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Choreographing Race: An Analysis of Black Performance and White Audience

A Dissertation Presented

by

Katrina Dyonne Thompson

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Katrina Dyonne Thompson

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the Doctorate of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend acceptance of this dissertation.

Dr. Floris Cash-Dissertation Advisor
Chair, Africana Studies Department

Dr. Wilbur Miller-Chairperson of Defense
Professor, History Department

Dr. Nancy Tomes
Chair, History Department

Dr. Richard Pierce
Chair, Africana Studies, University of Notre Dame

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin

Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

Choreographing Race: An Analysis of Black Performance and White Audience

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The dissertation, "Choreographing Race: An Analysis of Black Performance and White Audience" analyzes the pressure placed on blacks to sing and dance for whites and how this racial imagery contributed to the subjugation of black culture, while simultaneously reinforcing whiteness. Through an examination of slave narratives, travel journals, popular literature and theater, this dissertation investigate a wide variety of performance scenes and their staging of race. The study examines the influence whites had on black cultural development and the public image of blackness through the coercion of music and dance. Blacks continued to exhibit their West African culture in the lyrical and dance expression however whites distorted black performance by forcing blacks to create images reinforcing a justification for slavery, subjugation and otherness, creating an interesting dynamic of domination and agency that constructed American society into the 20th century.

Dedication Page

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INTRODUCTION

On February 3, 2006, Dave Chappelle had his first national interview on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, after walking away from a $50 million dollar contract and his hit comedy series, *The Chappelle Show*. *The Chappelle Show* debuted in 2003 on Comedy Central and was considered by audiences and critics alike to be one of the funniest shows on television. Chappelle, who created and wrote the show, was a professional comedian and actor whose trademark was politically incorrect humor explored popular culture, race, sex, drugs and fame. *The Chappelle Show* became one of the highest rated programs on Comedy Central, earning three Emmy nominations. It went on to become the best-selling TV show in DVD history.

Then, in April 2005, a year after signing a two-year contract to continue the show, Chappelle abruptly walked off the set and went to Africa. In his first national broadcast after his disappearance, Chappelle explained why he abandoned his hit television series. In a racial skit in which Chappelle played a blackface pixie, which he described as the "visual personification of the "N-word," he started to question the social ramifications of these satirical performances. During the taping of this particular sketch, Chappelle noticed,

> somebody on the set (who) was white laughed in such a way – I know the difference of people laughing with me and people laughing at me – and it was the first time I had ever gotten a laugh that I was uncomfortable with….I don't want black people to be disappointed in me for putting that message out there…It's a complete moral dilemma.[1]

The "moral dilemma" Dave Chappelle grappled with concerned the racial images

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[1] The information concerning the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and her interview with Dave Chappelle comes directly from the archives of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

he was propagating in the public sphere of mass media through his comedy show. The social responsibility of African Americans in the entertainment industry has always been a topic of great controversy due to the continual negative, stereotypical manner in which blacks have been portrayed in American entertainment.

Similar to many black entertainers, Dave Chappelle continuously balances the obscured line between doing a parody and reinforcing racial stereotypes.[2] Today, a heated debate within the African American community centered on the controversial (and frequent) use of the word "nigger" in the highly popular black genre of music known as hip hop. Furthermore, the racially charged rants of famous white figures Michael Richards and Don Imus, directed toward black targets, fueled discussion on the manner blacks are continually portrayed in popular culture. These controversial events also mobilized black activists to seek retribution against public displays of racism by mainstream media.[3] Richards and Imus experienced social repercussions for their racist displays.

The Richards and Imus controversies, however, had a second effect: a negative backlash against blacks in the entertainment industry. Interestingly, in the aftermath of these controversies, the current generation of black entertainers has been left holding the proverbial bag of blame for promoting negative, black

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[2] Michael Eric Dyson, *Debating Race with Michael Eric Dyson*, New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2007).

[3] Michael Richards, comedian and actor, commonly known as Cosmo Kramer from the television series, *Seinfeld.* In November 2006, Richards sparked national controversy when he shouted racial epithets at black hecklers in a Los Angeles comedy club. Don Imus, controversial radio host, stated negative racial and sexual comments towards the Rutgers female basketball team on April 4, 2007.

stereotypes in popular culture. At the same time, recent racially-tinged media incidents have raised questions about differences in popular culture intended for white or black consumption.

African American entertainers, especially comedians and hip hop artists, are often blamed for the continuing racist ideology that is present in the mass media. For instance, after making racist and sexist comments on a public, televised radio show, Don Imus defended his comments by stating that "I may be a white man, but I know that…young black women all through society are demeaned and disparaged and disrespected by their own black men." Currently, the African American community is involved in an introspective debate on the racial responsibility of black entertainers. One white journalist, John Strausbaugh, controversially stated,

> The word 'nigger,' which for decades was so taboo it could be rendered only as 'the N-word,' began to resurface in the 1990s. While still extremely controversial and scandal provoking, its ubiquity in rap lyrics created a social context in which some white Americans have felt emboldened to use it as well. [4]

While this controversy has brought to the forefront the prevalence of racist ideology in mainstream entertainment, it has also seriously neglected the historical significance of these events. The racist ideology prevalent in mass media has become somewhat inappropriately legitimized due to the prevalence of African Americans reenacting black stereotypes and it needs to be recognized fully.

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[4] John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult and Imitation in American Popular Culture* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 20-23.

This work focuses on the foundation and infiltration of black stereotypes into the culture of the United States entertainment system. Rejecting the notion that African Americans should be used as a scapegoat for the continuance of black stereotypes in popular culture, this dissertation recognizes that American entertainment culture was largely founded and developed on negative racial imagery created and inserted into the public sphere by whites. Although the African American community holds some responsibility for the continual proliferation of racist and sexist stereotypes in the mass media, that accountability has to be placed in a larger cultural context. To that end, this work will analyze the historical relevance and mentality of blacks that contribute to their self-desecration.

Today, the proliferation of black stereotypes in popular culture is simply a continuation of an entertainment tradition in the United States that was purposely created to express the anti-black, pro-white ideology of America's culture. Furthermore, the perceived inferiority of blackness, coming from the pervasive ethnocentrism of whiteness, was actively promoted through the folk culture of society. The moral dilemmas of the African American entertainer, as stated earlier by Dave Chappelle, are directly related to the tradition of subjugation and negative imagery infused in popular culture that derived from the plantation society.

For the majority of America's existence, blacks have been vulnerable to negative representations in the entertainment public sphere. Racism, as part of the American psyche and culture, is continually recognized in the political and

social systems of this country, but it often goes unnoticed when it is manifested in its popular culture. The attempts to reverse racism have made great strides in the last half-century, but underlying racism remains, which continues to affect black citizens in the United States. These lingering, fundamental remnants of white supremacy and black degradation have consistently influenced popular culture, and manifested themselves in the many forms of amusement that exist today. Several scholars trace the origins of American entertainment culture to the beginning of blackface minstrelsy in the nineteenth century. In *Black Like You*, John Strausbaugh states that American entertainment resonates with the legacy of blackface minstrelsy that initially rose to popularity in the 1830s.[5] Blackface minstrelsy has often been credited as the source of many of the negative black stereotypes that exist in American popular culture. Intending his book to serve as cultural commentary, Strausbaugh reviews the history of blackface minstrelsy as the main form of entertainment in the United States and postulates that it only becomes politically incorrect with the advent of the Civil Rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 21st century, he argues that blackface minstrelsy reappears in a new incarnation through the racist actions of hip hop music. Strausbaugh concludes that blacks and whites “mock and mimic one another, are by turns attracted to and repulsed by one another….It is a culture…and this will continue for as long as America is America.”[6]

[5] Straubaugh, 57.

[6] Strausbaugh, 16.

My research leads me to disagree with many of Strausbaugh's assumptions, but I do concur that racist ideology was, and is, an active element of the basic entertainment culture in the United States. This research project does not review current mass media, although the scholarship on the history of black representations in popular culture contributed greatly to the inception of this work. In 1992, scholar Donald Bogle's historic work, *Tom's Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks*, chronicled black representations in mass media, specifically film.[7] He argues that American popular entertainment initiated with the misrepresentation of blacks as caricatures in the minstrel show. Robin Means Coleman in 1998 explored black representations in mass media, specifically radio and television, from its beginning until its present state.[8] In her work, she also traced the source of negative racial imagery in popular culture to the emergence of the American minstrel show in the 1830s. She concluded that a new era of minstrelsy has developed as a trend in the mass media of today (and she made this point prior to Strausbaugh). Coleman's research focused on deconstructing the distortion of black imagery in the public sphere of entertainment through a thorough analysis of black caricatures and their reincarnation within decades of media.

This dissertation challenges the commonly accepted belief that the minstrel show was the first American entertainment genre. Instead, I will delve

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[7] Donald Bogle, *Tom's, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 1992).

[8] Robin R. Means Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998.)

further into the earlier development of misrepresentations of blacks. This work recognizes that the slave society fostered the first American entertainment venue. Scenes of enslaved blacks performing music, song and dance for the amusement of white spectators represented the first major American entertainment setting, long before minstrel shows appeared. Thus, anti-black stereotypes in entertainment reach much further back in history than current scholarship acknowledges. This dissertation covers a broad spectrum of scholarship, from the sixteenth to twentieth century, to understand the creation, distribution and saturation of negative, stereotypical images of blacks in the United States' entertainment culture.

This study is divided into five parts. Chapter One, titled "Distorted View," explores the popular literature of travel journals from Europe in the sixteenth century that created the social and moral codes that provided the justification for the enslavement of Africans. The questions addressed include the following: What allowed people during the fifteenth and sixteenth century to create and support the African-based slave system? What values were created to foster a system of human chattel and how were these ideals distributed and popularized?

