The manner in which, in many Negro churches, the sermon forms a kind of litany between preacher and congregation represents the reworking of still another form of African polite behavior (Herskovits, 1958, page 12).

Lodges, benevolent societies, secret societies (Masons, Shriners, Daughters of Isis), insurance societies, missionary groups and other mutual aid groups are found both in the African-American church and in the community. Corollaries of these organizations can be found in traditional West African societies. The African view of man in society places primary importance on his membership in a group rather than on the individual's allegiance to self.

The membership of the group continues beyond death into the life beyond. The dead, the living, and the yet unborn form an unbroken family, and this philosophy is solidified through institutions and rituals (Busia, 1955).

### Conclusion

Oral tradition and the involvement of the twelve forms of folklore did indeed make the trip from West Africa to the New World. Oral tradition arose in the enclaves of slaves wherever they were placed. The slaves and subsequent free men and women in the Cotton Belt preserved, reworked, molded, and fashioned an oral tradition in folklore that served them well, during slavery and after emancipation, in the church, home, school, and community. J. Maon Brewer (1968) stated

Probably no people have been so completely the bearers of tradition as the African slave-immigrants. They carried in their minds and hearts a treasure of complex musical forms, dramatic speech, and imaginative stories, which they perpetuated through the vital art of self-expression. Wherever the slaves were ultimately placed, they established an enclave of African culture that flourished in spite of environmental disadvantages (Berry and Blassingame, 1982, page 32).

The West African heritage included an oral tradition of folklore in education. Folklore, music, dance, sculpture, painting, woodcarving, spirituality, and nature functioned as a total generic unit, serving not only religion, rulers, servants, man, and woman, but all phases of daily life, encompassing birth, death, work, and play.

There is something that runs  
all of the time and never stops.  
- That's the River.

Spell Black water in three letters.  
- I-n-k.

Spell hard water in three letters  
- I-c-e.

What has one Eye and one Foot?  
- A Needle

### Chapter 3

## African-American Folkloric Form and Function in the Classroom

### Introduction

In Chapter 1, the interrelatedness of culture and education was discussed. The research study was described along with the rationale for taking an anthropological point of view in choosing the research tool. In Chapter 2, the oral tradition of the African-American was placed in its historical context and various survivals of this tradition were enumerated. In Chapter 3, these survivals will be discussed in an educational context--in other words, how the folkloric elements have been used in actual classrooms. In order to understand the classrooms of the four respondents, it is necessary to first review the political and educational climate prior to the entry of the first respondent into the classroom. The education of the African-Americans was often a political issue.

## The Pursuit of Literacy

### Pre-Emancipation

The formal education of Africans in the New World was viewed by the owners of the plantations, clergy, and the majority of the southern white population to be inappropriate. In their view, teaching an African, slave or free, to read or write made him unfit for work, rebellious, and forgetful of his place (Bullock, 1970; Woodson, 1919; Franklin, 1974; Bond, 1966). The maintenance of the system of illiteracy for Africans in the southern United States was determined by law. The earliest legal prohibition was in 1740 in South Carolina.

Whereas, the having of slaves taught to write or suffering them to be employed in writing may be attended with inconveniences, be it enacted, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatever, hereafter taught to write, every such person or persons shall for every such offense forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money (Du Bois, Dill; 1911; page 15).

Georgia had three laws forbidding African slaves an education: a law passed in 1770 forbade the teaching of reading and writing and imposed a fine of twenty pounds sterling for violation; an 1829 law established either a fine or whipping for teaching slaves to read or write; and both of these laws appeared again in a law passed in 1853. Savannah, Georgia, passed a city ordinance in 1818 imposing a fine of thirty dollars for each of the offenses defined in the state laws along with imprisonment for ten days and a whipping of not less than thirty-nine lashes (Franklin,



1974; Bond, 1966). Virginia had a contradictory situation as did several other states. On the books were laws forbidding the instruction of slaves and free Africans. Yet, in a few states, Virginia, Louisiana, and Tennessee, schools did exist for free African-Americans. The Honorable J. C. Napier, a former Registrar of the United States Treasury, attended a private school for African-American children in Nashville, Tennessee, before the Civil War (Bond, 1966). Some free African-Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, and New Orleans sent their children to Europe for education.

In the North, the first school for African-Americans was established by Elias Neau in New York City in 1704. In 1770, a similar school was opened in Philadelphia. There were only a few African-American women teachers during this early period of the North American colonies.

The first about whom we know was Catherine Ferguson, a slave, who purchased her freedom and in 1793 took forty-eight children, twenty of whom were white, from the almshouse and opened Katy Ferguson's Schools for the Poor in New York City (Lerner, 1973, page 76).

The Bostonians of African descent opened their own school in 1798. In March, 1834, the twelve hundred African-American residents of Cincinnati opened a school for their children. Before the year ended, using their own resources, they opened three more schools to instruct both children and adults (Aptheker, 1982). At the advent of the Civil War, there were approximately twenty schools for free African-

Americans in Washington, D.C. Fifteen-year-old Maria Becraft, in 1820, opened the first boarding school for African-American young ladies in Washington, D.C. In 1831, she became a nun in the Order of the Sisters of Providence in Baltimore and continued to teach after her ordination. Private schools for the African-Americans were rare and did very little to significantly combat the almost universal illiteracy of both the slave and free Black up to and including the Civil War (Bullock, 1970; Bond, 1966; Du Bois, Dill; 1911).

...at Emancipation the percentage of illiteracy among the colored population was probably about ninety (90) percent. The following table gives the census figures for Negro illiteracy:

Illiteracy by Percent

<u>States</u>	<u>Negroes 10 years of age and over</u>			
	<u>1870</u>	<u>1880</u>	<u>1890</u>	<u>1900</u>
District of Columbia	70.5	48.4	35.0	24.3
Missouri	72.7	53.9	41.7	28.1
West Virginia	74.4	55.0	44.5	32.3
Florida	84.1	70.7	50.5	38.4
Maryland	69.5	59.6	50.1	35.1
Delaware	71.3	57.5	49.5	38.1
Arkansas	81.2	75.0	53.6	43.0
Texas	88.7	75.4	52.5	38.2
Tennessee	82.4	71.7	54.2	41.6
Kentucky	83.8	70.4	55.9	40.1
Virginia	88.9	73.2	57.2	44.6
North Carolina	84.8	77.4	60.1	47.6
Mississippi	87.0	75.2	60.8	49.1
South Carolina	81.1	78.5	64.1	52.8
Georgia	92.1	81.6	67.3	52.4
Alabama	88.1	80.6	69.1	57.4
Louisiana	85.9	79.1	72.1	61.1

Massachusetts	18.5	15.1	14.3	10.7
United States	79.9	70.0	57.1	44.4

(DuBois, Dill; 1911, page 16)

### Post-Emancipation

With the establishment by Congress of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Land in 1865, a federal agency was established to oversee, assist, and direct the affairs pertaining to the newly-freed slaves. Passing over the veto of President Andrew Johnson, the Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1866 was oriented toward education.

Now the Bureau was explicitly authorized to cooperate with private benevolent agencies and hire or provide by lease buildings for purposes of education as well as to seize, hold, use, lease or sell all buildings and tenements...and to use the same or appropriate the proceeds derived therefrom to the education of the freed people (Bently, 1955; page 172).

Reconstruction ushered in an unprecedented educational harvest for both poor white and ex-slave.

On South Carolina's Sea Islands, education was combined with a system of free labor. This came to be known as the Port Royal experiment. When thirty-one teachers from the New England Freedmen's Aid Society responded to a request for assistance from Union General Edward L. Pierce, the "Yankee School Marms" invasion of the Cotton Belt had begun in earnest. A Black woman from a well established free African-American family in Philadelphia went to teach in the Sea Islands in 1862. Charlotte Forten, that Philadelphia "school marm," said she went to the South to teach "for the

good I can do my oppressed and suffering fellow creatures" (Edt. Billington, 1953). She taught in Port Royal through May, 1864.

Teachers such as Forten and others, both Black and white, were sponsored by different organizations in the North. Among them were the American Missionary Association, Society of Friends, the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Home Mission, and the Northern Presbyterian Church. Secular groups also formed to aid the former slaves: the New England Freedman's Aid Society, the American Freedman's Union Commission, and others.

Two well-known African-American groups joined the fight for literacy for the Black men and women in the South. The African Methodist Episcopal Church sent funds as did the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People.

From 1862 to 1872 at least ten (10) Black organizations collected and directed funds and supplies to the South. By 1870 their total contribution amounted to almost \$479,000. Furthermore, also to that date, southern Negroes deposited \$12 million in savings. Thus Black people aided their own educational cause and began to show signs of economic independence (Parmenter, page 131).

Large financial contributions from a few wealthy individuals contributed to the growth of literacy among southern African-Americans. The George Peabody Education Fund (1867) donated over two million dollars to promote common school education, to subsidize public education, facilitate teacher training, and to increase the public's

awareness of the critical need for better educational facilities for both Blacks and whites (Bullock, 1970). The John F. Slater Fund (1882), the Rockefeller sponsored General Education Board (1902), the Anna T. Jeanes Fund (1905), the Caroline Phelps-Stokes Fund (1910), and the Julius Rosenwald Fund (1913) all made contributions to the improvement of the educational conditions of the African-Americans in the South.

These concerted efforts did not eliminate illiteracy, economic deprivation, discrimination, and racial injustice. However, they did provide a foundation upon which public tax supported school systems could serve as a catalyst in the development and implementation of the idea that education must be intellectually anchored while being humanistically motivated and delivered.

Although recent researches have shown in the South some germs of a public school system before the war, there can be no reasonable doubt but that common school instruction in the South, in the modern sense of the term, was founded by the Freedman's Bureau and missionary societies, and that the state public school systems were formed mainly by Negro reconstruction governments (Du Bois, Dill; 1911, page 21).

### Separate and Unequal

Southern whites as a group never relinquished their hatred of, nor their attitude of superiority toward, the African-American. The years of Reconstruction (1868-1876) gave way to legal disenfranchisement, strictly enforced racial segregation, and the transformation of the educational system into one designed to permanently insure,

solidify, and confer low economic status on African-Americans (Bullock, 1970; Logan, 1965).

The paramount issue of the presidential campaign of 1876 was whether the Federal government would be removed from direct involvement in the internal affairs of the southern states. Both Republicans and Democrats were actively courting the Southern white aristocracy. Loss of land, power, and lifestyle left the plantation owner angry, embittered, and determined to return to positions of wealth and political leadership. Candidate Rutherford B. Hayes made clear his acceptance of the idea of giving the South freedom to design its own future. The Compromise of 1877 restored the South to parity with other sections and freed it from Northern intervention in Southern race relations (Bullock, 1970). The Confederate States of America lost the war, but in 1877, they won the peace.

The troops in South Carolina - 34 officers and 316 enlisted men - were withdrawn on April 10, 1877. On April 20, the 22 officers and 271 enlisted men stationed in New Orleans were withdrawn. Although these numbers were small, they had symbolized the power, and perhaps the determination, of the federal government to support the constitutional rights of the freedmen (Logan, 1965, page 31).

White rule based on violence, fraud, murder, and intimidation had returned to Tennessee by 1869; in Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia by 1870; in Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas by 1874; and in Mississippi by 1875. Well-armed and organized white supremacy groups such as the Regulators, the Jayhawkers, the Black Horse Cavalry, the Knights of the White Camellia, the Constitutional Union Guards, the Pale

Faces, the White Brotherhood, the Council of Safety, the '76 Association, the Rifle Clubs of South Carolina, and the most infamous, the Ku Klux Klan, made the pursuit of the American Dream by African-Americans an American nightmare.

This nightmare took shape legally, economically, socially, and educationally. The 1896 judgement of the United States Supreme Court in the case of Plessy vs. Ferguson established the doctrine of "separate but equal accommodations." The application of this doctrine was equal only in that it equally applied to all African-Americans, North and South. The Southern public school systems lost all vestiges of the earlier ideas of equality in the rush to establish separate systems for African-Americans. They then became graphic examples of the separate and unequal philosophy.

What did African-Americans do? They returned to their survival strategies perfected in the slave cabins. Education, hope, community cooperation, and a strong spiritual base produced miracles.

Before the equality doors closed, a few African-Americans passed through. Since teaching, preaching, and burying were the primary fields available to them, these careers claimed the attention of the majority of those African-Americans living and working in the South from 1900 through 1950. "Get an education in order to better yourself and your race," was the rallying cry in all of the African-American communities both North and South.

The colleges founded in the mid to late 1800's for the ex-slaves had progressed steadily from teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic to real college level courses in the early 1900's. Coming out of schools such as Howard, Fisk, Atlanta, Wilberforce, Wiley, Tuskegee, Lincoln, and others were men and women committed to teaching other African-Americans.