Previous scholarship on the ideals of blackness from the perspective of whites has contributed to the foundational analysis of this research. The first major work to address the perceptions that whites had of blacks was Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black*.[9] This very ambitious work interpreted the

[9] Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

ethnocentrism of whites to better understand their mindset in establishing an African-based slave system. Jordan focused on the ideals of African inferiority among Englishmen and also displayed the establishment of racial prejudice in the United States.

Following this work, George Fredrickson published *The Black Image in the White Mind* in 1971, which displayed the progression of intellectualized racism that was propagated by white supremacists to continually convey blacks as inferior to whites. [10] Fredrickson engaged in the racial debate concerning the status and potential of African Americans that occurred within the intellectual, scientific, and political realms from 1817 to 1914.

These works set the foundation for this chapter, through its review of whites' active involvement in assigning negative traits to blacks. This section focuses on the first contact between whites and blacks on the shores of West Africa to display the initial myths associated with blacks, specifically those associated with the performing arts. Scholars such as Jordan and Frederickson contributed greatly to understanding previous ideals of racial construction and relations. More recently, scholar Mia Bay released *The White Image in the Black Mind*, a work that views whites from an African American perspective from 1830-1925.[11] Building upon this scholarship, this chapter explores the manner in which Africans were sculpted in the popular culture of Europe and later the New World.

[10] George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1971).

[11] Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Travel journals, slave ship logs, slave narratives, and other archival data were analyzed to understand the situations and contexts in which blacks have performed for white audiences throughout history. Although the visual images presented in mass media have been a pressing concern among many African Americans, this research focuses mainly on performances involving music, song, and dance. The performing arts were a functional aspect of the diverse cultures throughout West Africa that were distorted by whites and used to subjugate generations of blacks in the United States. In this study, the performing arts are recognized as the first entertainment style used by blacks for white audiences. Music, dance and song were also among the most diverse and important aspects of daily life that were tainted and abused, first figuratively through travel journals, and then literally in the slave-based plantation society.

The second chapter, “Staging Race,” reviews the common scenes of blacks being forced to perform through music, song and dance on the main stages of slavery: the middle passage, the coffle, the auction block, and the plantation system. At every stage, blacks were forced to display their subjugated role in society while reinforcing ideas of whiteness. Issues to be addressed in the second chapter include: How did the fallacious attributes of being innately gifted in music, song, and dance contribute to the foundation of race and racial hierarchy in America? How did these myths affect the role of the black body in the slavery system? How were the performing arts utilized to subjugate the black body?

The second chapter reviews the scenes of music, dance, and song throughout the slave era as staged displays of race relations that contributed to the status of whites and blacks in American society. For example, in 1997, Saidiya Hartman broadened the understanding of violence and repercussions of slavery on the African American population.[12] Through an exhaustive analysis, she showed a history of black subjugation by whites through force and violence. Hartman argued that the state and socially enforced behaviors throughout the nineteenth century subordinated blacks mentally and physically. Her work highlighted the injustices that African Americans faced and their overwhelming sense of inferiority from the days of the middle passage until 1896. Hartman contributed to this work by offering the exhaustive examination of sources on the creation of black identity in America. She also broadened the forums of abuse against African Americans beyond the normal scope of scholarly discussion. Instead of sporadically viewing diverse scenes throughout the black experience and transforming them to "scenes of subjection" as done in Hartman's text, this research project was focused on the fluidity of one major scene habitually recreated.

The third chapter, "Dual Nature of Performance," examines the agency and subjugation received through the performing arts among the black community during the slave era. The subject matter of this chapter examines these questions: What did these scenes of music, song and dance mean for

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[12] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

blacks in society? How did the performing arts contribute to the development of agency in the burgeoning African American culture? Also, how did these displays contribute to the foundation of not only culture but also entertainment in America?

The previous works of Amiri Baraka and Ron Eyerman focus on the political, social, and psychological remnants left from the institution of slavery, and they greatly contribute to this chapter. Moreover, they examine the influence of slave culture on the everyday lives of African Americans. In *Cultural Trauma*, Ron Eyerman theorizes that the national identity of blacks in America was constructed through a "collective memory of slavery."[13] Additionally, he focuses on major social movements from emancipation until the turn of the 20th century by reviewing the sociology of cultural development. Ultimately, he concludes that although present day blacks have not physically experienced slavery, they possess a memory of slavery that helps to construct their African-American identity. Eyerman's "collective memory of slavery" is flawed but still contributes to an understanding of the continuance of slave culture in the African American community.

Another theory that contributes greatly to this research project is Amiri Baraka's "slave mentality" which essentially states that, "two hundred years of bending to the will of the white man" essentially left a cultural mark, an inerasable

[13] Roy Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African-American Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

effect on the foundation of black society.[14] Eyerman's and Baraka's works contribute to the study of African American identity, but they leave out a large segment of the population: whites. In this chapter, the term "collective mentality" is used to refer to the overarching attitudes and behaviors of blacks and whites that formed from the slave system through its images and stratification of power.

Chapter Three also relies on numerous primary sources that focused on the black cultural development that grew under the veiled guise of *happy darkies.* A thorough analysis of the *Workers Progress Administration Slave Narratives Collection* from the 1930s was reviewed to understand the memory of music, dance, and song among the ex-slave population. The secondary sources for this chapter mainly focus on literature that displayed the development of a distinct African American culture. Another source that greatly contributed to this chapter is Lawrence W. Levine work *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*. Levine explores the African motifs that continued in the slave community and analyzes the agency allowed through the ingenuity of the 'trickster' elements of the African American community from the slave era to the 1940s.

Essentially, Levine reveals the influences and establishment of blacks' societal mores, traditions, and beliefs that assisted in creating an African American culture. This dissertation reviews and builds upon the ingenuity of the black population introduced in Levine's work; while race and racial imagery were sculpted within a guise of entertainment for white amusement, blacks were

[14] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed From It* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963), 57. The term slave mentality comes from A. Baraka's work and is explained further in this work.

obtaining agency and expressing their culture through these performances within the plantation community.

Levine's work was used in conjunction with Sterling Stuckey's *Slave Culture*, which was published in 1987.[15] His thesis reviews the Africanisms that were continually present in the culture and political consciousness of blacks in America. Stuckey mainly focused on religion but also delved into the music, song, and dance culture that continued from the diversity of West Africa and became a monolithic African American tradition in the United States. His recognition of the performing arts and its importance in the slave community contributed greatly to the agency of blacks reviewed in this chapter. Stuckey also identified the performing arts style utilized by slaves which contributed to the overall analysis of this work.

The fourth chapter, "The Blackface of Whiteness," analyzes the American minstrel show as a continuation of forced performances on the plantations that reinforced the whiteness of native whites in the industrializing North. This chapter was centered on these questions: What was the racial, economic, and social atmosphere of the Northern cities of the United States that fostered the enthusiasm for blackface theater? Why were native, white males, and immigrants so attracted to this blackface minstrelsy as a form of entertainment? What were the main influences that contributed to the growth and popularity of blackface minstrelsy?

[15] Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.)

Previous scholars who have reviewed the relationship between blackface performances, whiteness, and class-consciousness contributed greatly to this chapter. In 1993, Eric Lott published *Love and Theft*, in which he stated that blackface minstrelsy was influenced by black culture and reflected the ambivalent attitude of whites toward people of color.[16] He also extensively reviewed performance scenes of minstrel song lyrics in order to trace the entertainment genre. Lott recognized blackface minstrel theater as an intersection of race and class with a focus on the working class consciousness of whites and their relationship with African Americans. This chapter agrees with Lott's assertion of the blackface mask as a "distorted mirror" of the concerns and values of the white working class, but it goes further to analyze the whiteness aspect and its effect on the plight of blacks in America. My research also focused on the influence of foreign views on the status of native, working-class whites and native whites' desire to gain recognition for their race instead of their class status.

This discussion also reviewed the development of regional differences between the North and South and its influence on the popularity of the minstrel show in the urban sphere. The significant work of Ira Berlin in *Many Thousand Gone* divides the history of American slavery into four regions: North, the Chesapeake, the Low Country and the lower Mississippi Valley.[17] Through a review of the first two centuries of slavery, Berlin divides the North and South

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[16] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[17] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

social development between a society with slaves and a slave society. This interpretation of the slave era was applied to this chapter in order to further understand the desire to re-establish whiteness through the development and popularity of blackface minstrelsy in the North. Berlin's assessment of the North as a society with slaves influenced the proliferation of whiteness and contributed to the attractiveness of black humiliation and degradation through the minstrel show.

The concluding chapter focuses on African Americans' perspective of whites' obsession with the black body during the Harlem Renaissance. This chapter, entitled "All The World's A Stage," reflects the exhibition of blackness that was present within Harlem during its renaissance. This section addresses several questions such as: What were the internal conflicts of the New Negroes in Harlem concerning black cultural exhibition under supervision of white patronage? How did the black performer and white audience evolve from the plantation to the nightclubs of Harlem? How does W.E.B. Dubois' concept of "Double Consciousness" relate both to African Americans who donned blackface as well as the New Negroes of the Harlem Renaissance?

There are numerous secondary sources which analyze this era in both broad and specific terms. These scholarly works will assist in developing an accurate depiction of the Harlem Renaissance. For example, Langston Hughes was one of the few Harlem Renaissance artists to reflect on the important people and events of the period.[18] In his autobiography, Hughes gives a personal

[18] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940).

account of the life of a "New Negro," while also supplying a lengthy commentary on New York City's important artists. His work gives an excellent account of the social life in Harlem during the 1920s, but it is only one perspective and does not necessarily represent the other writers' and artists' experiences during this time. Edward Waldron is a biographer who wrote on Walter White, an influential participant who contributed to the development of the Harlem Renaissance. [19] He examines the black community and its relationship to the Harlem Renaissance artists in order to construct the social climate of the era. Waldron and Hughes' work represent a minor component of the biographical and autobiographical works on the main actors of the Harlem Renaissance.

There are several works which provide an overall historical review of the Harlem Renaissance.[20] In his renowned work *When Harlem Was In Vogue,* David Levering Lewis highlights almost every aspect of the Harlem Renaissance.[21] He examines every major movement in Harlem during the 1920s, such as Garveyism, literary salons, cabarets, and major and minor writers and artists. Another author, Ann Douglass, traces the history of New York City

[19]Edward Waldron, *Walter White and the Harlem Renaissance* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1978).

[20] See Arna Bontemps, *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1972); Mark Helbing, *The Harlem Renaissance: The One and the Many* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999); David Driskell, *Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem: Harry N. Abrams, 1987); George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, M: Harvard University Press, 1995); Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) and Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African American Culture 1920-1930* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995).

[21] David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979).

and provides details of the rise of the Harlem Renaissance's artistic movement during the 1920s. In *Terrible Honesty*, she focuses on the black and white Manhattan through an analysis of the arts.[22] Her comprehensive work adds pertinent data to the dissertation on the social, economic, and cultural atmosphere of Manhattan during the Roaring Twenties.

Several other works attempt to mimic the work of Douglass, but they fail to extensively display the Greenwich Village artistic movement and its relationship with Harlem. These works only represent a minor part of a large, saturated market that gives a historical overview of the Harlem Renaissance. They display the real essence of this cultural, social, economic, and artistic movement that African-Americans experienced during the 1920s in Harlem, New York. Many works pertaining to this connection lack theory and analysis of the conflict between blacks and whites in Harlem. While they give comprehensive histories of the Harlem Renaissance, they do so without specifically looking at the history of black performance and white audiences. These volumes of scholarship will display the introspective view of African Americans on their continual relationship as performers for white audiences.

This study does not focus on the content of the music, songs, or dances performed by African Americans but instead analyzes the influence such performances have had on the establishment of race, racial imagery and entertainment culture in the United States. The overall project displays the

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[22] Ann Douglass, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920's* (New York: Noonday Press, 1995).

importance of the performing arts as a form of cultural expression and as a legacy of the diverse traditions of Africa among the black community in the United States. While this cultural tradition provided agency for blacks, it also was exploited by many whites to stereotype, humiliate, and subjugate blacks. Ultimately, the context of blacks performing for a white audience provided a justification for white dominance and whiteness in society. The performing arts present an interesting backdrop for understanding the nature of double consciousness among blacks and whites, as well as for the development of race, culture and entertainment in the United States.

CHAPTER ONE: DISTORTED VIEW

Introduction

> Among the chief amusements of the [Africans]… must be reckoned singing and dancing…No sooner, however, does the departing sun permit the air to cool, than fresh vigour seems to animate each breast, and the village resounds with the tumult of loud mirth. About the same time the young people return to enjoy…soon re-echo with the sound of drums, and shouts joined with the clam'rous cymbals shrill toned bells which are heard at a prodigious distance. No wonder then that the imagination of strangers, just landed upon an unknown coast, aided by the power of superstition, should attribute these uncouth noises to invisible spirits.[1]

Englishman Thomas Winterbottom ventured to West Africa during the late eighteenth century as a missionary, physician and abolitionist. During his stay, Winterbottom reported on various aspects of the culture, people and terrain of West Africa in his writings. Through his travel account, he recognized the importance of music, dance, and song within the indigenous traditions present among the West Africans. Winterbottom made reference to the negative interpretations of the West African performing arts culture of earlier explorers and he dismissed their assessments as products of their "imagination." His account not only recognized the importance of music, dance, and song within the West African culture but it also attempted to counter the negative myths of this tradition that continually dominated the travel accounts of Europeans during the time.

Thomas Winterbottom's travel journal was one of the few texts that attempted to combat the fallacious stories that circulated from previous explorers. Ironically, the majority of European travel journals that surveyed West Africa recognized the importance of the performing arts tradition throughout the area,

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[1] Thomas Masterman Winterbottom, *An account of the native Africans in the neighborhood of Sierra Leone*, 2nd Edition, ed. John D. Hargreaves and E. Maurice Backett (London: F. Cass & Co., Ltd., 1969), 351.

but their misinterpretation of this cultural experience, as will be discussed, contributed to the subjugation and enslavement of blacks within the New World.[2]

Early European visitors negatively categorized Africans by distorting their culture. Such distortions contributed to the Africans' exploitation through the institution of slavery. The mistreatment of Africans by the North American slave system has been well-researched. North Americans and Europeans have expressed guilt and remorse for this vile practice, but several questions still linger, such as: Why did people get involved? What allowed people during the sixteenth century to create and support this system? What values were created through this distortion that fostered a system of human chattel? And, most important for this study, how did the distortion of West African music, dance, and song within travel journals contribute to their degradation and forced submission in the New World? This chapter examines the performing arts culture of West Africa and the manner in which it was distorted through European travel literature to create the moral and social justification for the creation of slavery.[3]

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[2] For this study, the term "performing arts" will be used to mean the presentation of artistic work that is related to music (instrumental and vocal), dance, theatre, and all forms that are related to the public display of performance.

[3] The main objective of this chapter is to review the influence of travel literature on the English colonies, specifically the New World, although the sources are not restricted to purely English travel journals. Slavery existed and pre-dates the North America system, but this analysis is specifically examining the most influential travel accounts that assisted in the creation of Africans to the outside world. Africa is an immense territory with an intricate, multi-dimensional development contingent on the geographical location. Every section of the land developed at its own pace and in its own way. The main area of interest in this work is West Africa because of its complicated, intertwined history with the Western world, specifically North America. West Africa is a term coined in Europe by Europeans and refers to a specific region of land but has no geographical meaning. It basically constitutes lands, and the offshore islands, about 20° latitude north of the equator and 15° longitude eastward or the large area south of the Sahara Desert.

The "Other" Defined

Travel journals described Africans as the antithesis of Europeans in their physical and cultural characteristics.[4] Europeans commonly fashioned the idea of the exotic "others" to describe non-Europeans; therefore the label was applied to several distant societies. [5] Africans were not the only group characterized as the exotic "other," but they were the main ethnic group subordinated and forced into a foreign slave labor system. Psychologist Perry Hinton argues that there are three main components that assist in defining and understanding the creation of "the other" in a society.[6] The first component is that a group of persons must be identified by specific characteristics. The main attribute that separated Africans from Europeans was their complexion. In comparison to other non-European ethnic groups, the black skin of Africans was the most dissimilar to Europeans'. Europe has a long history of associating the color black with evil and negative attributes. Therefore, the black skin of Africans marked them as the most "other," or different. Additional differences included Africans' geographical location, culture, languages and manner of dress, all of which contributed to the identification of the African group as "the other."

Hinton's second element is the identification of a set of additional characteristics to an out-group. Constructing the traits of savagery, cannibalism,

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[4] T. Carlos Jacques, "From Savages and Barbarians to Primitives: Africa, Social Typologies, and History in Eighteenth-Century French Philosophy," *History and Theory,* 36, 2, (May, 1997), 212.

[5] Peter Erickson, "Representations of Blacks and Blackness in the Renaissance," *Criticism,* 35 (1993): 499-527.

[6] The three components of the "other" comes directly from the work of Perry R. Hinton, *Stereotypes, Cognition and Culture* (Hove and East Sussex: Psychology Press, 2000), 7.

inhumanness, heathenism and innate music and dance abilities were only a few of the ways in which Europeans satisfied this second element. The last component entails identifying all persons in the "other group" as having the assigned characteristic.[7] As "the other," Africans were homogenized, therefore reducing their diversity of languages, traditions, and histories into a single group of black bodies. These depictions of Africans were spread throughout the Western world courtesy of the accounts of European explorers, beginning in the fifteenth century. European "reports about Africans are limited to description of their observable physical and cultural characteristics…all serving to paint a picture of ignorant savages."[8] Ultimately, Africans were characterized as the other by Europeans, and later North Americans, to validate the morality of black subjugation and to justify the developing race-based slave system.

The misrepresentation of West African music and dance culture is one example of the manner in which images of blacks were distorted in travel journals. Often, white explorers did not understand the diverse customs throughout the vast region, and therefore acquired the perception that African music and dance was an uncivilized activity directed solely toward pleasure. While white explorers accurately recognized music and dance as the centerpiece of many African cultures, they frequently misrepresented Africans' musicality as a sign of their innate joviality and simple-mindedness.

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[7] Hinton, 7-12.

[8] Jacques, 212.

West African Performing Arts Culture

Music, song and dance were focal points of many of West Africa's societies. This is evident in the personal narrative of Olaudah Equiano, an African forced into the transatlantic slave trade. His narrative is one of the earliest recorded first-hand accounts of an African captive within the slave trade. [9] Although Equiano spent many chaotic years outside of Africa, he still possessed a memory of the performing arts culture of his homeland of Africa. This is evident in his work in which he stated, "We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets." [10] His recollection of the rich West African culture of music and dance traditions showed the importance of these arts in society. Through his account, it is evident that both music and dance were extremely organized, functional art forms that were, at least in Equiano's time, active societal events.