This research focuses on four African-American women who graduated from Wiley College and returned to teach in a rural, segregated, one-room school. Their commitment to teach African-American children was heightened by their own college experiences. These four women are:

- (1) Mrs. Maggie Halbert Reese,
- (2) Mrs. Heloise Hill,
- (3) Mrs. June Roe Key, and
- (4) Mrs. Mary-Geneva Roe Savage

### Schooling

Education was not only a family affair in the rural South from Reconstruction through the 1960's, it was also the nucleus around which African-American parents pinned their hopes for a better future for their children. African-American women provided much of the teaching, in the elementary grades especially, and thus were the primary transmitters, sustainers, and representatives of culture and tradition. The mixture of southern and West African culture and tradition found expression in a variety of ways. The book, Drums and Shadows (1940), a study of Georgia Blacks in



the 1930's, documented seventy elements of African culture in that area.

African names, indicating a connection to the ancestral home, continued to be marks of status in the free Black community throughout the nineteenth century. Significantly, many of them appeared in Carter G. Woodson's list of free Blacks included in the census of 1830 (Berry, Blassingame, 1982, page 19).

The African-American woman teacher stood at the center of the square acting as a conduit between home, school, Black community, and the white community. Access to the white power brokers was most often denied to the parents of her pupils, but she had it to a limited extent. These women sustained immense hardships and bore many personal and professional burdens in order to teach African-Americans, old and young, the joys of learning coupled with the mechanics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Biographers of African-American women such as Mary McCloud Bethune, Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, Charlotte Forten, and others, said of these women: These founders were not mere missionaries with ephemeral dreams, but women of action whose character has been tempered in the forge-fire of anxiety and sacrifice. The African-American female teacher brought to those one- room schools a West African, southern American expressive system that had an intuitive dynamic. The African-American experience was a source of spiritual strength.

Anna Julia Cooper wrote in 1925: "My one aim is and has always been, so far as I may, to hold a torch for the

children of a group too long exploited and too frequently disparaged in its struggling for the light."

Facts and figures do not tell the complete story of what happened in those rural, segregated, one-room schools for African-Americans. All great events are really only the sum of individual experiences. Selectively viewing the teaching lives of these women, who themselves were born and bred in the South, shows them to be links in the chain of cultural continuity. They are unique and, at the same time, are reflective of the African-American culture. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote that the exploited man doesn't separate his destiny from that of others; his individual misfortune is in fact a collective misfortune; it is due to the economic, political, and social structures of the society in which he lives. These women as African-Americans in Texas were subject to the same exploitation as their friends and neighbors, yet it never broke their minds, bodies, or spirits. In fact, Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Key had job problems because they did not say "Yes Sir" and "Yes Ma'am" to whites. They were taught by their parents to say only Yes and No.

Visually, the schools each of these women taught in evoke images of the bizarre, heroic, pathetic, and romantic. Mrs. Reese, Mrs. Key, and Mrs. Savage all taught at different times in the one-room school building at Skidmore Prairie, La Mar County, Texas. From 1930 through 1935, Mrs. Reese taught in New Bethel, Pine Creek, Reedsprairie, and

Skidmore Prairie, Texas. Mrs. Heloise Hill taught in Jones Prairie, Texas, during 1933-1934. Mrs. Key taught in Skidmore Prairie, Texas, from 1938 through 1940. Mrs. Savage began teaching in 1941 in the same school in Skidmore Prairie, Texas.

Each of the informants described the physical facility designated as the school. Mrs. Maggie H. Reese's description represents a composite of each of the one-room, rural, segregated schools she taught in.

"It was a long narrow gunshot house - shape similar to a rifle, with double front doors; four windows without sealed panes; a wood stove; and double desk seats." "It was also the church in each place I taught in the rurals." "Each Negro family out there was responsible for cutting a half cord of wood." The parents would bring the wood to the school. Each of the schools where she taught in the rural area had a well in the yard. Each had a unisex "out-house". None of these schools had electricity or a telephone.

Mrs. Heloise Hill described her building thus: "The school building looked rather run-down. Repairs were made by the Black people living out there. It was also their church. It did have a decent blackboard. Desks were attached to the seats. Cold wind, rain, snow, all came in through the cracks in the walls. The large wood stove provided only minimal relief on very cold days. Nails served as hooks for coats. There was a well outside. The

one toilet was also outside. There was neither a telephone or electricity."

Mrs. Key and Mrs. Savage both spoke of their experiences in Skidmore Prairie. "The building sat up off of the ground on tree stumps, one under each corner of the building." (Key) "The steps were just planks nailed together." (Savage) "The boards comprising the sides were rough and unpainted with holes between them. There wasn't any electricity, telephone, audio-visual equipment, or indoor plumbing. The building was very ramshackly with lots of unwanted ventilation. There was a large wood burning stove in the center of the room. I wasn't good at making fires so after a few mornings with no fire going by the time the students arrived, one of them, I believe his name was Earnest, volunteered to come early - around 6:30-7:00 - to make the fire. I agreed immediately." (Key) "The seats were long row-like benches. The men dug the latrine for the out-house. These were the Black men. The walls had no color, they were just bare boards. Oil lamps were used and provided the only light on stormy, dark days and in the evening when we had programs - concerts and plays. We hung our coats on wooden pegs by the door." (Savage)

Mrs. Reese, Key, and Savage are members of an extended upper class African-American southern family. Mrs. Reese, born in 1901 in Paris, Texas, which is twenty-two miles from Skidmore Prairie, is the aunt of Mrs. Key and Mrs. Savage. Mrs. Key and Mrs. Savage are sisters. The grandmother of

Mrs. Key and Mrs. Savage and sister of Mrs. Reese was also a teacher. Another sister of Mrs. Reese taught in Gibbons High School in Paris for over fifty years and never missed a day. The only other sister of Mrs. Reese owned and printed a local newspaper and taught school. Dr. and Mrs. Roe and daughters shared the home place of his wife's mother and father and her sisters. As each sibling married, additional rooms were built onto the house. Therefore, it was not necessary to leave home. The Patriarchs (grandmother and grandfather) of June and Mary-Geneva did not believe anyone should move from home. Dr. Roe, a college graduate and licensed dentist, lived in the only African-American home in Paris, Texas (located one hundred miles northeast of Dallas), with a large personal library. Learning for the joy of discovery of new knowledge was stressed by all in this family.

Mrs. Hill, a Paris, Texas, native, attributes her strong foundation of ethics, spirituality, and commitment to quality education to the teachings of her mother.

This research views one phase of their many years of teaching in one-room, rural, segregated schools to ascertain the use or non-use of a West African derived folkloric oral tradition. This research follows in the tradition of Allan Nevins, the founder of the Oral History Project at Columbia University in 1948, and William L. Montell, who advocated the use of oral history, oral traditions, and life histories derived from people from all walks of life. This research

explores a previously unexplored segment in the educational anthropology of African-Americans.

Getting a job in the classroom presented the first hurdle. No concept of equal employment opportunity had emerged from constitutional interpretation in the South for the African-Americans seeking employment.

Consequently, the Negro's occupational mobility was made to hang not simply upon his industrial fitness but also upon his acceptability to white employers (Bullock, 1970, page 168).

In order for Mrs. Reese to be hired, her mother had to visit one of the white trustees for the "Negro" school and quote the law to him regarding the need for African-American children to be taught. Mrs. Savage, Key, and Hill each had to visit each of the white trustees (usually at work in their fields) to answer whatever questions were asked. There was no job description, no known salary schedule, and no signed contract. The questions ranged from ascertaining educational background to one asked Mrs. Key - "See that big boy over there in the field? Can you whip him?" Mrs. Key said, "I can think of a lot of other ways to work with young people and keep their attention. Whipping is not always the correct method, but if it is needed I can do it." The African-American families sometimes were asked to comment on the prospective teacher, but not always. Mrs. Savage was visited by a delegation of African-American parents from Skidmore Prairie who came into Paris and asked her to come there to teach. They knew her family and her sister June who had preceeded her as a teacher at Skidmore Prairie.

They also knew she had just graduated and was unemployed. When she said yes, they carried her response to the white trustees. Not until Mrs. Savage had visited each of the five white male trustees on their farms was she hired.

Since these schools were quite isolated, these teachers found themselves performing many different tasks, not all of which were school related. However, they were related to the life of the students, their families, and other African-Americans in that area. The school building served as the church, the community center, and general meeting place for all the African-American people. When traveling shows, church choirs, or any occasion arose necessitating a community gathering, it was held in the school, which in many rural communities was also the church.

As discussed by E. Franklin Frazier, John Hope Franklin, Romney Mosley, and W.E.B. DuBois, since African-Americans were denied access to many activities of the dominant society, the church in the African-American community became the center for most activities; that is, for religious, social, political, business, and educational purposes. Du Bois commented on the retention of some West African religious traditions in the African-American churches.

Its tribal functions are shown in its religious activity, its social authority and general guiding and co-ordinating work; its family functions are shown by the fact that the church is a centre of social life and intercourse; acts as a newspaper and intelligence bureau, is the center of

amusement--indeed, is the world in which the Negro moves and acts (Du Bois, 1967, p. 201).

The responsibility of record-keeping and reporting the community activities to the "circuit-riding Pastor" was one of Mrs. Key's responsibilities. In fact, she read the reports she had written at the regional and annual conferences. She performed many church-related functions such as recording of births, deaths, and marriages in the records of the church. Keeping the financial statements and organizing clean-up parties, church socials, informing the members of their conference claims--assessments--due dates, and general information. "I gave the sick and shut-in list to the pastor when he preached there," said Mrs. Key. Since she was reared in the United Methodist church, these duties were not new to her, nor did she feel put-upon.

Most students walked from three to twelve miles each way daily to get to school. The teachers lived from two to five miles away with one of the families who had children attending school and also walked. Paved roads were scarce in the rural South and there were not any sidewalks. During snowy weather, the students often had to dig a path up to the school door with their hands and sticks in order to get in. The teachers remembered being down on their hands and knees digging in the snow with their students. Mrs. Savage said, "The roads weren't ever cleared and I remember many a morning sinking in the snow or mud every step of the way." Mrs. Hill's comment was, "If you wanted to have school you



had to do it. I didn't stop to think how hard it was." Their only cleaning implements were a broom and a bucket.

W. E. B. DuBois discovered in 1910 that, in many of the farming communities and the rural areas in general, the African-Americans had built the school/church buildings themselves or purchased them using their own hard-earned money.

In many parts of the South Negroes are paying into the school fund in the way of taxes much more than they are receiving in actual appropriations for their school facilities. Wherever this is true it may be said that the Negroes are helping to pay for the education of the white children while the states are depriving the Negro children of their just share of school facilities (Du Bois and Dill, 1911, page 8).

The actual expenditures on buildings for white and African-American children in the first fifty years of this century leave no doubt that the physical facilities were unequal.

Of the \$145,600,629 investment that the Southern states had made in public school property by 1915, only \$13,996,342 or 9.6 percent had been made in the interest of the Negro schools. In fact, the average white school child at this time was studying in an educational structure whose per capita investment value was \$29.84. This was more than four times the \$7.34 per capita value representative of the Negro schools. The investment values of white and Negro schools reached \$812,873,522 and \$77,326,009, respectively, in 1930, but the Negro schools proportional share remained constant (Bullock, 1970, Page 182).

Just as the physical facility is important to an understanding of the cultural environment of these teachers and students, so too is the length of the term. These children were the offspring of tenant farmers or share croppers. Therefore, the cycle of the farm year was the

major determinant of school attendance. Each interviewee reported that her teaching year was usually six months long. The school year for the white students was nine months long. However, the school year was sometimes even shorter than six months for the African-American students due to the vagaries of weather, planting, and harvesting. These teachers did report holding class at different times of the day in order to accommodate the needs of the farm. Mrs. Reese explained, "Parents were totally supportive of the school and the need to bring in a crop versus having their children learning was a source of frustration for them." Mrs. Savage said, "Sometimes school would not open until ten to allow time to work in the fields beginning at dawn."

With the inequalities in buildings, supplies, and shortened school years, it was not surprising to find these teachers' salaries were below those of white teachers. From 1930 to 1933, Mrs. Reese earned seventy-five dollars a month, which she reported was the highest pay for an African-American teacher in the county. Mrs. Hill (1933-34) earned fifty dollars a month while most white teachers earned ninety dollars. Mrs. Key (1938-40) earned sixty-five dollars a month while Mrs. Savage (1941) earned fifty dollars. These teachers all paid between \$2.50 and \$5.00 a week for room and board. They returned to Paris on weekends.

Even though a loaf of bread averaged five cents during this time, the salaries were low in comparison to those of

white teachers. In addition to a lack of consistency within the counties of the same state, there was no consistency from state to state. One could find evidence of low wages for African-American teachers throughout the Cotton Belt. Texas, it is reported by Du Bois, Bond, Bullock, and other educational historians, did pay a little better than her Southern neighbors. Texas paid salary to African-American teachers which was, on the average, three fourths of that paid the white teachers.

Such severely constrained physical and financial circumstances did not lead these four African-American teachers to a state of depression or despair. In fact, just the opposite was true. Their determination to produce students with solid academic foundations was in the content and methodology of the curriculum they designed. None of them were told what, how, or when to teach by the white trustees. They knew that they were to teach everyone who appeared in that one room. Having been either education or social science majors in college, having aunts who were or had been teachers in similar situations, and possessing a lot of "Mother-Wit," they began to instruct grades one through seven. The average class size for the informants was from twenty-one to thirty, although it varied. Mrs. Hill reported having as few as ten to twelve some days. Mrs. Reese said, "I was never sure how many I would have daily - sometimes even the mothers, fathers, and grandparents would come." What at first appeared to be a

formidable task was made manageable, interesting, and fun. These teachers developed their curriculum based on their academic training and the environmental resources found in the home, church, and community.

#### A Typical School Day

The days were divided into lessons on English grammar, spelling, writing, reading; geography (local, state, national, and international); U. S. and Texas history, and social studies (family, state, national); music (songs, dance); literature (poems, plays, riddles, folktales, ghost stories, proverbs); math; science; health; and physical education.

7:00 a.m.	Teacher arrived, swept, made fire, washed blackboard.
8:00-8:30	Students arrived. If bad weather, allowed time for students to warm up. Devotional exercises consisted of prayer, Pledge of Allegiance, and a song, the latter usually a spiritual. Some frequently used spirituals were: Down by the River Side, Roll Jordan Roll, Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, and Li' Daniel Play on Your Harp. Poem or Bible verses were also used. Mrs. Key wrote the following prayer and used it in her classes. The students first were told to repeat after her. After a couple of days of repeating after

her, she instructed them to repeat with her. Next, they repeated it together while she listened. In about a week, she allowed individual students to lead the prayer and the other students joined on the second verse. The mechanics of the oral tradition were employed in the process used by Mrs. Key in her employment of the prayer as an instructional device.

God We Thank Thee for last night  
And for Today's Pleasant Light.  
For Rest and Food and Loving Care  
And All That Makes Our World so Fair.

Help Us To Do The Things We Should  
To Be To Others Kind and Good  
In All We Do - Work and Play  
May We Grow More Loving Every Day.

8:30-9:30      Grades One, Two, and Three were started on alphabet or spelling. Grade Four worked on grammar. Grade Five would be diagramming sentences or reviewing parts of speech. Grade Six would be writing short stories, rhymes, or proverbs. Grade Seven would be reading. The teachers reported that by the time they had organized each group of grades, the first group had usually finished or had questions.

9:30-10:00      Recitation, sometimes individually with

the teacher or without the teacher as a group to each other.

10:00-11:00 History, Geography, Political Science

11:00-12:00 Poetry Reading; Literature; Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Longfellow, Contee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and other authors were used. Sometimes the Brer Rabbit folktales were used.

12:00-12:15 or 12:30 Recess

12:15-12:30 Math

12:30-1:30 Science

1:30-2:30 Health

2:30-3:00 Review - Assignments

Mrs. Savage explained a funny incident that happened to her in an effort to keep herself warm.

I was standing in front of the room reading to the class when I heard a couple of the students laugh. I asked what was funny. One little girl raised her hand and said, 'Your flannels are showing.' I said thank you, reached down, pulled them up and kept right on with the lesson. I wasn't embarrassed because the kids wore them and so did their parents and grandparents.

Mrs. Key:

I had all of the students draw maps of Texas and put Skidmore Prairie on them. Then they had to put in the rivers and the adjoining states. Next, I had them put in their house, school/church, general store and the home of the major white farmers from whom their parents rented their farms. The students wrote the names of the crops produced there and drew the roads to market.

Each teacher reported having discussions about the "Juneteenth Celebrations." (Texas was not notified of the Emancipation Proclamation when everyone else heard about it in January, 1863.) "Texas didn't receive the word until June 19th." To this day, African-Americans throughout Texas celebrate "Juneteenth." In fact, Black Texans in other regions of the United States still celebrate this holiday.

Frequently, one grade would be working on one subject, while another would be involved with another academic area. The specific time delineations are those of the researcher. The respondents each emphasized that they had to be flexible and often allowed more time for a subject based on student need and interest.

Division of the school day and students into ability groups was very important. Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Key both reported that their grandmother made their first lesson plan. Their grandmother explained to them that the most important idea to remember was "to meet the student where they were and take them where you wanted them to go." They explained to the researcher that this meant not all of the students would have the same knowledge base - even if they were the same age; the grade levels would sometimes overlap and a student who is slow in arithmetic may be very good in reading or vice versa. Grandmother advised both teachers to "remember to work in a circle - begin with the primary grades and go around the room in circular fashion." She further explained the need to be flexible and observe how

the children were feeling and reacting to each lesson, the class, the community - this meant that community problems as well as joys often were brought to the school - a good teacher had to be alert to this and either diffuse, incorporate, ignore, or offer an explanation in the classroom. "The community offered excellent opportunities for generating the content or examples for lesson plans." Their grandmother emphasized the importance of planning. She told them to be prepared for the unexpected, student absences, parents attending school, foul weather, and for lessons to not always be heard the way they were intended to be heard. These "words of wisdom" have stayed with Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Key all of their lives. They reported that she was not quoting from teacher-training textbooks, but from her heart and her many years in the classroom. They both said "she loved children and never stopped teaching even after she retired." (Key, Savage)

Not all of the activities took the allotted time, nor did they occur daily. Each interviewee reported that a variety of activities was occurring simultaneously. In the morning, as soon as there was any degree of warmth in the room, devotions began with a different student being in charge each day. Each teacher commented on how well the pupils knew the Bible and the spirituals, even the young children. Mrs. Key said, "The parents, usually the grandmothers, taught the children the Bible stories." Mrs. Savage, Hill, and Reese explained that even the parents who



could not read knew the Bible and every home had a Bible in it that also had births, deaths, and marriages listed. Mrs. Key said "Whenever I would visit any of my students' homes, they always made me welcome and showed me their family Bible."

### The Importance of the Bible

The Bible was more than a Holy Book to be used only on Sundays. It encompassed the sermons of the preachers, the stories handed down from slavery about freedom, justice, and what the Lord did to and for "His people." At mealtime, especially dinner, when the entire family was gathered, after the grace was given, each person at the table said a different Bible verse. "Often the meaning of the verses were explained and the workings of the Lord were explained to the young people by their parents and/or grandparents."

(Key) "Children were frequently corrected with a verse from the Bible or a Spiritual." (Savage)  
     Sister, you better mind  
     How you walk on the cross,  
     Your foot might slip  
     An' your soul get lost.

    The Devil is a liar  
     An' a conjurer too,  
     If you don't look out  
     He'll conjure you.

The Lord was an active participant in their daily lives. When sinners were being called forward to join the church, Baptist and Methodist ministers often used the phrase:  
 "Come and take God as your personal Savior."

A humorous method used by ministers and the older members of the community to make a point about what "acting

ugly" could lead to was a story overheard by Mrs. Key. This one was very popular and told at church socials and camp meetings. In the classroom, all she had to do was say to the students, "Remember the Cain and Abel story" and the naughtiness would cease:

### Origin of the Races

The old preacher said:

The question of which race existed first, the white or the Black, and how the other finally developed from the original, has long agitated the scientific brain in vain. It is not a question for science. Brothers and Sisters of God gathered here this morning and you sinners too, the first man the Good Lord made he named Adam. The first woman, he named Eve. They were blessed with two children. You know - Children are a Blessing - even when they don't do right; even when times are hard - Children are a Blessing! They called their children Cain and Abel. Now everyone knows that the Good Lord made us in His own image - Look at each other - What color are you? We are Black - Brown - Not White - Thank God! Praise the Lord! Well, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel looked like Us - Black.

Now Cain was always getting into trouble. You know how some folks are - they don't believe fire will burn - no matter how often you tell them - until their coattail is singed. Well, Cain was also jealous of his brother Abel and one day in a fit of anger when the Devil was particularly busy, Cain killed Abel.

The Lord came up behind Cain and asked him: "Cain, where is your brother Abel?" Cain was a sassy Negro and didn't take nothing from nobody - You all know folks like that! Cain didn't even turn to see who was asking the question. He just answered in a smart way, "Am I really my brother's keeper? I don't have him in my pocket. I think he is off somewhere being good." The Lord does not like for us to disrespect him. He made us and

we should remember he can be good to us but he can rain down fire and thunder too. He asked again - in a very loud voice - sounded like a mighty thunderclap - Cain, where is your brother?" Then Cain turned and saw the wrath of God. He became so frightened and scared down inside his very bones that his hair stood up, straight out - slick as you please and his skin turned pale and then - Christian fear washed over him like a Mighty River and bleached him white. Now, Brothers and Sisters - that's where the first white came from. "Remember my children - White Folks Been Evil a Long Time."

Many lessons can be taught from this story. It is a creation myth, a folktale teaching survival tactics, an historical narrative, and a yardstick presenting consequences of good and bad behavior. West African parallels are numerous, including examples depicting white as a sign of evil or evil spirits.

Working with the primary grades first while the older youngsters completed assignments was reported frequently. The teachers used the blackboard a great deal. Oral recitation as well as assigning material orally occurred frequently.

Each respondent reported that the textbooks they were given were always no less than two years old when they received them. Also, as Mrs. Savage explained, "we would not receive books before December." She, as did the other interviewees, brought materials from their home. Many of the lessons were conducted orally. For example, each teacher reported writing the spelling words on the board; the arithmetic exercises were explained and the problems -

both number, word, and story problems - were worked on the board first by the teachers. The children had their slates and penny tablets which they used to copy the lessons and to write their answers. The teachers had spelling bees, oral reading; stories were written on the board and then read by the students; the students were given assignments to write stories, songs, poems, riddles, proverbs, and to draw. There was a lot of small group work - more by ability grouping than by strict adherence to grade levels. The teachers read to the students often. Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Savage said their students enjoyed the ghost stories.

One of the ghost stories recalled by Mrs. Key and Mrs. Savage was this one:

Texas is a state where hunting and fishing are favorite sports. In a remote, lonely, and feared area in the woods, a long way from any town stands a lonely, old, weather-worn cabin. It has been there longer than anyone living. It is known as the haunted cabin in the woods and meeting place for all ghosts, haints, spirits, and witches. Everyone knew about this cabin and many a weary hunter has slept out in the cold because even with guns and rifles, he would be too nervous to venture inside. Those who did always ran out screaming before dawn.

One hunter was telling some newcomers about this place. He said, he "had been so cold one night he didn't care about any ghosts and besides, he didn't believe in them anyway." He went in, started a fire and along about midnight - just as he got warm - he began to hear a low moan, then a groan, then a wail. Next, the fire went out and came on again three times. Next, there was a mighty roar and the room filled with smoke. "I ran and ran and didn't stop until I had put six miles between myself and that

cabin. I don't believe that there is a man alive who can stay in that cabin from dark until dawn. In fact, I've got twenty-five dollars for anyone who does." Well now, you know there is always one who has to take a dare and a bet. John said, "Make that seventy-five dollars, a pan of corn bread, a big, black iron skillet, enough pork to fill me up and some collard greens and sweet potato pie and I'll stay a week. Don't forget a jug of ice cold spring water. The hunters all agreed to give John what he asked and that he only had to remain inside the cabin from dark until dawn. They were going to keep watch outside - at a safe distance away.

John arrived about an hour before dark - went in and started a big fire in the fireplace. He put his pots on to heat. Then he put that big heavy iron skillet on with his pork chops in it to cook over the fire. Then he sat down, crossed his legs, lit his pipe, and smelled his dinner cooking. John was just about to turn his chops for the second time when he heard a noise. He ignored it.

He heard a groan, then another. John said: "Mr. Wind I know that's you; but you'll get none of this supper tonight." Next came a loud groan and this time smoke came out of the fireplace and danced around John's feet. John said - "smoke - a little smoke can't hurt me."

At that very moment, the smoke formed itself into a strange shape and took a seat on the hearth. This form said, "it's just you and me and my dinner here." John got angry and grabbed for the ghost. The ghost hit John a mighty blow throwing John up against the wall. As the room filled with huge smoke forms, John said, "I love corn bread, I love pork chops, I love collards and sweet potato pie, but I love me best of all," as he jumped up and ran out of the cabin - his feet never touching the floor or ground until he arrived in town. The men watching reported seeing John leap from the cabin with horrible noises and foul smelling smoke coming out of it. No one has ever tried to stay in that cabin since.