The functionality of music was drawn from its ritualistic connections and its organized culture.[11] This was evident in Equiano's description: "The assembly is separated into four divisions, which dance either apart or in succession….The first division contains the married men....The married women…dance in the second division….The young men occupy the third; and the maidens the fourth." This description portrayed the ceremony procession with great detail, and it

[9] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself*, ed. Angelo Costanzo (Canada: Broadview literary texts, 2001), 48.

[10] Equiano, 48.

[11] Akia Euba, "The Potential of African Traditional Music as a Contemplative Art," *Black Orpheus 3* no. 1, (1974), 54-60, and Kofi Agawu, *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

reflected the sophisticated nature of these performing arts scenes.

Music, song and dance formed an interrelated part of many West African societies. Judith L. Hanna defined African dance as "composed of purposefully, intentionally, rhythmical, and culturally patterned sequences of nonverbal body movements and gestures which are not ordinary motor activities, the motion having inherent value."[12] Dance genres are contingent on the regional group, in which there are varying religious beliefs, daily activities, traditions, movements and style. The variety of performing arts cultures among the many West African societies is too complex for a brief explanation, but a survey of the common characteristics of dance throughout West Africa is possible.

In *Jazz Dance*, Marshall and Jean Stearns outlined six characteristics of African dance: African style is often flat-footed and favors gliding, dragging or shuffling steps; African dance is frequently performed from a crouch, knees, flexed, and body bent at the waist; African dance generally imitates animals in realistic detail; African dance places great importance on improvisation and satire, and allows for freedom of individual expression. This characteristic makes for flexibility and aids the evolution and diffusion of other African characteristics; African dance is centrifugal, exploding outward from the hip. The leg moves from the hip instead of from the knee; African dance is performed to a propulsive

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[12] Judith Lynne Hanna, "African Dance: The Continuity of Change," *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council,*.5 (1973): 165. For further reading on traditional West African Dance, Judith Lynne Hanna has contributed numerous articles and books on the review of tradition and modern African dance and its place in society. Other scholars that have contributed to this study include: Edward Evans-Pritchard, "The Dance," *Africa,* I, (October 1928), 446-462 and Geoffrey Gorer, *Africa Dances* (New York: W.W. Norton &Co., 1962).

rhythm that gives it a swinging quality.[13] The dance method and purpose greatly vary according to the indigenous group.[14] Regardless of the tribal group, however, the forms and styles were prescribed by their tradition and function.

Many dance patterns reflected a particular event or ritualistic task as described by Equiano: "Each [performing arts scene] represents some…great achievement….The subject is generally founded on some event."[15] The parallel sequences of West African dance customs include several behaviors associated with the tradition, such as physical, artistic, cultural, psychological, economic, social, communicative and political behaviors.[16] Dance is first a physical behavior, needing and involving the human body as an instrument. But West African dance went well beyond the physical.

It is also artistic behavior, because it has its own "aesthetic criteria."[17] It is a cultural behavior with a style and purpose that is contingent on the traditions, customs and mores of the people performing it. It is a social behavior, being performed in an open community involving various groups and individuals. It is a

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[13] J. Stearns and M. Stearns, *Jazz Dance* (New York: Schrimer, 1979).

[14] Hanna, 165. Judith Lynne Hanna gives an example of the difference in dance culture among different groups/societies in Africa, stating that the Ibo, Akan, Efik, Azande, and Kamba, dance involves vocal and instrumental music, including the drum, whereas among the Zulu, Matabele, Shi, Ngoni, Turkana, and Wanyaturu drums are not used, and sometimes the users of drums are despised.

[15] Equiano, 48.

[16] Hanna in "African Dance" further explains the behaviors associated with the tradition of dance.

[17] Hanna, 165.

psychological behavior because it is an “emotional experience”[18] which signifies a variety of communal and personal ideals. It is an economic behavior, for the dancer may receive payments to perform at various ceremonies. It is a political behavior because the dance may make a statement for a person in a leadership role. Finally, it is a communicative behavior, since dance is a way for people to converse and convey meaning without using verbal language.

[18] Hanna, 164.

The Role of Musical Instruments

Centuries ago, dance was an essential and sacred component of the social, political, religious and aesthetic life of West African villages. Marriage, birth, death, puberty, rain, sun, prayerfulness, hopes for a plentiful harvest, good hunting, the welcome of visitors, the recognition of leaders, and many other events were heralded with dance and musical ceremonies. Dance was interwoven within the music of society. A variety of authors note a special appreciation for drums and a consistent reflection on the importance of the drum as the controller of the dance movements.[19]

The importance of drums in West African society is evident in Equiano's personal narrative: "We have musical instruments particularly drums of different kinds."[20] To truly understand West African music and dance tradition, an examination of the unique array of musical instruments is needed. These instruments range in style and sound, but they seem to all fall under very specific categories. Almost all instruments fall under the category of membranophones, idiophones, xylophones, aerophones and chordophones.[21] The membranophones are instruments that have membranes or drum heads that vibrate. They are the simplest and least diversified of the five categories and

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[19] Pearl E. Primus, "Primitive African Dances," *The Dance Encyclopedia: Index Cards*, Anatole Chujoy, ed. (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1949).

[20] Equiano, 48.

[21] Betty Warner Dietz and Michael Babatunde Ojatunjii, *Musical Instruments of Africa: Their Nature, Use, and Place in the Life of a Deeply Musical People* (New York: The John Day Company, 1965), 24-71. Further explanation of the West African Instruments and its categories is presented in Bruno Nettl, *Music in Primitive Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

include instruments with one or two drumheads with varying shapes. This category does not include all drums, however. Idiophones are instruments with bodies that vibrate to produce sound when they are shaken or struck. This grouping is one of the most common types found throughout West Africa, and it includes rattles, bells, and various other percussion instruments. The xylophone falls into the idiophones category, but with this type, each key vibrates separately. The thumb piano, which is commonly known in West Africa as the *kembe*, also falls under this category. Aerophones are “instruments which enclose a body of vibrating air.”[22] This group is considered the woodwind of the instruments and consists of whistles and flute types. Lastly, the chordophones are instruments that produce sound through vibrating strings which can be played in three ways: plucked, struck, and bowed.

The diverse classes of musical instruments in the previously mentioned categories vary according to region. The available natural resources largely determined the types of musical instruments used in West Africa.[23] “Animal bones, leather, skins, iron, wood, fiber, shells, bamboo, and reeds along with a variety of sizes of calabash are prime sources of importance in the construction of traditional African musical instruments.”[24] Also, the materials used to make the instruments, and the style in which the instruments were played, could reflect

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[22] The information pertaining to instrument categories was found in Dietz and Ojatunjii work.

[23] Bilial Abdurahman, *Traditional African Musical Instruments* (New York: Ethno Modes Forkloric Workshop, 1987), 1.

[24] Abdurahman, 1.

a particular area or profession of their player. For example, a blacksmith may create instruments made out of wood and metal; a hunter may create instruments with animal skins.

Gender may have determined which instrument a person played. Gender orientation for instrument implementation seemed to be contingent not necessarily on ability but mainly on tradition. Women and men customarily played prescribed instruments that were often composed of natural resources available in the region.[25] These natural resources, which assisted in creating the musical instruments of West Africa, were of some interest to Arab, European and North American observers. In 1355, the explorer Ibn Battuta stated, "The trumpets are made out of elephant-tusks and their [other] musical instruments are made out of reeds and gourds."[26] Different individual lifestyles normally coordinated with the types of instruments played by certain individuals. This aspect of society represented the organizational function that music, dance and song played in the community.

The drum in West Africa falls under the category of membranophones, and it has a long, rich culture. The drum is an important aspect of West African society and deserves special attention amongst all instruments, evident in Equiano's emphasis on "particularly drums."[27] Traditionally, drums have been

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[25] Thomas A. Hale, *Griots, and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 162-63.

[26] Ibn Battuta, *Black Africa*, trans., Said Hamdun and Noel King (London: Rex Collings, 1975) and Ibn Battuta, *Corpus of Early Arabic Resources for West African History*, trans. J.F.P. Hopkins, ed. N. Levitzion & J.F.P. Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 198.

[27] Equiano, 48.

associated with special occasions, each rhythm having a purpose, a time, and a place.[28] Drumming could be used for events such as the infant naming ceremony, circumcision, agricultural ceremonies, entertainment, religious ceremonies, coming of age rituals, and other cultural rites.

The drum had special importance because of its multi-purpose use, ranging from its utilization in communication to various rituals in West African society.[29] With respect to the drum's importance as a form of communication among persons in the community, the drum and drummer were able to send messages among those persons who understood the language of the "talking drums."[30] These drums are used to communicate warnings of danger, war, peace arrangements and other information that would assist with culture survival. The drums were of special importance in the West African community because of their multi-faceted functions; they were used for communication, life-cycle, agricultural, recreational events and other ceremonies.[31]

The importance of instruments in African societies was evident in Equiano's account. There were dozens of instruments that were within the

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[28] Charry, 199.

[29] There are dozens of different drums used throughout West Africa, the significant variables among them being the shape, method of assembling the body, playing technique and the person who played them. The style of playing these drums range from bare hands to an exterior object used in order to create sound. There are traditionally two types of drums the open drum and the closed drum. The open drum is a "single-headed drum with an opening at one end." The closed drums have a "single or double-headed drums without any open end." The jembe, dundun, sangba, kenkeni and tama are just a few of the names of drums that existed in West Africa. The most well known drum in the area was the Jembe, but there are various other kinds used in the region.

[30] Charry, 233.