On bad weather days, recess was inside and the students were taught songs, had riddle contests and played other games. "The pupils were very good about sharing what they knew with myself and the other young people." (Savage) "Recipes were brought from home and taught to everyone." (Key) The easier ones were sometimes made there with each person bringing an ingredient.

Stories such as these made interesting reading lessons. They were also used to teach grammar, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure. Allowing the students to read them or tell them enabled the teachers to teach them correct pronunciation and punctuation.

Writing by the students was done on slates, blackboard, and, in a very few cases, on penny tablets. To obtain basic supplies such as pencils (pens were not used), chalk, erasers, or paper, each teacher had to go and ask one of the white trustees. Trustees might give the teacher one piece of each item requested or a handful. Mrs. Key reported "getting tired of this approach" and told the white trustee that she had made a list of needed supplies for the term. He told her to go to his store and get whatever she needed. When the African-American gentleman designated as the liaison between the Black people and the whites saw all of the supplies she had purchased, "He was shocked!" This Black man said no one had ever stood up to this trustee like that before. There was no such thing as a written budget given to the teachers.

### Folkloric Form and Function in the Classroom

The customs, traditions, survival tactics, and the etiquette governing relations between African-Americans and whites in these rural Southern communities could be found in the various forms of Black folklore. The folkloric forms--folktales, proverbs, rhymes, songs, riddles, creation stories, praise poems, and lullabies-- represent the continuity of an oral tradition. The transition of the folkloric forms from the largely unlettered African-American members of the community to the classroom was accomplished through the curriculum developed by the teachers in this study. The function changed to fit the lesson. There are elements of humor, social criticism, irony, hope, faith, and a few triumphs contained within the folkloric forms.

#### Lullabies and Rhymes

Doing "memory work" in the classroom was an extension of the cultural tradition of the African American living in these rural areas. "The reliance on Mrs. So and So or Mr. So and So for information about planting, baking, building, canning, sewing, and other daily chores was a natural part of how these people lived every day." (Key) "Memory and the ability to remember the old days was very important." (Reese) "You see, for example, no one cooked using a recipe book, or built a house from a blue print." (Hill) Alice Bacon captured both the flavor and the cultural continuity of the African-American oral tradition in this statement:

In many homes, by the firesides in the  
softest chairs and the warmest corners,

are sitting the old folks who have come out of slavery, who have preserved in memories, strengthened by the necessity of remembering what could not be committed to paper - the traditions and beliefs of the old days (Bacon, 1969).

Lullabies and rhymes were used by the teachers in different ways - doing "memory work," as recess activities, and as a part of reading class. The students were encouraged to share ones they knew with others who didn't.

Giving the students assignments such as reciting rhymes and singing as well as reciting lullabies caused them to ask their parents and grandparents for help. This in turn led to children bringing to school older rhymes their parents and grandparents knew. These teachers explained that they used these rhymes in class to assist in reading, to aid the pupils in remembering something more complex, as well as to teach poetry. Sometimes the class had contests and the pupil who recited the most rhymes correctly in a set amount of time won a prize. An example of one lullaby used often by Mrs. Key was, "Rock-a-bye Baby Bunting, Daddy's Gone A-Hunting to find a Rabbit Skin." Mrs. Reese and Mrs. Savage explained that many of these rhymes were handed down from slavery, as part of an oral tradition. Another rhyme used to remind the students to pay attention was:

There was a little grasshopper  
That was always on the jump,  
And cause he never look ahead  
He always got bumped on the head.

This one served as a fun introduction to geography:

Alabama Negro say he love mush.  
Tennessee Negro say, "Good Lord, hush!"



Fifteen cents in the panel of the fence,  
South Carolina Negro hasn't got any sense.

That Kentucky Negro just think he's fine,  
'Cause he drink that gooseberry wine.

I've heard that twenty years ago  
That Mississippi Negroes have to sleep on  
the floor.

Louisiana Negro fall off the bed,  
And break his head on a pone o' corn bread.

Religion was the subject of rhymes also:

Fisherman Peter was on the sea;  
Christ came down from Galilee  
He say drop yo' net and follow me.

The preceding rhyme was used to show that everyone was  
important and deserved a chance. The rhyme given below was  
a favorite among the older people in the community.

Down in the valley;  
Down on my knees;  
I prayed so hard  
'Til I heard God sneeze.

Teachers, too, were the subjects of rhymes:

The Lord has come from Heaven above,  
To bless us poor little scholars;  
He hired a nice ma'm to teach our school  
And paid her forty dollars.

The respect that the parents and students had for the  
teachers is expressed in the one above. The low pay was  
recognized also.

Mrs. Savage used this one:

Wire, Brair, Limber Lock  
Three Geese In a Flock  
Some flew East  
Some flew West.  
Some flew over the cuckoo's nest.

This was good with the little ones for learning their

numbers and naming the birds.

Mrs. Savage recalled another rhyme that the children often played during recess:

Little Sally Walker  
Sat in a saucer...

The frustration of always working hard and still receiving less is expressed in the following:

An apple is an apple  
And cheese is cheese;  
White folks are sure  
Hard to please.

The teachers discussed the injustices heaped upon the Black people. The teachers explained that these rhymes often relieved tension, allowed the students to relax, and yet learn at the same time. The rhymes fitted into many different lessons. These are just a few examples.

If you are feeling lonesome, if you are  
feeling blue,  
Call on the Lord, he will surely answer  
you.

When you get married and move upstairs,  
Don't fall down putting on airs.

When you marry, don't marry a Fool,  
Marry a boy that went to School.

A little today and a little tomorrow,  
Come back again, but do not borrow.

You can wish for a nickle  
You can wish for a dime,  
You can wish for a lot

But hard work is how I got mine.

## Songs

Spirituals were sung in the morning as a part of morning devotional exercises - Swing Low Sweet Chariot; Go Down Moses; A Little Talk With Jesus Makes It Right; Lord, I Want To Be A Christian In-a My Heart; Rise Up Shepherd An' Foller; and many others. They were also sung by the children at concerts organized by the teachers - Mary Had A Baby, Yes, Lord; Were You There When They Crucified My Lord; 'Zekiel Saw The Wheel; Dry Bones; I Know The Lord's Laid His Hands On Me; There's A Hand Writing On The Wall; Walk Together Children; Steal Away; to name just a few. History and geography lessons were often explained by using the people and places sung about in the spirituals. Songs stressing work and education were taught to the children. The following illustrates this:

There is a school on earth begun  
Supported by the Holy One.  
I had a little book, an' I read it through,  
I got my Jesus as well as you;

Another: O, write my name,  
O, write my name,  
O, write my name,  
De Angels in heab'n  
Guineter write my name.

Come down, come down, My Lord, come down,  
My Lord's a-writin all de time  
An' take me up to wear de crown  
My Lord's a writin' all de time  
He sees all you do  
He hears all you say;

Perseverance and the rewards of sticking to a task until it is well done were demonstrated through this spiritual:

The road is rocky here below,

But Jesus will come by an' by.  
 But Jesus leads me as I go,  
 Jesus'll come by an' by.  
 Keep er-inchin' erlong,  
 Keep er-inchin' erlong,  
 Jesus will come by an' by.

You can hinder me here but you can't  
 hinder me there.  
 For the Lord in Heaven will hear my  
 prayer.  
 The enemy's great but my Cap'n is strong,  
 I'm fightin' for the city and the time  
 ain't long.

Both Mrs. Key and Mrs. Savage have beautiful voices and sang in churches, in concerts, in choirs, and at weddings. In fact, they were a part of a quartet that sang and danced. They have also directed choirs in Texas and New Mexico. Until recently, Mrs. Savage was an active member of the Fremont United Methodist church concert choir in Portland. Because of their musical knowledge, music was an integral part of their curriculum. "The old songs were the best." (Key) "My students knew and enjoyed singing the spirituals." (Savage) You could do more with a song than just sing it. (Reese, Key, Savage, Hill). The location of places and bodies of water named in the spirituals provided the basis for many geography lessons. The people named in the spirituals also were used to teach geography and World History.

Go Down Moses  
 Way down in Egypt Land,  
 Tell ole Pharoah,  
 To Let My People Go.

Roll Jordan, Roll,  
 Roll Jordan, Roll  
 I want to go to Heaven when I die,

Joshua Fit de Battle of Jerico, Jerico,  
 Jerico,  
 Joshua Fit de Battle of Jerico  
 An' the walls come tumblin' down.  
 You may talk about yo' king of Gideon,  
 You may talk about your man ob Saul,  
 There's none like good ole Joshua!

Other spirituals that were remembered were Deep River, Walk Together Children, Ride On King Jesus, Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child, Steal Away, Listen to the Lambs, Weary Traveler, Get On Board Little Children, A Little Talk With Jesus Made It Right, I Know the Lord's Laid His Hand On Me, I Thank God I'm Free At Last, 'Zekiel Saw the Wheel, Were You There When They Crucified My Lord, Rise Up Shepherd And Follow, and many others.

Play songs and nonsense verse were used both in class and on the playground (field). One song used to teach writing was Kitty Cat, Kitty Cat, Roll the Ball. Mrs. Key reported that, "As I said the words of the jingle I wrote on the board making my hand strokes, curves, and swirls fit the rhythm of the song." "The children repeated the words and hand actions imaginarily in front of them - using the air for a tablet." "Then they copied the song on their slate or tablet." (Key)

#### Counting Songs and Rhymes

Out goes the Rat  
 Out goes the Cat  
 Out goes the Lady with the See-saw Hat.  
 O-U-T spells out and out goes you.

Recess provided opportunities for learning also. The rhyme above was a favorite of teachers and students. The children played many games taught them by their grandparents. The teachers taught them others they had learned at home. Additional verses were added because a child had to leave the circle each time one was completed. Another:

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.  
 All good people go to Heaven.  
 All bad people go down Below  
 To keep company with old Jimbo.  
 O-U-T spells out and out goes you.

Another:

Eeny, meeny, miney-mo.  
 Catch a boy by his toe.  
 If he hollers, let him go.  
 Eeny, meeny, miney, mo.  
 Out goes you.

Eeny, meeny dixie, deeny.  
 Hit him a lick and join the queeny.  
 Time, time, merry go round.  
 Eighteen-Hundred and Ninety-nine.  
 O-U-T spells out and out goes you.

Counting songs and games were used to teach arithmetic.

A favorite of Mrs. Key was:

Step it, Step it, Step it  
 Ringing or Remin' for Me.

In this rhyming game, students stepped off the numbers as they were called. She also devised song games to teach fractions. Fruit was cut in pieces and the students had to answer questions such as: What is larger, one fourth or one eighth? The inches, feet, squares, and angles could be shown to the students by having them stand in ways to form the arithmetic symbols.

### Ring Games and Songs

Leader: Oh, Mary Mack,  
 Chorus: Mack, Mack  
 Leader: All dressed in Black,  
 Chorus: Black, black  
 Leader: With silver buttons  
 Chorus: Buttons, buttons  
 Leader: Up and down her back,  
 Chorus: Back, back.

"There were many, many verses to this one." (Savage) Mrs. Reese recalled playing Mary Mack herself as a child. Parts of others remembered were:

Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ (use of different children's names) went to the river  
 Chorus: To the River, river,  
 Leader: And I couldn't get across  
 Chorus: Couldn't cross, cross  
 Leader: And I paid one dollar  
 Chorus: One dollar, dollar  
 Leader: For the old grey horse,  
 Chorus: Grey horse, horse  
 Leader: Grey horse wouldn't ford  
 Chorus: Wouldn't ford, ford

Mrs. Hill recalled one entitled - "Wolf Over the Hill."  
 She did not remember any of the verses. Each respondent mentioned "Shoo Fly, Don't Bother Me" - sometimes called "Shoo Turkey."

Shoo, Shoo, Shoo, Shoo-fly don't bother me.  
 Shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo-fly don't bother me.  
 Oh, shoo-fly don't bother me.  
 Shoo, shoo-fly don't bother me.  
 Shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo-fly don't  
 bother me.  
 I belong to the bumble bee.

Another:

Leader: O little girl  
 Chorus: Yes Ma'm  
 Leader: Did you find any eggs today?  
 Chorus: Yes Ma'm  
 Leader: Did you give them to your mama?  
 Chorus: Yes Ma'm  
 Leader: Did your mama bake a cake?

Chorus: Yes Ma'm! Yes, Ma'm  
 Leader: Was it good Pound Cake?  
 Chorus: Yes Ma'm, Yes, Yes, Ma'm.  
 Leader: What did you do?  
 Chorus: Shake, shake, shake  
 Leader: What did you do?  
 Chorus: Shake it all down,  
 Shake it all down.

The following ring/song game required the participants to form a circle with one on the outside. The one on the outside ran around the circle. When the song ended, the outside child dropped something - handkerchief, glove, etc. - behind one of the children in the circle. This child tried to catch the one who dropped it before he could return to the vacated spot. If caught, that child remained "it"; if not caught, the new child became "it".

Lost my glove (handkerchief) yesterday  
 yesterday, yesterday, yesterday,  
 Found it today, today, today, today  
 All full of mud  
 Tossed it away  
 Tossed it away, away, away, away.

A good handclapping song reported by Mrs. Key was "Lil Liza Jane.

Work Songs reported were: John Henry - That Steel-Driving Man; Tone the Bell Easy; The Ballad of the Boll Weevil. These songs were also about people who performed superhuman feats, such as John Henry. This lament was heard in the fields, in church, and sung in school: "We Shall Overcome." Work songs such as these served as examples during discussions of American Literature and American History.



### Riddles and Proverbs

Sometimes, contests were held to see how many riddles the children knew. The proverbs were heard both in school and in the home. Biblical proverbs were often quoted by children and adult alike. Each teacher reported that the older people of the community were highly respected.

Respect for "grown folks" was taught to the children.

"These older residents were revered elder statesmen and viewed as the repositories of wisdom. I lived with one of the oldest ladies out there (Skidmore Prairie) - everyone came to her for something - advice, help with birthing, herbs and roots, or information about something that happened a long time ago." (Savage) Each of my respondents had been reared to respect and value older people. Mrs. Key lived with a family that had a grandmother in it who dispensed "wit and wisdom" to all. The elders of a family were cared for by their families. These seniors were loved and respected by the entire community. The whites often asked them for information about planting, medicine, and child-bearing and rearing. The respondents commented that the whites ignored the hypocrisy of their actions.

Mrs. Hill reported that sometimes when the weather was good, one of the parents would bring her lunch and would remain to talk. One proverb she learned from such a conversation was, "A mole does not see what his neighbor is doing." This proved very useful to her in the classroom because she used it to remind the students the importance of

doing one's own work. Sharing proverbs and riddling were heard at picnics and socials. In school, the teachers used them to teach moral values, ethics, to explain other ideas, and as fun activities on days they could not have recess outside.

- Licker talks mighty loud when it is let out of the jug.
- You can hide the fire, but what will you do with the smoke.
- Watch your head - You may be the carriage driver today, but tomorrow you could be plowing.
- The price of your hat is not the measure of your brain.
- The rich get richer and the poor get children.
- A little hole in your pocket is worse than a big one at the knee.
- Don't let your mouth say more than your back can stand.
- Old man know-it-all died last year.
- It takes two to make an argument.
- You'll lose your grip if you stop too often to admire your work.
- Don't blame the cow when the milk sours.
- Convertin' some sinners is sort of like tryin' to catch a greased pig.
- Don't fling all your power into a small job.
- Even a blind horse knows the way home.

Riddles proved to be very good in the classroom because they were fun and often illustrated a more complex idea. Sometimes riddles were used in classroom contests and were

generally regarded by all of these teachers as "good memory training."

A duck behind a duck,  
A duck before a duck,  
A duck between two duck.  
How many ducks are there?  
(answer: Three Ducks)

The following riddles were reported by these teachers as useful in science lessons:

- What follows you everywhere you go on a sunny day?  
- Your shadow.
- What goes and never comes back?  
- Your breath
- A stove cost ten dollars, a pipe cost five. What will the wood come to?  
- Wood comes to ashes.
- What is it that flies high and flies low, but hasn't got any wings?  
- Dust
- A house full, a yard full, a chimney full, No one can get a spoonful.  
- Smoke
- In your house there is a table. On the table is a plate. In the plate is a saucer. In the saucer is a cup. In the cup is a spoon. In the spoon is a drop of something each living person has.  
- A drop of blood.

An example used to teach both good listening skills and arithmetic:

Was twelve pears hanging high,  
And twelve pears hanging low;  
And twelve kings came riding by,  
And Each took a pear,  
And how many were left hanging there?  
- There were twenty-four. The  
man who took the pear was named Each.  
Therefore, he left twenty-three  
hanging there.

Several religious proverbs were recalled:

- Satan does his best work at night.
- Idle hands are the devil's workshop.
- Long sermons, short sermons - all the same
- to the devil.
- The Lord may not come when you call, but
- He is Always Right On Time.

The following riddles were used in class to show right from wrong, as writing exercises, and as examples of philosophy and ethics:

- The noise of the wheels does not measure
- the load of the wagon.
- You cannot dance until dawn with a borrowed
- drum.
- Don't trouble with something unless it
- troubles you.
- Not trying is a sure way to Fail.
- Still water runs deep, Shallow water prattles.
- You will reap just what you sow.
- Tongue hung in a hollow head just roll around
- and rattle.

### Stories of Creation and Sacred Tales

"All the kids knew the Creation story from Genesis."  
 (Hill) They had also heard variations on James Weldon Johnson's Poem, "The Creation: A Negro Sermon." The Biblical characters were used in spelling lists, the parables were a favorite - The Prodigal Son. The Adam and Eve story was adapted for presentation as a play for the community to see. The Christmas and Easter stories were favorites. Mrs. Key shared this incident:

There really wasn't anything like a raised stage with curtains or dressing rooms. I had a couple of the larger boys string a wire across the front of the room. Across this I hung sheets. The play was performed in the center and the ends were used as dressing rooms. I went out front to greet the parents and friends who had come to see the play. It was night - we only had oil lamps. As I turned to go back up front, I stopped. Behind the "curtain" the girls and boys could be seen as plain as day through the "curtain" as they changed into the costumes we had made. You see the oil lamps gave them clear outlines to the audience. There wasn't anything I could do because we had to have light. At least the boys were on one side and the girls on the other. But, the next excitement came not in the play - backstage again. Right in the middle of the performance somehow one of the lamps was overturned - caught the end of the "curtain" and a couple of the costumes. I put it out and the play never stopped but it was dark and smokey on one end.

Mrs. Reese talked about stories told by the preachers in their sermons - some in dialect that could be repeated word for word by several of her students. The spiritual, "Dry Bones" laid an interesting foundation for a health lesson.

#### Myths, Legends, Folktales

In these groups are found the Brer Rabbit, Mr. Fox, John Henry, and John stories. These stories showed up in the creative writing assignments by the pupils. Each of these teachers told how the people in the "rurals" and in Paris, Texas, told each other stories. Favorites also demonstrated the ways the Negroes outwitted the whites during slavery and after.

Parts of stories recalled were:

The farmer was talking to John and was describing his recent run of back luck. The farmer said: "John, I have just lost half my crop to drought; my back is painin' something awful; and my wagon just broke down and my mortgage payment is due. Times are really, really hard." John looked at the farmer and said, "Quit your complaining, you're still white, aren't you! You'll make it."

Mary had a little lamb,  
Its fleas were white as snow -  
For everywhere that Mary went  
Only white fleas could go!

Preachers and Sunday dinners - how much  
they ate depended upon their denomination!

"Many of these stories provided ways of teaching good values, the importance of truth, good friends, and the need to think before you act." Mrs. Reese remembered this:

One day, Mr. Fox was going down the road and saw a goose. "Good afternoon Sis Goose." Goose flew high up into a tree then spoke. Fox said, "Why you fly so high? You aren't afraid of me are you? Didn't you hear about the vote taken at the meeting?" "No," Mr. Fox, "I've been away - visiting a sick friend." "Well, there is a peace here now. No animal is going to hurt any other animal anymore. Come on down and I'll tell you all about it." Sis Goose thought about it for a little bit. Off in the distance there was a loud bark. Sounded like the cap't big hunting dog. The Fox was urging Goose to come down. Just as Sis Goose was about to descend, the dog appeared on the edge of the clearing. Mr. Fox began to back away. Goose asked Fox why he was trying to leave before Dog arrived - What about the vote? Mr. Fox said yes there was a vote, but not all of us voted for it.

"Ol Wives Tales were numerous":

- Full Moon - Dog howling means bad luck.
- If a conjure woman gets balls of your hair, she can make you crazy.

- If you are drowning and accidentally cross your hands, you will come to the surface and float. You are saved by the sign of the cross.
- Don't sweep a person's feet; it will make him lazy.
- Breaking a mirror brings seven years bad luck.
- Cleanliness is next to Godliness.
- Don't step on a crack it will break your back.
- Walking backward means you are cursing your Father and Mother.
- Bad luck for a lady to whistle.
- Cook Blackeye peas, collards, and pork on New Year's Day to have good luck during the year.
- If your right eye jumps, it is a sign of bad luck. If your left eye jumps, it is a sign of money.
- Don't sleep with your shoes under the bed or don't lay your hat on a bed - bad luck.
- Don't sweep your house out at night - the good will go with it.
- If your nose itches, company is coming.
- Put keys around your neck to stop a nose bleed.
- Whenever anyone dies, cover all mirrors and pictures in the house; no music can be played in the house until sometime after the funeral. No lipstick could be worn by bereaved females for a long time; all family members must always have on something black - a bow, a ribbon, etc., for mourning period; Mourning varied from one to seven years. The widow was definitely "looked down upon" if she married in less than a year.

Often, these stories were told outside of the classroom at major social events of the communities such as births, weddings, revivals, and funerals. Funerals provided a rich source of information because after the service (which could

last all day and into the evening) and the internment, everyone would return to the deceased's home or church for a communal meal. During this time, talk would inevitably move from the deceased to how it used to be, or to story telling. The whims of the whites and the evasion tactics employed were shared.

The use of charms and superstitions were commonplace. One that Mrs. Key said she was told had been handed down from slavery was the wearing of an ankle bracelet to ward off evil spirits.

Other activities which were designed and utilized by each of these teachers points to the inventiveness and ability to utilize all situations as learning experiences. What the researcher calls the "Rabbit Story" was related independently by Mrs. Savage and Mrs. Key. There were differences employed by each of these teachers. For example, Mrs. Savage had a young man in her class who could run fast enough to catch rabbits, which he did. But all four teachers commented on rabbit season and how they wove it into the curriculum.

#### Rabbit Story

Mrs. Savage told the researcher:

During rabbit season I would combine recess and science or recess and math. Sometimes recess and a health lesson worked well. Remember that the school sat on stumps so you could see under it. The pupils and I would go outside together. Before going out I would give out the assignments - some would run with the dogs chasing the rabbits toward us; the one young man I had who could run as fast as the rabbit I stationed near



the school; the little ones would be all around. When the rabbit came our way, my big boy who could run fast would take off. He never failed to catch most of them. Then we would divide up the work, skinning, cutting so the blood would drain, and hanging on the line. Then we would discuss lessons - math, cooperation, health, even science. We all had a good time and our dinner. Everyone would get one - maybe not on the same day, but before the season ended we all had rabbit. Whenever there was only one, the students always gave it to me.

Mrs. Key explained it thusly:

It taught cooperation, responsibility, science, math, and physical education. The dogs of the children came to school with them. They always stayed outside - during recess the kids played with them. Well, during rabbit season, the dogs bark a lot and I thought, why not make use of them and teach the kids at the same time. So before we went outside we talked about what we were going to do. I let the kids choose if they wanted to run with the dogs into the woods to chase the rabbits back toward us at school or stay up there to help shoo them out from under the school. I did pick my largest and physically well-coordinated boys to be along the front of the building to throw a lethal rock at them as they came out. Then we would skin and cut the rabbit, hang it up until school ended and then we would each take one home. If there weren't enough to go around, I made a rotation system. We would eat our lunch and return inside.

You know "I had a hot lunch program. The students would bring eggs and powdered milk. I would boil the eggs and mix the milk and we ate this with whatever else we had brought from home."

Mrs. Reese and Mrs. Hill did not give specifics about how they incorporated the rabbit season into their lesson. However, each of them said rabbit was a staple in the diet for the families and the little boys enjoyed hunting.

### Contributions of Parents

There were many activities requiring the students to make things. They made little animals for a manger scene or for a lesson on farming; or potholders; or doilies. Materials often were brought from home. Money was raised through the sale of pies, homemade jellies, bread, fish fries, and other things.

"We would search for roots and herbs and discuss what they were and how they could be used. The poisonous ones were explained and the students were taught how to recognize them." (Key)

"Since we didn't have any budget, the whole Black community would donate pies, fried chicken and other food we sold to raise money we needed. We bought things like paper tablets, pencils, erasers, material for making costumes for plays and concerts." "The food was so good even the whites would come." Traveling shows, singers, visiting church choirs, and quartets performed in the school/church. The teacher was given a part of any money that was collected. It was used to buy supplies for the school.