[31] Charry, 3.

categories previously mentioned. One instrument in particular, the banjo, was one of the main instruments that consistently appeared in European and North American journals. Originally derived from North Africa, the banjo was an important part of West African cultures during the time of the Atlantic slave trade. Its continuance in America and transformation into an instrument used in American folk music brings to the forefront many questions for historians and ethnomusicologists.[32]

Equiano recognized the choreographed style of performing arts: "Every great event, such as a triumphant return from battle, or other cause of public rejoicing, is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with song and music suited to the occasion."[33] The functional aspect of music is relayed through the use of performing arts for the appropriate event, although a group not specifically mentioned in the narrative, griots, coordinated these "great events." Griots are the "musical-verbal artisans" of many parts of West Africa.[34] The term

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[32] The influence of these African instruments in the Diaspora presents potential research opportunities on the incorporation of these musical tools through the transatlantic slave trade and an analysis of why and how these instruments were brought to the various regions. Although the fiddle was also an instrument directly descending from West Africa and often referred to in travel journals and in North American slave texts, this instrument did not reach the notoriety of the banjo as the American folk instrument.

[33] Equiano, 48.

[34] Charry, 1. The most common theory is that the term griot comes from the French word guiriot. The professions' title of griot ranges according to the ethnic group such as: Wolof *guiewel*, Fulbe *gawlo,* Mande *jeli,jail* (Creole djidiu), Spanish *guirigay*, Catalan *guirigaray*, Berber and Hassaniya Arabic *iggio, egeum*, and Arabic *qawal* via *guewel*. There are dozens of theories on the origin of the word griot, which seemed to be the most dominant manner of referring to the professional musicians of West Africa, although the term jeli was also often used. The griots, or any other term used according to the geographical region, are not the only persons responsible for the music of the area; the title seemed to refer more to the profession of creating music. According to Charry, there was a distinction between jeli and non-jeli musical artists. Jelis devoted their lives to music and non-jelis have other avenues they ventured into for an occupation, but they still were able to produce music (play musical instruments, sing, dance). See Hale,162-63.

musician only narrowly explains the role of griot. A griot could be historian, adviser, spokesperson, diplomat, mediator, interpreter, translator, musician, composer, teacher, praise singer, or ceremony participant, according to the area in which s/he lived.[35]

As a historian, the griot used stories to present oral narratives of past events with references to tradition, values and social structure. The geographic mobility of the profession allowed them to have a wider view of the entire area. The griot was able to interpret and recall events of the past and relay them orally to living persons. In many areas, griots were known as advisers to a variety of persons in different hierarchical stations. Their advice could be offered through song, open communication or parables. They had that right because of their in-depth knowledge of past events and people, as well as their ability to understand their present communities. Griots held diverse roles throughout West Africa.[36]

[35] Hale, 18-58.

[36] Hale, See also Eric Charry, *Mande Music* and Jan Jansen, *The griot's craft: an essay on oral tradition and diplomacy* (Munster, New Jersey: Transaction 2000).

Distorted Observations

The griot, music, instruments and dance were all a part of ritual cultural events and were perverted within travel journals. European geographical explorers had the most lasting effect on the distorted image of the African, but they were not the creators of the stories. Prior to European exploration, there were several myths that centered on Africa and its inhabitants. Scholar Margery Perham commented that travel journals created an illusion of Africa that "was one of revaluation….that pre-European Africa was a place of complete and anarchic savagery."[37] Europeans' initial impressions of Africa came from the classical world of Greek, Roman and Muslim explorers.[38] Their accounts were well known amongst the educated men of Europe, and they formed the foundation of European knowledge and point of view of Africa and its inhabitants. They were also the first travel journals to represent the African as the exotic "other."

For instance, the earliest travel writer, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, a Greek researcher and storyteller from the fifth century BC, was the first to record observations on Africa's interior. Herodotus is known as the "Father of History"

[37] Margery Perham and J. Simmons, eds., *African Discovery: An Anthology of Exploration* (London, 1963), 16.

[38] William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), 1.

but equally deserved the title of "Father of Travel Literature."[39] While these writings have been proven erroneous, they were still quite influential in setting the basis of understanding and historical knowledge of Africa and its inhabitants. Herodotus stated that Africans "eat locusts and snakes, share wives, and speak no human language, but rather screech like bats."[40] He continued to say that wild animals inhabited Africa with men that had "dogs' heads and those with no heads whose eyes are in their chests."[41] Although Herodotus' work was inaccurate, it did set the precedent for Europeans' initial impressions of Africa as uncivilized and exotic. The Roman compiler, Gaius Plinius Secundus, also known as Pliny the Elder, uncritically received these fantastic descriptions and continued the mythical images in the first century AD.[42] He contributed to the exoticism of the African that "hath a cloven foot….His muzzle or snout turneth up: his taile twineth like the bores."[43] These statements were prevalent throughout classical works; Africans were not only exotic but often depicted with non-human

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[39] K.H. Waters, *Herodotus, the historian: his problems, methods, and originality* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1985); Percy G. Adams, ed., *Travel Literature Through the Ages: An Anthology* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.,1988), 3. Herodotus is considered the "Father of History" and was one of the earliest writers to say anything about the interior of Africa. He visited Egypt and Libya in the fifth century B.C. and recorded his experiences while also documenting the layout of the land. For several centuries there was little added to the tales of Africa reported by Herodotus.

[40] Herodotus, *History,* Bk IV, chs. 171-94, trans. (Letchworth, Great Britain: J. Enoch Powel Temple Press, 1912), 341-48.

[41] Herodotus, 341-48.

[42] Pliny*, The Natural History*, Bk V, ch. 8, ed. and trans. (John Bostock and H.T. Riley, London, 1893), 405-406 and Sorcha Carey, *Pliny's catalogue of culture: art and empire in the natural history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[43] Gaius Julius Solinus, *The Excellent and Pleasant Worke*, trans. (Arthur Golding, London, 1587).

characteristics. In the continued tradition, a geographer from the third-century, Gaius Julius Solinus, described Africans with “long snouts” and others who possessed “no noses, no months, and still others, no tongues.”[44] Herodotus’, Pliny’s and Solinus’ works were duplicated for over a thousand years, supplying the groundwork for many translation compilations.[45]

Outside of the Greek and Roman sphere, the Islamic world also had an immense impact on the Europeans’ image of Africa. The classical Greek and Roman writers directly affected the works of Arab writers. The tenth century author Mutahar Ibn Tahir al Maqdisi continued to preserve the contrived beliefs of Africa by stating, “There is no marriage among them; the child does not know his father, and they eat people…they are people of black color, flat noses, kinky hair, and little understanding or intelligence."[46] The majority of the Arab travelers’ accounts were unknown to the Western world until centuries after publication.[47]

The last of the writers of Arab descent who contributed to the image of Africa was Leo Africanus, often remembered for being captured and converted to Christianity in Rome. [48] He received acclaim throughout Europe and later in North America. While residing in Rome, Africanus wrote an account of his

[44] Solinus, ch. 42.

[45] Robert Lucas, “Medieval French Translations of the Latin Classics to 1500,” *Speculum* 45, (1970): 226.

[46] Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 25-29.

[47] The manuscripts of many Arab geographers and travelers were translated mainly by French scholars during the ninth century.

[48] Cohen, 3.

experiences and views of the African nations and people. His texts reflected the image of blacks in the Islamic society that were circulated in post-Byzantium Roman society.[49] Africanus stated, "Negroes are brutes without reason, without intelligence or knowledge. They have no notion of anything. They live like animals, without rules or laws."[50] His account was widely distributed and translated into various languages, allowing it to have influence in many countries. Africanus wrote his original narrative in 1526, in flawed Italian; a proper Italian version was printed in 1550 and was translated into English in 1600. His work was widely used until the eighteenth century in England, well after first contact between Africans and modern Europeans had taken place.[51] Accounts like those of Africanus influenced successors in their exploration and introduced the African to the literate and semi-literate European world.[52]

The next foreign adventurers in African waters were the Portuguese.[53] They began to travel to the continent in the fifteenth century with the main purposes of commercial enterprise and missionary work.[54] The Portuguese set

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[49] The ideals of the Islamic society reviewed in Rome, only reflects the Islamic racist stereotypes with a combination of erroneous beliefs that already existed in Europe.

[50] Leo Africanus, *Description de l'Afrique*, ed. and trans. (A. Epaulard, Paris 1956), 65 and Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 54, 377.

[51] Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa, British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850,Vol. 1* (The University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 1964), 11.

[52] Specifically the ones mentioned in this review, were translated and re-published throughout the European nations for centuries after their first publication.

[53]T.J. Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856*, 2nd edition (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd.,1968), 18.

[54] Cohen, 3.

the standard for the manner Europeans would interact with Africans, and they greatly influenced the development of the Atlantic slave trade that continued and flourished in the New World. The Portuguese claimed various regions on the continent "in the name of God, the pope, and the king."[55] These Portuguese also opened the door for West African exploration. One of the earliest travelers, Alvise Cadamosto, voyaged throughout the Western African nation of Gambia in 1455 with Henry the Navigator.[56]

The encounters of the Portuguese and West Africans maintained the generalization of the classical works. The Portuguese had a Eurocentric worldview; many of their accounts represented a biased view that assisted in the support of the slavery system. As a Catholic society, the Portuguese insisted that their pursuits in West Africa were religiously based. Portuguese missionaries recognized slavery as a Christianizing process, and therefore legitimate and right, in order to permit Africans to make the transition from "immoral heathens" to Christians. Christianity was continually used to defend the institution of slavery throughout Europe and North America.