"One day, my kids and I were outside for recess and the school bus for the white kids came past. It passed twice everyday taking them to and from school. My students were playing basketball. The bus stopped--they wanted to play us. I talked to the driver and the two of us agreed that it was okay but insisted on no name-calling and no fighting.

They played. We beat them, but they continued to stop whenever they saw us playing--baseball also sometimes."

(Key)

Each teacher reported having very few discipline problems. "They were too eager to learn to waste time getting into trouble. These kids were hard workers, they didn't have time for foolishness." (Hill)

These African-American "families, some of whom not only remembered slavery but had relatives right there who had been slaves, had great respect for the teacher and education." Many of the parents could not read or write, but they taught their children what they knew, the poems, stories, the Bible, and the etiquette African-Americans needed to know in order to survive among the white people. (Reese, Hill, Key, Savage)

#### Interviewees Summary

At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher asked how these experiences were viewed and to summarize their educational philosophies. They each expressed their joy in observing the growth and development of those children; how eager they were to learn, "They were like sponges, they soaked up everything; there was so much to be done but I didn't mind the hard work because we were all trying and you saw immediate results; there is no feeling in the world like the one you get when an idea or a problem you have taught but the kid has struggled with becomes clear to

that student; struggle is not new to Black people but with love, courage, self-respect and faith, we'll make it." (Key)

These teachers reported that parents were committed to their childrens' learning and, sometimes when planting was over, the parents would come and do the lessons as students. "It was really a joy to teach those children and it was my most enjoyable teaching experience; I believe in giving the very best that I can wherever I am; I also believe in the wisdom and justice of God; He helped me be successful out there - so did those kids and their parents; Of course, my own academic work and family training helped also." (Savage)

Using a variety of words, each respondent expressed sentiments that education must facilitate development, change, and maturation in individuals young and old; yet it must also be germane for the individual in terms of culture and environment. The total mental, physical, and spiritual enhancement of the student must be in the mind of the teacher as she develops the lessons and delivers them. (Reese, Key, Savage, Hill)

"Children respond well to you when they know you care about them; I cared about kids learning all my life; we didn't have a lot of material things out there but we had what counts and they learned and so did I." (Hill)

"My years in the one room schools were teaching in the purest sense - willing and eager students, parental cooperation, and fun. Black people stuck together in those days and we accomplished something." (Reese)

Education is the medium by which a people are prepared for the creation of their own particular civilization and the advancement and glory of its own race.

- Marcus Garvey

## Chapter 4

### Analysis and Conclusions

#### Introduction

The preceding chapters of this paper have stated that there are very strong indicators that a centuries-old, African oral tradition was part of the educational techniques used by four, female, African-American teachers in one-room, rural, segregated southern schools. Indeed, each student carries his heritage with him into the classroom. In this chapter, the researcher will suggest that studying traditional cultural patterns and incorporating them into education systems present valuable opportunities for improving teacher-training, curriculum development, and long range educational policies, especially in regard to the education of African-Americans.

The world view of this researcher is derived from a West African cosmology. It encompasses Man-Nature-God in an interconnected unbroken circle of interactions. Coupled with this, the researcher is a product of the African-American adaptive experience. Having been a student in segregated public schools from Grades One through Twelve, the researcher began her search for both topic and methodology where the literature of educational anthropology recommends one begin--within one's self.

The attitudes, spirituality, ethical, and educational development of the investigator is derived from a strong family tradition, a tradition that valued education as a

life-long pursuit, not merely beginning and ending with formal schooling inside brick buildings. Armed with a philosophical base, formal education, and college years set to the discordant harmonies of the sixties, the researcher's quest for links between West African oral traditions, African-Americans, and the role of African-American women as teachers in one-room, segregated, rural southern schools emerged as topics to be investigated.

Two significant events took place in the life of the researcher which confirmed the credibility of her evolving theory. The first was attendance of a summer institute on African and African-American history, culture, and teaching techniques for teachers at Cornell University. Professor John Henrik Clarke was the first consultant/ lecturer for the six-week institute. His sense of self worth, dignity, and academic scholarship was both overwhelming and awe-inspiring. He was the first person the researcher asked whether or not there could be a connection between West African oral tradition and African-American women teachers in one-room, segregated, rural schools. He felt it was a worthy research topic. A six-week summer study tour to Ghana, Togo, Dahomey, and Nigeria was the second significant event leading to the formulation of some of the research reported here.

In each country visited, the researcher lived on college campuses and received instruction from African scholars in African history, culture, political science,

geography, and anthropology. There were visits to small, rural communities, major cities, and former slave forts such as Elmina in Ghana. Many cultural activities were attended, including the installation of the Asantehene in Accra. (The Asantehene is the traditional leader of the Ashanti people.) Elders, griots, and other leaders told of the history, folktales, and legends of their people.

Those experiences, coupled with a search of the literature in cultural anthropology, curriculum development, African-American studies, and educational anthropology, confirmed the researcher's belief that the use of the West African oral tradition in folklore had not been studied in terms of its application by African-American women teachers in segregated schools. A visit to the Schomburg library in New York; the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans; and many conversations with the late Professor Thomas C. Hogg confirmed the results of the literature search and the need for such a study.



### Analysis

The following table, taken from Melville Herskovits' The New World Negro, denotes a scale of intensity of Africanisms not in terms of total cultures, but of surviving aspects of culture within different Black communities in the New World. Herskovits cautions that "since it is apparent that in every part of the New World where Negroes live, excepting only the Guiana Bush, class differences operate so as to make for variation in the number and intensity of Africanisms within each Negro group, our table will record only that degree of retention for each group which is closest to African custom." Table I, page 140, offers additional support to the thesis that there are numerous African survivals in folklore and music in the rural southern United States.

"Herskovits shows that in the rural Southern United States, folklore and music are quite African and language is somewhat African. In fact, no cultural aspect is described as having only a trace of African custom or being without any African influence" (Hogg, conversation, 1983).

This table (Table I) is a graphic representation of what was revealed in the literature and from conversations with scholars. However, only after questioning the four African-American women teachers about their experiences in those one-room, rural schools did the researcher have evidence that folklore was a significant part of the curriculum. In addition, this folklore had its roots in the

TABLE I\*

SCALE OF INTENSITY OF NEW WORLD AFRICANISMS  
(Only the greatest degree of retention is indicated for each group)

	Tech- nology	Eco- nomic	Social Organi- zation	Non-Kinship Institutions	Reli- gion	Magic	Art	Folk- lore	Music	Lan- guage
Guiana (bush)	b	b	a	a	a	a	b	a	a	b
Guiana (Paramaribo)	c	c	b	c	a	a	e	a	a	c
Haiti (peasant)	c	b	b	c	a	a	d	a	a	c
Haiti (urban)	e	d	c	c	b	b	e	a	a	c
Brazil (Bahia-Recife)	d	d	b	d	a	a	b	a	a	a
Brazil (Porto Alegre)	e	e	c	d	a	a	e	a	a	c
Brazil (Maranhao-rural)	c	c	b	e	c	b	e	b	b	d
Brazil (Maranhao-urban)	e	d	c	e	a	b	e	d	a	b
Cuba	e	d	c	b	a	a	b	b	a	a
Jamaica (Maroons)	c	c	b	b	b	a	e	a	a	c
Jamaica (Morant Bay)	e	c	b	b	a	a	e	a	a	a
Jamaica (general)	e	c	d	d	b	b	e	a	b	c
Honduras (Black Caribs)**	c	c	b	b	b	a	e	b	c	e
Trinidad (Port of Spain)	e	d	c	b	a	a	e	b	a	e
Trinidad (Toco)	e	d	c	c	c	b	e	b	b	d
Mexico (Guerrero)	d	e	b	b	c	b	e	b	?	e
Columbia (Choco)	d	d	c	c	c	b	e	b	e	e
Virgin Islands	e	d	c	d	e	b	c	b	b	d
U.S. (Gullah Islands)	c	c	c	d	c	b	c	a	b	b
U.S. (Rural South)	d	c	c	d	c	b	c	b	b	c
U.S. (Urban North)	e	c	c	d	c	b	c	d	b	c

a: very African b: quite African c: somewhat African d: a little African e: trace of African customs, or absent ? : no report

\* Derivations of the listings in Table I are given at the end of the chapter. \*\*Carib Indian influences are strong in this culture.

African-American slave experience, thereby leading to the conclusion that it has a West African foundation. The similarities of motifs and usage demonstrate the links between the African-American and his West African ancestor.

Of importance for this study are the uses made of the various forms of folklore in the classroom. The one-room, segregated, rural schools to which Black people were assigned in the United States provided the teacher with opportunity for innovation and creativity. These four women are unique in that they did not allow the tremendous shortages in these schools to stop them from teaching. Clearly, one could raise the issue: The fact that three of them are from one family makes them different and three other unrelated African-American women teachers in similar settings may produce other results. It is the belief of the researcher that all four of these teachers are unique because they represent the best qualities of teaching. Just as no two people are alike, no two teachers are alike. However, these teachers did use folklore as a regular part of their teaching and given the pervasiveness of storytelling, riddles, proverbs, songs, games, and creation stories throughout the Southern Black communities, it is clear to the researcher that their usage in the classroom was inevitable. Also, given the tightness of the communities and the fact that the school/church served as the center of activity for all of the Black people, there was frequent exposure to the folkloric forms. Old

textbooks, scarce supplies and no curriculum guides meant that the primary curriculum source had to be the teacher. The fact that Mrs. Hill used folkloric elements in her teaching shows that it was not just a "family affair."

A question often raised about any research report concerns the predictability of the findings in a study. This study is descriptive of what four African-American female teachers did under oppressive conditions. It is not a predictive study but rather an ethnographic exploration to uncover previously unstudied cultural elements. This study is important as an initial guidepost and as an affirmation of the belief that individuals who are not well known or designated by history as the heroes and heroines make important contributions to history. More importantly, this study highlights an entire segment of life that has been ignored. The fact that these women are a synthesis of their academic, social, cultural, and political environment and used those forces to aid in the educational liberation of their people is indeed miraculous.

Being a contributor in the world today requires one to invest time, energy, and thought into the present. However, in order to have a reasonably successful present leading to a hopeful future, one must be ever mindful of the successes and failures of one's past. A number of problems arise when an entire race or major portions of an entire race are systematically excluded from the written history of a country, not the least of which is that both the

accomplishments and failures are unavailable for study and growth. As Asa Hilliard, III, professor, University of Georgia, has written, "While it is true that no one can or should live in the past; it is equally true that all futures are created out of some past."

### Conclusions

Mrs. Maggie Reese, Mrs. Heloise Hill, Mrs. June Roe Key and Mrs. Mary-Geneva Roe Savage offered a comprehensive curriculum to their students and to the African-American communities surrounding those schools. These teachers believed that the ideas, information, and attitudes expressed in poetry, folklore, song, proverbs, and other examples of the African-American oral tradition provided a valuable resource for the classroom because they came from the experiences of the Black people themselves. Donald J. Waters said: "The experience of appreciation of Black folkloric tradition was for the Black teacher indicative of a regard for a recognized common heritage - a shared body of our own old ways." It had at its core the production of students who were competent academically, socially well adjusted, and ethically sound. In other words, they designed curriculum that contributed to the development of high moral character, a sense of social responsibility, spiritual understanding, and competence in subject matter. This curriculum included folktales, riddles, songs, and proverbs.

The West African world view of the unity between God-Man-Environment is immediately recognizable. It was an interactive process--interactions among students, interactions between teacher and students, teacher and parents, teachers and other members of African-American community, and teacher and white community. The teachers modeled the behaviors expected from students and since they lived among them and were involved in the total community, they could react to and nurture positive experiences and behaviors in the children. They were also available to respond to and try to ameliorate negative influences.

Mrs. Key explained how living with Mrs. Odum (a grandmother of several of the children in the school) was beneficial to her as the teacher. Mrs. Odum was "looked up to" and respected by everyone out there. "She often told me about the old days and regularly told not only her grandchildren but all the children how important it was for them to get their lessons and mind Miss Roe." The tightness of the community (even though geographically widespread) and the traditions of: (1) respect for all adults but especially for the elderly; (2) children viewed as a community responsibility and responsible to any adult member of the African-American community; (3) the importance of the church combined with a genuine respect for education, made the teacher the pivotal person in these rural communities. These four teachers shared the concept that everyone in her classroom worked together for not mere personal enlighten-

ment but also for the good of the whole group. Knowledge was integrated into each child's psychosocial and cognitive activity system through each experience.

The study of the intricacies within the pedagogies of English, Math, Science, Literature, History, Geography, Political Science, and Physical Education, better known as Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, were facilitated through the use of stories--folktale, legends, proverbs, songs, dance, riddles, poems, lullabies, rhymes, creation stories, drama, and historical narrative. The folkloric content came from the families of the teachers themselves. Other sources were the African-Americans in those rural communities (such as Mrs. Bly, the oldest member of the Skidmore Prairie community with whom Mrs. Savage lived while teaching there); the children themselves; and the creativity of the teachers. These teachers recognized and utilized the wisdom embodied in the admonition of Ptahotep (circa 2350 B.C.)

Do not be arrogant because of your knowledge, but confer with the ignorant man as with the learned, for the limit of skill has not been attained, and there is no craftsman who has fully acquired his mastery. Good speech is more hidden than malachite, yet is found in the possession of women slaves at the millstones (Simpson, 1972, p. 161, cited in Asa Hilliard III speech, 1983).

These teachers believed in themselves, in the abilities and potential of their students, and in the importance of using information reflective of the lifestyle, yearnings, wisdom, and experiential base of their students. New facts were not presented in an alien frame of reference. One of the great

privileges of teaching consists of being able to assist the students in understanding clearly what the teacher said, and why and how it fits into yesterday's lesson and how it will fit tomorrow's.

The descriptions each of these women shared with the researcher demonstrated that they did indeed use folklore in the manner it was used by their West African ancestors. They did not make a conscious connection between utilizing what they considered readily available information that would be both fun and instructive, to a West African Oral Tradition in Folklore. However, the forms (stories, poems, legends, riddles, proverbs, creation stories and historical narratives) were used (function) to instruct, amuse, admonish, aid in recall, as recreation, to reveal history, to warn, to praise, to encourage, to motivate, and to regularize relations between people through direct instruction, drama, and oral exposition.

The authors of Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life described African-American women teachers, authors, and entrepreneurs in the following way:

The women in this sample were powerfully moved - not always consciously - to preserve and nurture the spark of living, performing beyond externally imposed limits, and defining and redefining for their students the reality of their world but more importantly helping them to never accept less than excellent in any of their endeavours. They were themselves inspired to reject futility and they shared this inspiration with others. They refused to accept individual collapse. They believed that an inner



citadel of strength and privacy based on ethics, justice, and spirituality would provide an enduring haven of personal survival in an evil and destructive white environment (Loewenberg and Bogin, 1978, page 81).

The preceding quotation was not written as a description of the women in this study; however, it is an accurate description of Mrs. Reese, Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Key, and Mrs. Savage. Each of these interviewees exemplified a unique style of living, an ethical and spiritual philosophy embodying love, charity, hope, honesty, and faith. They were able to sustain themselves and perform as teachers in circumstances that were both incongruous within the context of educational theory and impossible given the barriers erected by the white power structure. These women represent cultural composites of the West African and the African-American experience which they utilized to develop an organized, self-sustaining network of academic excellence, cultural continuity, and commitment to the educational liberation of their people.

### Implications

Moving from rural, southern, segregated, one-room schools in the 1930's and 1940's, the researcher recalls seeing the folkloric elements of a West African-derived oral tradition being used in urban Northern classrooms during the 1960's. This occurred in those schools labeled "Freedom Schools." These schools came into existence as a result of the marches, sit-ins, and Black parents calling for major changes in the public schools systems. Community control

was the battle-cry. In cities such as Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York, one found classes being conducted in churches, private homes, and community centers. There was tremendous emphasis on Africa and African traditions, culture, and history. Not only was there an eagerness for accurate information about West Africa, there was also a resurgence of the belief in the worth of African-American creativity. Black authors, poets, revolutionaries, and teachers were proclaimed and reclaimed. The music, songs, folk sayings, folklore and African-American lifestyles were analyzed, revered, discussed, and critiqued by Black intellectuals and the Black masses. This resurgence, rebirth, and regeneration inspired this researcher and countless other African-Americans, young and old, to believe in themselves, their West African cultural heritage, and to understand that the first freedom is of the mind.

The current climate is still one of racism, and it permeates every segment of society including the public school systems of the United States. In response to these living conditions, many African-Americans have chosen to drop out of all of those systems most demonstrative of this racist ideology. For others, cynicism and disillusionment have crystallized into counter-productive behavior. The public school systems which the majority of the African-American youth must utilize are either explicitly or

implicitly teaching them that they are representatives of a culture-negative people.

Along with the obvious need for educators to cleanse themselves of racist, stereotypical, condescending attitudes, is the overwhelming need for both the professional educator and the public educational systems to recognize what Edgar L. Hewett (1904 and 1905) said in his articles, "Anthropology and Education" and "Ethnic Factors in Education." He asked educators to realize that "a civilization imposed from without is usually harmful, often destructive, and always undesirable, because the development of a race must be from within." Therefore, the movement to denigrate the oral tradition and its role in African-American culture has served to blunt it as an instrument of reconnaissance in the education of African-American children.

The resilience of West African oral tradition in folklore provides a rich and fertile area for teacher training, curriculum development, and long range policy. This was a comprehensive educational system in spite of the intentions of the white trustees who were enforcing local and national policy. Viewed from the perspectives of West African educational philosophy, the system employed by these women, and developed within their students, emphasized unity of the individual, unity with family and community, unity with nature, a sense of social responsibility, a sense of morality and ethical living, and a sense of spirituality. This was an interactive process involving teacher, student,

parent, church, and other members of the rural African-American community. The process included stories, examination of signs and symbols, the use of proverbs, the use of song, dance, and the environment.

In the long run, it is the task of the poets, the artists, the writers, the men (and women) of culture (and teachers) by blending in the daily round of sufferings and denials of justice, both memories and hopes, to create those great reserves of faith, those great storehouses of strength from which the people can draw courage in critical moments to assert themselves and to assault their future (Cesaire, 1959, page 229).

Both the educator and the anthropologist should look for cultural patterns and cultural forms which are shared by members of the same social heritage, system, and subsystem. Education, as is culture, is not a fixed, one-dimensional state but a fluid process composed of interactions between teacher, student, home, and community. The product, the student, must ultimately embody the knowledge of the past, the skills of today, and the wisdom to construct a better tomorrow.

This researcher is not advocating a return to segregation in public schools. However, she is saying that because of the skill, dedication, and cooperation of parents and the use of and belief in things produced by African-Americans, positive results took place. This researcher is postulating that there are rich, untapped curriculum resources in the African-American folkloric tradition. To teach children who come from environments in which the West African world view coupled with the American Black

experience is a part of their upbringing and to not know, care, or deem it valid, does disservice to those students. It often causes academic trauma and ultimate failure in the educational system.

It is a historical fact that whenever the oppressor is called upon to define and explain an indigenous product of the oppressed (African-Americans are oppressed) that product loses its functional value and worth to its indigenous creators.

The role of the African-American researcher is to proclaim, detail, and consolidate the values, traditions, ethics, and wisdom of his past, both African and American. Knowledge of the past contributes a feeling of historical continuity essential to taking one's proper place as a productive member of a multinational state.

The significance of the West African Oral Tradition in Folklore for African-Americans lies in how it has been used by Black people to increase their freedom, and how it has been used in the classrooms by Black teachers, albeit unconsciously. A people which denies its own past cannot see its value today or its worth in making and shaping tomorrow. The strong folkloric tradition of West Africa, which was enhanced and reshaped to fit the African-American, provides a treasury of resources for the poets, artists, musicians, and teachers of today.

Education provides an enlightened path upon which people can walk into society. However, without curriculum

designed with a comprehension of the specific recipient's culture, it will produce only people who will be as directionless as leaves in the wind.

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## **APPENDICES**

### Slave Experiences

No study involving the Africans' removal from West Africa would be complete without at least a cursory glance at the sea experiences. The captain of the Liverpool slaver, Zong, in 1780, caused 133 Africans to be flung overboard alive since they were sick or weak and not likely to survive the voyage. The captain excused his actions with statements that if the slaves should die a natural death on board ship, their loss would be borne by the owners, while the underwriters would have to pay if the slaves were thrown living into the sea. Therefore, he threw them living into the sea before they died on him. In the event the owners did claim for these slaves, but the underwriters refused to pay the insurance, the owners then brought suit in the Court of the King's Bench. In many cases, the courts found for the plaintiffs, the owners (Davidson, 1961). The Zong captain was an extreme example since live cargo was more profitable. A more frequent picture was of extremely harsh conditions wherein the captives were given only enough food and water to remain alive for a profitable sale.

An Englishman named Walsh in 1829 left Brazil on an English frigate, the North Star. During his voyage, a slaving ship was chased and caught in the South Atlantic. He had provided an eye-witness account of what he saw when he boarded this vessel.

The slaving ship's cargo was of five hundred and five men and women--the crew had thrown fifty-five overboard during their seventeen days at sea--and these slaves were all enclosed

under grated hatchways, between decks. The space was so low that they sat between each other's legs, and stowed so close together that there was no possibility of lying down, or at all changing their positions, by night or by day. As they belonged to and were shipped on account of different individuals, they were all branded like sheep, with the owner's marks of different forms. These were impressed under their breasts, or on their arms, and, as the mate informed me with perfect indifference, burnt with a red hot iron. They had no more than one square foot of sitting space, with no chance of standing up, and all suffered from a deadly shortage of water. Headroom was usually no more than eighteen inches. Slaves were chained by the neck and legs for the entire journey (Davidson, 1961).

The date of Walsh's observations is important--twenty-one years after Britain had legally ended the slave trade.

The abolition of the slave trade on paper by Great Britain and other nations at the beginning of the nineteenth century greatly restricted the number of American countries into which the Africans could be imported. The principal commercial demand on West Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was for slave labor to supply the plantations in the New World, especially in Cuba, Brazil, and the southern colonies of what was to become the United States.

The outlawing of slave trading only addressed itself to Africa and was not effective. Also, it did not address or attempt to halt internal sales or the sale between countries of the New World. Frederick Bancroft estimates that 180 thousand Africans were a part of this internal U. S. boom between 1840 and 1850, and some 230 thousand in the following decade. W. E. B. DuBois cites evidence to show

the pervasiveness of smuggling slaves during the period beginning in 1808 and continuing through 1860.

Although statistics on the slave trade are imprecise, a compilation of records from various sources indicate that 400 thousand to one million of the Africans forcibly transported to the New World came to North America between 1619 and 1808 (Berry and Blassingame, 1982; Rawley, 1981). Another 16% to 25% who were taken out of West Africa died enroute. Boahen suggests that Europeans brought to Africa a paralysis of poverty, disease, and moral pestilence which is still there today.

In the southern United States, these Africans were brought to work, live, and die as beasts of burden. "Chattel" originally meant cattle which, in effect, the slaves on the plantation were virtually replacing; both words came from the Latin word which gives us capital, i.e., property (Fage, 1969).

Able-bodied males between eighteen and thirty years of age brought five hundred dollars in 1800, nine hundred dollars in 1810, one thousand dollars in 1820, thirteen hundred dollars in 1834, seven hundred ninety dollars in 1837, and eighteen hundred dollars in 1860. Women usually sold for three-fourths the price of men and boys of corresponding ages, and both males and females declined in value after they had reached thirty years; at sixty-five they were considered commercially valueless (Simpkins, Roland, page 120).

In 1860, there were approximately 4 million Black slaves in the United States South (Blassingame, 1972). To support such a system of evil, all elements of white society were employed. Many famous and academically credentialed men and

women have offered justifications and elaborate explanations of slavery. Included in this group were Ulrich B. Phillips, Stanley Elkins, and Frank Tannenbaum.

The savage and uncivilized black man lacks the ability to organize his social or economic life on the level of the white man. He is unrestrained and requires the constant control of white people to keep him in check. Without the presence of the white police force Negroes would turn upon themselves and destroy each other. The white man is the only authority he knows (Thompson, 1939).

The onslaught of such credible people proved insufficient after many years and constant battering by both Black and white abolitionists. Researchers of today are able to piece together accurate pictures of slavery and the "Old South" from the actual testimonies of both planters and slaves. In their letters, speeches, interviews, autobiographies, revolts, and even deaths, the slaves gave eloquent testimonies that they resisted bondage, mental, moral, and physical servitude by any means possible. Frederick Douglass explained the slaves' behavior and attitudes best in an 1846 speech:

Those who are under the yoke find themselves constantly in a state of rebellion against the will and wishes of their masters. It cannot be otherwise. The slave has wants of his own, he has aspirations of his own, he has rights and feelings of his own, and while he remains in the condition of a slave, he finds those thoughts, feelings and emotions all in opposition to the will of his master, and he will on all fitting occasions attempt to act in obedience to his own instead of his master's will...Men do not go into slavery naturally--they don't go into slavery at the bidding of their fellowmen--they don't bow down their necks to the yoke merely by being entreated to do so--they don't go to the field and labour without wages, merely at

the kind suggestions of some very amiable and affable slaveholder. No! Something else is necessary--the whip must be there--the gag must be there--the thumb screw must be there--the fear of death must be there, in order to induce the slave to go to the field and labour for another man without wages (Berry and Blassingame, 1982).