The English and the Dutch were the next to enter the African continent, and they demonstrated the influence of their predecessors. In the sixteenth century, numerous travelers went to Africa from England, carrying with them preconceived ideas imparted on them by previous travelers. The traditional view of Africans did not dissipate with the influx of Europeans during the sixteenth

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[55] Bowen, 18.

[56] G.R. Crone, "Notes on the Texts," *The Voyages of Cadamosto*, ed. (G.R. Crone: London, 1937), Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., no. 80, xliii.

century. Many Europeans were aware of the travelers' accounts from the medieval times, but not until the sixteenth century, with the development of printing, were they publicly dispersed.[57] In several European travel journals, such as the popular accounts of Richard Jobson, Renè Cailliè, and later Mungo Park, the legacy of these classical explorers was continued.[58] Mungo Park's account first appeared in 1799 and over 5,000 copies were sold during the first month of publication.[59] Two additional editions appeared that year and were translated into French and German.[60] Parks' works were accessible to the educated English public in spite of the fact that several were written in a variety of European languages; the classical writings were re-published in numerous regional collections that continued their influence in the public sphere.

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[57] Robin Hallet, *The Penetration of Africa: European Exploration in North and West Africa to 1815* (New York and Washington: Frederick Praeger, 1965), 39.

[58] Mungo Park, *Travels in Interior Districts of Africa*, Kate Ferguson Marsters, ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 75.

[59] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing And Transculturation* (London and New York: Routeledge, 1992), 74.

[60] Pratt, 74.

From Distortion to Subjugation

The performing arts culture was distorted in the written words of early explorers from the continent of Europe and Euro-Americans.[61] European travelers often overlooked or ignored the ritualistic purpose of African music and dance and instead inferred that Africans' musicality was an intrinsic trait of the black race. The creation of the innate performer reverberated in travel journals. The distortion of Africans' music and dance culture resulted in black bodies being reduced to the role of servant, prostitute and entertainment source in the New World.[62] As members of a subjugated class, blacks were sexually abused and forced to entertain whites through the institution of slavery. The distorted performing arts culture of West Africans within travel journals contributed to the negative ideals associated with the black body.

The innate performer characteristic was assigned to the black body and distributed through travel journals. This neglect of the diversity and complexity of

[61] Reviewed travel journals that contain references to the performing arts culture in Africa are as follows: John Ogilby, *Africa: being accurate description of the regions of Aegypt, Barbary, Lybia, and Billendulgerid, the land of Negroes, Guinee, Aethiopia, and the Abyssines; with all the adjacent island* (London: T. Johnson, 1670); El Hage Abd Salem Shabeeny, *An Account of Timbuctoo and Housa, territories in the interior of Africa*, trans. James Grey Jackson, Reprint, (London: Cass, 1976);Thomas Astley, *A new general collection of voyages and travels; consisting of the most esteemed relations, which have been hitherto published in any language; comprehending everything remarkable in is kind, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America,* ed. John Green (London: Printed for T. Astley, 1745-47); Richard Hakluyt, *The principall navigations, voyages and discoveries of the English nation, made by sea or ouer land, to the most remote and farthest distant quarters of the earth at any time within the compasse of these 1500 yeeres: [yeeres]* (London: George Bishop, 1589) Text-fiche; Paul Erdmann, *Letters on West Africa and the slave trade: Paul Erdmann Isert's Journal to Guinea and the Carribeen Islands in Columbia* (1788) translated from the German and edited by Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) and Thomas Birch Freeman, *Journals of various visits to the kingdom of Ashanti, Aku, and Dahomi in Western Africa,*3rd ed. (London: Cass, 1968). These travel journals mainly represent works reviewed but not directly quoted in this chapter's text. They are provided as further evidence of the continual reference to Africans' association with music and dance.

[62] Peter Fryer*, Black People in the British Empire: An Introduction* (London: Pluto, 1988).

African culture contributed to performing arts being used as a tool to subjugate blackness. One popularly read travel journal was *The Golden Trade*, in which Richard Jobson stated that "There is [sic], without doubt, no people on the earth more naturally affected to the sound of musicke then these people."[63] The belief that blacks were "naturally affected" to the performing arts resulted in Africans being identified by specific characteristics, therefore asserting their "otherness" in European society. Assigning to Africans an innate ability for music and dance contributed to their placement as entertainers or objects of amusement, therefore emphasizing their physical, rather than intellectual or human, qualities. This characterization was purposely placed on the black body in order to construct a social setting and culture that supported the subjugation of Africans while justifying the whites' assertion of dominance within the institution of slavery that was developing in the New World.

Richard Jobson's assessment of West Africa was only one instance of the numerous published works that misrepresented the performing arts culture of African blacks. Jean-Baptiste Labat, A French Dominican priest, also simplified the music and dance culture and stated that Africans "only love their pleasures… are excessively lazy, flee work as if it were the worst thing in the world; if hunger did not force them, they would never cultivate their land….They love to dance."[64] Labat reduced Africans to a childlike, simple group that barely survived due to

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[63] Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade or A Discovery of the River Gambia, and The Golden Trade of the Aethiopians* (Teignmouth &Devonshire: E.E. Speight & R. H. Walpole, 1623), 105-108.

[64] Jean-Baptiste Labat*, The Memoirs of Pere Labat, 1693-1705,* Translated and abridged by John Eaden (London: F. Cass, 1970), 152-160.

their naturally lackadaisical manners. This idea reverberated in travel journals that stated that Africans needed to be placed within the North American slave system in order to prevent slothfulness. Therefore, whites validated slavery as a method of aiding in Africans' moral and mental development. In the nineteenth century, English explorer Richard Burton stated that blacks were "unprogressive and unfit for change…devotedly fond of music. This love of tune has invented nothing but whistling and the whistle."[65] Burton asserted negative images of Africans as "unprogressive" which fit well within the European collective mentality and which helped justify their enslavement of blacks.

The fact that Africans possessed a culture with a strong tradition of music and dance in multiple activities was not necessarily negative. The actual problem was with the *portrayal* of the performing arts in travel journals, which both demonstrated and encouraged a lack of understanding and recognition of music's cultural significance. Although some explorers recognized the diversity and richness of music and dance, many whites mischaracterized their ritualistic nature. Their perspective deformed a tradition filled with rituals and order and transformed it to a negative myth that enhanced the "otherness" of the black body. Blacks became subjugated through the distortions in the written word, which created images consumed by whites throughout Europe and North America. John Matthews attempted to draw an accurate picture of a performance scene in 1788. He stated:

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[65] Richard F. Burton, *Wandering in West Africa, from Liverpool to Fernando Po*. (New York: Dover, 1863).

> They began singing the praises of the deceased, and dancing to the music of a drum. In the dance they frequently vary the figure; sometimes forming one great circle round the music, and clapping hands at every period or repetition of their song. Sometimes one person performs the dance, the rest sitting or standing round in a circle, joining chorus and clapping hands as before: at other times two, three, or four, will dance together till they are weary, and then relieved by others; the rest singing and clapping hands.[66]

This account gave a vivid portrayal of a performing arts scene in Sierra Leone without the biases apparent in numerous other travel journals. Matthews' report displayed the relationship between music, dance and song for a specific ritual ceremony of the region through his reference to "singing the praises of the deceased." Therefore, Matthews' account recognized that the performing arts were not innate and random but, instead, they were progressive expressions of a cultured civilization. Matthews' report represented a minority of the works that attempted to display an accurate description of the performing arts tradition. Another explorer, John Barbot, also witnessed a dance scene in Nigeria in the 1700s and stated,

> Their dances are commonly in a round, singing the next thing that occurs, whether sense or nonsense. Some of them stand in the middle of the ring, holding one hand on their head, and the other behind their waist, advancing and strutting out their belly forwards, and beating very hard with their feet on the ground. Others clap their hands to the noise of a kettle, or a calabash fitted for a musical instrument. When young men, or boys, dance with maidens, or women, both sides always made abundance of lascivious gestures.[67]

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[66] John Matthews, *A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone on the Coast of Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1966).

[67] John Barbot, *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea; and of Ethiopia Inferior, Vulgarly Angola: Being a New and Accurate Account of the Western Maritime Countries of Africa*, cited by Awnsham Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts* (6 vols.; London: 1704, 1732), 53.

Barbot's description of the circular style dance motions, active element of many dance rituals throughout West Africa, was reminiscent of Matthews' account. Also, his report used critical terms to describe the scene, such as "lascivious" and "nonsense," both of which contributed to the negative qualities assigned to the black body. Similar to Barbot's travel journal, many other travel journals did not specifically state the ritualistic purpose for the performing arts but instead presented them as if the Africans performing them were innately prone to music and dance, therefore illustrated their disposition toward gaiety and heathenism. Furthermore, the overall missionary outlook of Africa featured the image of human sacrifice, highly sexual religious ceremonies, wicked excesses of polygamy, and lascivious dances along with a childlike ignorance.[68] The presentation of the naturally inclined dancer and singer assisted in reinforcing the perceived need to enslave black bodies and supported the need for missionary work.

The missionaries had a great interest in religiously converting and "civilizing" the inhabitants of the African continent.[69] Europeans believed that it was their duty to assert "order, self-discipline, self-abnegation, sexual restraint,

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[68] Curtin, 327.