The slave's life was controlled by the laws of the land. As early as 1663 in Maryland, the law declared that all Negroes or other slaves within the province, and all Negroes to be hereafter imported, shall serve durante vita and all of their offspring were to serve likewise (Davidson, 1961). South Carolina followed in 1740 with laws that established the legitimacy of selling any free Negro at public auction who had harbored a runaway slave or who was only charged with any criminal matter. In Mississippi, any Negro or mulatto could be sold as a slave unless he was able to prove himself a free man--and his word was not sufficient proof. Even as late as 1801 in Georgia, a fine of \$200 was imposed on any master who freed a slave without the previous consent of the legislature. They imposed a fine of \$1000 on anyone who gave effect to a last will and testament freeing a slave or allowing him to work on his own account.

Religious justification developed along with the legal and moral justification of slavery in the southern United States. All of the Christian denominations supported slavery even in its most extreme and abhorrent forms. The plantation owners, themselves quite pious on Sunday, insisted that the slaves not be taught anything potentially subversive by white ministers. That eliminated all discus-

sion of the brotherhood of man. Saving souls was not the aim of the planter or his ministerial emissary to the slaves. William Wells Brown contended that the prevailing attitude among the white masters was to have religion teach the slave to accept his lot in life as natural, morally correct, and ordained by God.

White ministers taught that he who knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not shall be beaten with many stripes. To disobey one's master meant going to Hell without any possibility of reprieve. Slaves were told that they did not merit freedom, that it was God's will that they were enslaved, that the devil was creating those desires for liberty in their breasts, and that runaways would be expelled from the church. The slave beatitudes were repeated during each service: blessed are the patient; blessed are the faithful; blessed are the cheerful; blessed are the submissive; blessed are the hardworking; and above all, blessed are the obedient (Blassingame, 1972).

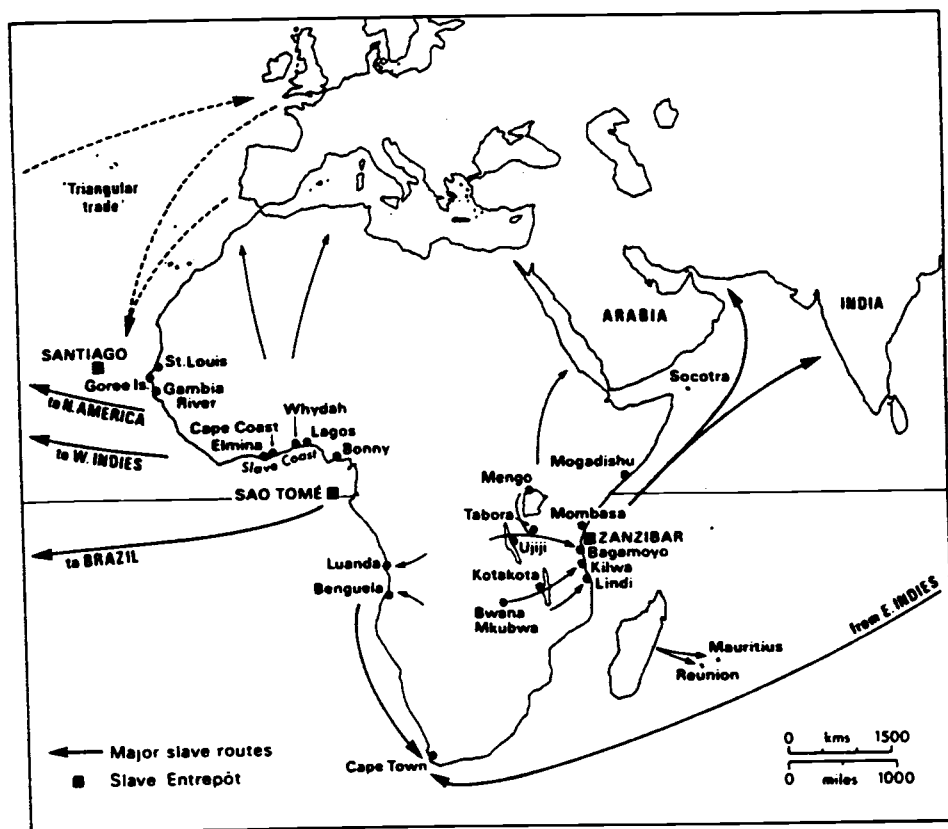
The worship services conducted by slaves using the oral traditions of their West African heritage, combined with an acute sense of contradiction, enabled them to conduct services in secret which were more in keeping with Christian tenets.

The other necessities of everyday life were not overlooked by the planter class. For example, James Madison stated that nine dollars a year for food and clothing for a young slave was more than adequate. Men were allowed one pair of pants and one shirt in the summer and again in the winter; women received two dresses per year (Buckmaster, 1968). Working hours varied from state to state. Some were from sun-up to sunset; in South Carolina field hands worked



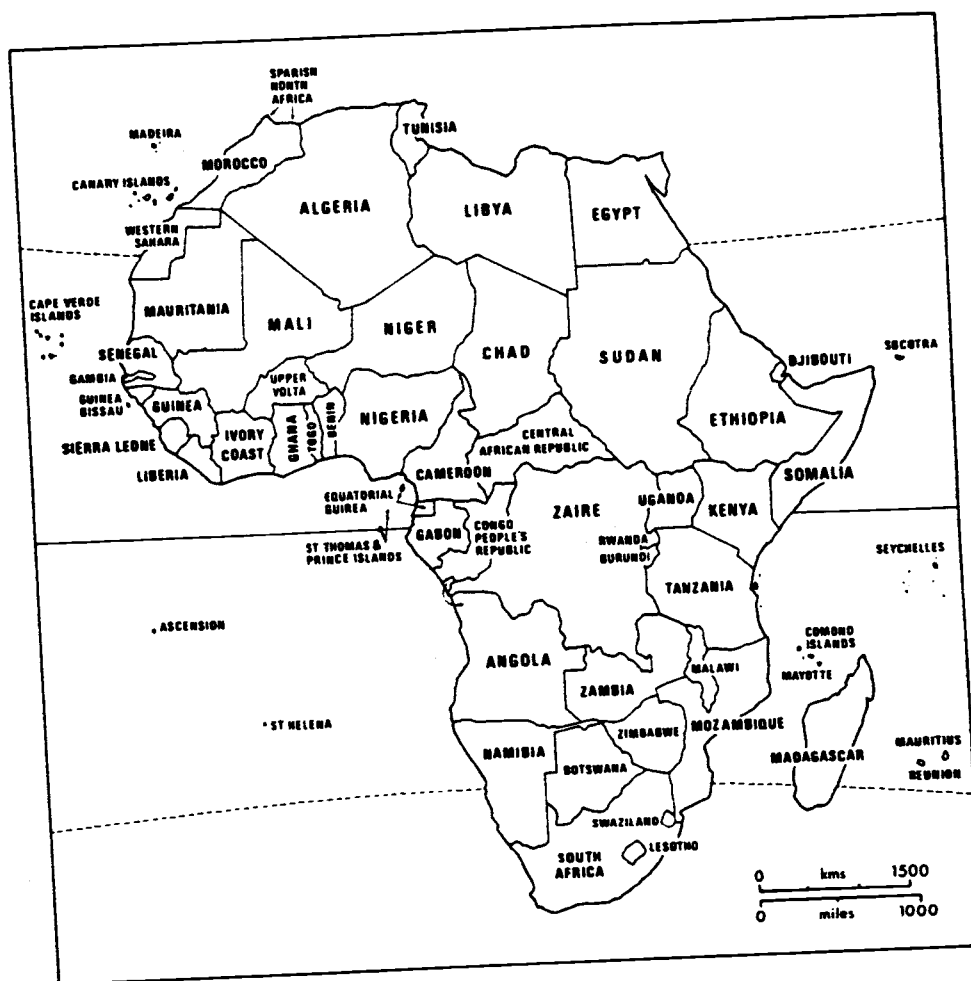
for fifteen hours each day in summer and fourteen hours daily in winter; Louisiana decreed two and one-half hours of rest in each twenty-four hour period. The weekly food allowance for a slave was generally a peck of corn and four quarts additional per child along with a half bushel of sweet potatoes. This was supplemented on rare occasions by a ration of molasses, bacon, or salted fish. When pigs were killed, the unwanted parts were given to the slaves. The view proffered by slave owners that house slaves ate and dressed well is not an accurate one when statements by former slaves are read. Moreover, only about ten percent of the slave population were house slaves. The field slaves living in shacks in compounds known as the "Quarter" is a far more historically accurate picture. In a vast crescent stretching from Southeast Virginia through the rich midlands of the South into Southeast Texas, slaves outnumbered whites. To the plantation-dominated commonwealths of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, had been added Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, and Arkansas (Simkins, Roland; 1972). By 1860, eleven of the sixteen United States Presidents had been slaveholders, seventeen of the twenty-eight judges of the United States Supreme Court, fourteen of nineteen United States Attorneys General, twenty-one of thirty-three Speakers of the United States House of Representatives, and eighty out of one hundred thirty-four foreign ministers (Buckmaster, 1968).

Figure 1. Map of Major Slave Trade Routes



From An Atlas of African Affairs, Ieuan L. L. Griffiths, 1984.

Figure 2. Map of States of Modern Africa



From An Atlas of African Affairs, Ieuan L. L. Griffiths, 1984.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### Section I: Who Are You?

1. Where were you born and when?
2. Describe your home life.
  - a. Relate your first school experience.
  - b. Describe your parents. Include what they did to earn a living, roles in the community, etc.
3. Describe your house.
4. When did you decide to become a teacher?
5. What influenced your decision?
6. Did you attend church? What denomination?
7. How long did you teach?
8. Have you any other careers? When? Where?
9. Where did you attend college? Major? Minor?

### Section II: The One-Room School

1. Where was it located?
2. How long did you teach there?
3. How did you know about the opening?
4. What were the qualifications?
5. What would cause you to be released?
6. What was the administrative structure?
  - a. For whites
  - b. For Blacks
  - c. Teacher's meetings - how often and where?
7. What grades did you teach?
8. What subjects did you teach?
9. How long was the school day? The school year?

10. Describe the outward appearance of the building and the grounds.
11. Describe the inside.
  - a. What kind of furniture?
  - b. Did you select the materials? Books, globes, magazines
  - c. What did you use to erase the chalkboard?
  - d. Did you have any kind of equipment - a.v., science, records, ditto machine
  - e. Was there enough for each pupil?
  - f. Were there large wall maps?
13. How many pupils were there per grade?
14. What subjects were taught?
15. Did you make your own schedule?
16. Were there any mandated competencies?
17. Do you have any copies of lesson plans used?
18. Do you have any of your student's papers?
19. What were some of the activities used most often?
20. Did you write a lot on the board?
21. Did you read to the students?
  - a. Was there choral reading?
22. Was drama used in the classroom? Creative writing?
23. What poems were used? How?
24. What riddles? How? Proverbs? Rhymes?
25. What stories, folktales, ghost stories? How?
26. What songs were used? Did the Spiritual play a part in the class? In the lessons?
27. How did you open school each day?
28. Was slavery discussed in school, home, community? What was the legacy of slavery in that community?

29. How were people (Black and White) put down or put in their place?
30. Who were the brokers in the Black community between the white community?
31. How was the Bible used in school, home, church, and community? What creation stories were used or told? By whom?

### Section III: The Pupil

1. Describe the games used to explain the academic areas.
2. Describe the games used in play.
3. What were the economic levels of the students?
4. Did you have any discipline problems?
5. How did the pupils dress?
6. How did the pupils talk?
7. Were they interested in school?
8. Did their parents ever come for lessons?
9. How did the pupils get to school?

### Section IV: The Environment/Community

1. Was the school building used for any other purpose?
2. Did you serve in any other capacity in the community?
3. What was the racial climate?
4. Did any administrators (white or black) visit your classroom?
5. Was there a Black newspaper?
6. How were school activities publicized?

### Section V: Your Philosophy of Education

1. How do you feel about your experiences in the one-room schools?
2. Would you return if the circumstances were the same?
3. How do you feel about students, schools?

4. What is your personal philosophy of teaching, education?
5. What is wrong with education today?
6. What were the positives about the one-room school, those African-American communities?