[69] The perception and ideals of the European missionaries have been reviewed in great detail in many scholarly texts and articles. For further reading on missionaries in Africa may be found: Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London: Longmans, 1952); J.F.A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891* (London: Longmans, 1965); R. L. Rotberg, C*hristian Missionaries and the Creation of Northern Rhodesia* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1965);M. W. Murphree, *Christianity and the Shona* (London: Athlone, 1969); and H.W. Mobley, *The Ghanian's Image of the Missionary* (Leiden: Brill, 1970). Also, Christian missionaries were not the first group to enter to convert the African populations. Muslims entered and converted several regions in the continent during their earlier explorations.

and Christianity" throughout West Africa.[70] The Protestant religion was brought by missionaries from Britain and the Netherlands, while the Catholic missionaries were from France, Spain and Portugal.[71] These missionaries attempted to convert Africans to Christianity, and they considered missionary work as a "civilizing mission."[72] One Wesleyan missionary, Reverend R. M. Macbriar, stated, "All these people…are capable of civilisation…It must be a Christian civilisation."[73] The Christian missionaries were culturally arrogant, believing that Christianity in Africa would liberate the Africans from the "bondage of sin, fear, and superstition."[74]

Africanist scholar James S. Coleman, stated, "Tropical Africa had a special attraction for the missionaries. The heathen was his target, and of all human groups, the Africans were believed to be the most heathen."[75] The

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[70] Cohen, 33.

[71] Norman R. Bennett, *African and Europe: from Roman times to the Present* (New York and London: Africana Publishing Co., 1975); Rev. Dr. J. Lewis Krapf, *Travels, Researcher, and Missionary Labours, During An Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa: Together with Journeys to Jagg, Usambara, Ukambani, Shoa, Absennia, and Khartum; and a Coasting Voyage From Mombaz to Cape Delgado* (London: Trubner and Co., Paternoster Row, 1860). The Portuguese and Spanish were the first of the European nations that often centered there exploration pursuits to introduce Catholicism. Missionaries were some of the most influential visitors who often learned local languages to assist in their pursuits. Such Portuguese missionaries that left influential travel journals include: Antonio da Coinceicao, "Tratado" and English translation, "Treatise on the Cuama Rivers" in D.N. Beach and H. de Noronha, *The Shona and the Portuguese 1575-1890* (2 vols.: Harare, 1980), 1:196-229 and Francisco Monclaro, "Account of the Journey Made by Fathers of the Company of Jesus with Francisco Barretto in the Conquest of Monootapa in the Year 1569," in Theal/RSEA, 3:202-53.

[72] "Christianity and Native Government of Uganda," *The Church Missionary Review*, 72 (1921): 306.

[73] Burton, 178.

[74] Toyin Falola, ed., *African Cultures and Societies Before 1885*, v. 2 (North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2000).

[75] Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman (eds.), *The Politics of the Developing* Areas (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,1960), 278.

missionaries learned of this erroneous perception from earlier travelers and their writings. Therefore, these missionaries continued the tradition of constructing negative images of the black body. The missionaries were critical of African religion, social customs, institutions and polygamous ways, often condemning their lifestyles as possessing "barbarous superstition."[76] In order to further support their expeditions, many missionaries asserted that Africans possessed immoral natures.

Missionaries were "representatives of European 'civilization and morality'…and were not only spokesmen for their god, but keepers of the European culture as well."[77] They entered the land, with intentions to cast a negative light upon the culture and history of Africans, identifying them as "the other," while validating European hegemony. Missionaries legitimized the use of Africans as slaves and the slave system as a positive institution that could civilize and Christianize the African captives. These Christianizing expeditions were often used as excuses to subjugate the black body and legitimize the dominant position of whites, who were Christians and therefore "civilized." One slaver stated that he was a "kidnapper doing God's service." The slaver later said that he was "instrumental in the salvation of more souls, than all the missionaries in Africa through the placement of Africans into the slavery system."[78]

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[76]Almond and Coleman, 33. This work explains the superstitions of Africa and proclaimed that "Polygamy exists on every part of the coast" of Africa contributing to the "heathenish" ideals of the region.

[77] Kariamu Welsh Asante, "The Jerusarema Dance of Zimbabwe," *Journal of Black Studies,* 15, 4, (June 1985): 381-403.

[78]Bowen, 18.

From Distortion to Sexual Exploitation

Missionaries provided religious justification for whites' dominance and blacks' subjugation within the Atlantic slave trade. The missionaries, analogous to other outside white explorers, often analyzed the performing arts aspect of African cultures. In many missionary accounts, the performing arts suggested an innate relationship between black women and lascivious behavior. Thus, not only was the innate African performer portrayed, but also the idea of the over-sexualized black female. "To many of the missionaries, the dances of the Africans were licentious, lustful, indecent, and provocative."[79] Within many West African traditions, women held important roles as dancers in rituals and ceremonies; these roles were often distorted by white explores and portrayed as the displays of innately lascivious women.

As a result of the sharp differences in European and African females' traditional dance movements, foreign missionaries and other white visitors often criticized black women. These criticisms ranged from complaints about how African women would mainly use the lower half of their bodies in vibrating motions to perform certain African dance movements to negative reactions to the partly clothed appearance of African women. "They are all blacks, and goe naked, only covering theyr pryvie partes,"[80] Henry Hawks, an English merchant, stated in the early sixteenth century, "The wild people go naked, without anything upon them….The women ware the skinne of adeere before their privities and

[79] Bowen, 384.

[80] Richard Eden, *The First Three English Books on America,* Edward Arber, ed. (Birmingham, 1885), 17-29.

nothing else upon their bodies."[81] The manner in which African women dressed was of constant concern in the travel journals, and great emphasis was placed on the stark differences in custom. European missionaries often used differences between African and European women in order to portray black women as lewd, immoral beings and white women as chaste and moral persons. Therefore, these early assessments of black femininity contributed to the sexual abuse that was actively practiced throughout the institution of slavery.

In travel journals, African female dance moves were described as vulgar displays of sexuality. The majority of the spectators who created these assessments were white men who had a completely different view of dance. The West African women's sensuous movements and "vibrant polyrhythmic hip shaking" were often interpreted as evidence of the heathenish and lustful, uncontrollability of blacks that needed to be restrained by European and North American explorers. The misunderstood dancing and singing of West Africa contributed to the idea that black females were over-sexualized beings who could not control their lustful ways. Black women were often physically and sexually exposed to the white male explorer (slaver). As one foreign traveler wrote about sub-Sahara Africa, "the women much given to lust and uncleanenesse, specially with straungers, which among them is no shame."[82]

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[81] Richard G. Cole, "Sixteenth-Century Travel Books as a Source of European Attitudes Toward Non-White and Non-Western Culture," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,* 116, 1 (Feb. 15, 1972): 66.

[82] Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Discours of Voyages into East and West Indies* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Obris Terrarum, 1974), 202.

This statement exemplifies the belief that African women were “specially” attracted to European explorers, a belief which set the stage for white males’ sexual assaults toward black females. This idea contributed to the belief that black women could not be raped since blacks desired sexual relations with whites. African women’s participation in the performing arts traditions was demoted through these traveler’s accounts into displays of their lewd manners. While on the Gold Coast of West Africa, slave trader Captain Theodore Canot observed,

> a whirling circle of half-stripped girls danced to the monotonous beat of a tom-tom. Presently the formal ring was broken, and each female stepping out singly, danced according to her individual fancy. Some were wild, some were soft, some were tame, and some were fiery.[83]

The language Canot used to describe the West African female dance movements reveals how Europeans viewed these performances. The women’s partial nudity and such terms as *wild, tame* and *fiery* alluded to the women’s perceived sexual nature; the description exemplifies how European travelers used language normally reserved to describe undomesticated animals to describe West African women. These ideals contributed to the perversion of African females and assisted in their commoditization not only for labor but also for sexual pleasure. Sexually reinterpreting African females’ roles throughout West Africa society greatly contributed to the creation of myths about Africans.

The lack of recognition of the African female role in the performing arts

[83] Theodore Canot, *Adventures of an African Slaver. Being a True Account of Captain Theodore Canot, Trader in Gold, Ivory and Slaves on the Coast of Guinea: His Own Story as Told in the Year 1854 to Brantz Mayer,* Malcolm Cowley, ed. (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1928), 73.

displayed the gender biases that existed in the European frame of reference, but there is a variety of sources that recognize women's role as a musician in society. In 1830, Réné` Caillié "saw several men parading about, beating large drums, and women with tambourine… these musicians were what are called at the Senegal griotes, or wandering minstrels, who make it their business to sing songs."[84] This account gives very specific information about the types of instruments used during a ceremony and mentions the male and female griots. One account even alters the name "griot" in order to apply it exclusively to females: "guiriotte or female musician…she held a kind of hard calabash covered with hide that had ten or twelve strings, which she played well…she began to sing."[85]

There are more accounts of females as professional griots. In 1802, one European observing a circumcision ceremony stated that "griots and griotes" or boys and girls were active participants in the mourning ritual.[86] These sources, and the consistency of identifying female griots in various forms, assist in understanding the active role professional female musicians have throughout the region. Women were active musicians in society, although many records imply that they may have been restricted to specific instruments.[87] For example, the

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[84] Réné Caillié, *Travels through Central Africa to Timbuctoo; and across the Great Desert to Morocco; Performed in the Years, 1824-1828,* 2 vols. (London: Frank Cass, 1968).

[85] Eric Charry, *Mande Music: Traditional and Modern Music of the Maninka and Mandinka of Western Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 105-107.

[86] Charry, 371.

[87] Specifically found in Charry's work it states that the water drum, or ji dunan, was a smaller drum used by the Mande people and was played by women.

water drum, or ji dunan, was a smaller drum used by the Mande people and was "played by women."[88]

The travel journal deliberately created the libidinous, immoral black female body through its misrepresentation of African cultures. Whites specifically perverted black bodies to rationalize blacks' degraded position in the Atlantic slave trade. Many travel journals that were absorbed into European culture were biased and Eurocentric in their review of African cultures, but there were a small portion of Europeans who attempted to understand and depict the diverse regions accurately.

In the sixteenth century, European explorers began to travel to Africa to conduct scientific research. Scientific exploration was often sponsored by a variety of learned societies to discover more about this unknown continent.[89] The London-based Association for the Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, known as the African Association, was a group that was organized specifically for scientific explorations of the African continent. The group was composed of aristocrats and wealthy businessmen who professed devotion to an un-biased scholarly view of the interior of West Africa.[90] The organization formed with a "desire for definite, scientific knowledge of this great

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[88] Charry, 11.

[89] Ali A. Mazrui, "European Exploration and Africa's Self-Discovery," *The Journal of Modern African Studies, 7, 4* (1969): 663.

[90] Pratt, 69-70, 10.

continent" therefore funding the "chosen man to find out the facts."[91]

The purpose of these types of scientific organizations was to establish legitimate commercial and diplomatic contact, but they were still plagued by the existing myths of Africa formulated by earlier European explorers. Although they countered many pre-existing African myths, they maintained some of these stereotypes and severely affected the images of Africans and their descendents. Interestingly, the anti-slavery movement was accelerated by these explorers who attempted to present an unbiased view of Africans. One Danish physician and scientific explorer, Paul Isert, stated that proponents of slavery should "travel in the African interior…to be cured of their prejudices."[92] This innovative approach to Africa and the African did not affect North America with the same velocity as Europe, and allowed for slavery and the distorted black body to be a culturally intrinsic aspect of the New World foundation. The African Association was the first that tried to accurately understand the diversity of African cultures within the Western regions. These explorers were in many ways pioneer anthropologists who tried not to disrupt the daily activities in the various societies, and endeavored to give an accurate view of the cultures. These groups entered the continent after the missionaries and slave traders and often demonstrated a general desire for human inquiry. The travel journals which contained and

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[91] Extracts from The Proceedings of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, London 1790. Found in an archival collection of works in a published text*, West African Explorers*, C. Howard, ed. (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1951),74-75 and Records of the African Association 1788-1831. Ed., *Robin Hallet for the Royal Geographical Society* (London: Nelson, 1964).

[92] Found in Pratt, 71.

helped to create the negative myths of Africa were the main supply of knowledge and history of this unknown land. However, the later, scientific attempts to present valid information appeared well after earlier stereotypes had become a part of the European consciousness. Therefore the attempts were unable to combat a long history of black misrepresentation and abuse.

Slavery Validation and Justification

Europeans created an accepted vision that validated the human chattel system in the New World. [93] Essentially, the accepted vision was the stereotypical view of "the other" that presented Africans as jovial, over-sexualized music and dance performers. The "natural" inclination of blacks to be happy through music and dance downgraded the complex culture and people while it presented Africans as naturally submissive, childlike and simple. Consequently, whites subscribed to the perception that Africans required firm control and were innately subservient. The over-sexualized black female displayed within European accounts validated the sexual abuse of black women by white slavers. These accepted visions of the perverted African body comforted whites throughout slavery's existence.

White slave owners utilized this accepted vision to mentally create a hierarchy in which whites dominated blacks. The stereotypes assisted in maintaining an idea that one group was superior to the other, therefore validating the dominant group's self-asserted position. Whites attempted to create an accepted vision of the black body as immoral, over-sexualized, lazy, docile and innately happy, all of which helped to validate slavery and asserted the hegemony of whites in society.

Whites needed to create and believe in the subordinate state of the African for two reasons: to commodify the African and to justify whites' pursuits of colonies and people under the power of European monarchs. With these ideals,

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[93] Sander Gilman. *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 16-27.

Africa was rendered the subject of Europe's projections, positive or negative. Scholar, Hèlène Cixous stated, "I saw how the white superior, plutocratic, civilized world founded its power on repressions of populations who had suddenly become invisible."[94] Throughout the non-European lands, Europeans asserted hegemony through forced physical subjugation and consistently emphasized difference or otherness. In *Imperial Eyes,* Mary Louis Pratt*,* referred to the encounter space between non-Europeans and Europeans as contact zones which were an active part of cultural formations for an imperialistic region attempting to establish its rank through nationalist, ethnocentric manners.[95]

The rise of European nationalism and the New World's need to define itself as an independent nation contributed to white's focus on difference. In comparison to blacks, whites established themselves as normal or the standard.[96] The recognition of Africans by their black skin and identifying them as "the other" contributed to the development of race and the social development of a New World culture. Also, the New World's development of a cash crop and a desired free labor system resulted in the region being founded on principles of the African "other" and the white standard.

[94] David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, eds., *Derrida and Difference* (Coventry, England: Parousia Press,1985) and quoted in Robert Young, *White Mythologies* (Routledge: London and New York, 1990), 1.

[95] Pratt, 43.

[96] Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, "Before Othello: Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 54, 1 (Jan., 1997): 21.

Constructing the Race

The foundation of race was centered on the ideals of difference and the creation of the other. The association of sameness required rights but the recognized "other" needed to be established and clearly classified. Somewhere in the process, while Africans were being characterized as having a strange or exotic nature, the term "race" came into general use.[97] The earliest record of the use of the word "race" in the English language was in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar, *Dance of the Seven Deidly Sins.* The author referred to race in the verse, "And bakbyttaris of sindry racis," within the section on the sin of envy.[98] The word "race" was sporadically mentioned throughout the sixteenth century, but in the seventeenth century it became associated with a term used to classify humans.[99] The word was used by the Spanish during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to describe the "caste or quality of authentic horses" that were recognized through an iron brand on their body.[100] In the sixteenth century, the Spanish were active in the African slave trade; the Spanish began to use the term "race" to refer to the populations discovered through their travels.[101] The exploration of foreign lands and the acquisition of power through the Spanish

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[97] Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 37.

[98] Smedley, 38 and Peter Osborne and Stella Sanford, ed., *Philosophies of Race and Ethnicity* (New York and London: Continuum, 2002).

[99] Smedley, 38 and Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[100] Banton, 60-65.

[101] Banton, 62.

imperialistic pursuits led directly to the classification of new groups.

The English adopted the term "race" from the Spanish and used it to identify people as well as to characterize people they discovered and exploited throughout their explorations. Travel journals were utilized to introduce to public favor a part of the globe that was virtually unknown to the rest of the world. Whites assigned drastically different characteristics to Africans according to "their color, their lack of Christian faith, and their social customs" which led to the formation of the concept of a single, homogenized group.[102] Ideas of separate races were a fairly old construction, and existed before the word was generally accepted. Travel journals depicted blackness as a separate race of inferior and uncivilized beings. The continual distortion of African music and dance contributed to the misrepresentation of the black race. The term "race" was often applied to the black body but it only represented one dynamic of this social construction. It was apparent that Europeans were being associated with normality and power which began early within the slave trade.

European imperialism and assertions of hegemony over unknown lands and people were predecessors to the development of whiteness that later thrived in North America. Travel accounts set the foundation for the expectation of blackness while and asserted whiteness throughout the Western world. These written accounts were quite influential due to the technological innovations and the accounts' circulation via literary and nonliterary mediums. Exploring the preponderance of these accounts and their place in the Western world

[102] Cohen, 27.

contributes to understanding their weight in structuring the development of race and racial stereotypes.

The Publication of Blackness

Travel journals were a popular form of literature and media. They were the first major source that illustrated and distributed images of Africa and its inhabitants to the Western world. Travel literature brought stories of great voyages of discovery and broadened the knowledge of Africa to several areas of the European world in massive collections and translations that consistently crossed national boundaries in one form or another. Publications that focused on Africa contributed to the shared attitudes, values and meanings of the land and its inhabitants. First-person journals transmitted messages that portrayed various aspects of African culture and society. The performing arts tradition in many areas of Africa was often depicted throughout travel literature.

Travel journals were the *National Geographic* magazine of their day. The image of Africa and its inhabitants were plagued with pervasive myths that were distributed to the public through these writings. These misrepresentations were a manipulation and perversion of Africans and their culture which were distributed and created by travelers' accounts of this distant land and its people. Travel journals created the perceived African and contributed to the commoditization of Africans for the Atlantic market place. Additionally, they justified the assertion of European hegemony, therefore setting the foundation for tenets of race and racism in the New World.

Travel journals represented eyewitness observations and recorded opinions of European travelers that influenced the initial ideas of Africa and its inhabitants throughout the Western world. The first accounts created an image

of Africa that was strengthened by frequent contact, and further reinforced by the initiation and tremendous growth of the Atlantic slave trade. This image reflected the European's personal feelings of superiority as the conquerors of distant lands. Through these travel accounts, Europeans created "domestic subjects of Euroimperalism" therefore allowing for the subjugation of Africans in the European public sphere. [103]

Information from travel journals circulated through various mediums of art, giving an erroneous image of Africa to European (and Euro-American) society. Even illiterate populations may have been able to hear remnants of the propaganda of travel journals through their oral folk culture in music, stories and art. For example, a 1493 painting titled, *The Archers' Festival in the Garden of their Guild,* displayed a black musician performing for Europeans, and a 1529 painting, *Drummer at the Entrance of the Emperor,* portrayed a black-skinned drummer.[104]

In the theatrical realm, the tall tales of European explorers were heard throughout many areas of life in England and were later transported to the New World. In William Shakespeare's1604 "Othello", he referred to Africans as "cannibals that each other eat" and who have "men whose heads, Do grow

[103] Pratt, 4; The term public sphere was first introduced in Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere – An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991). Habermas defined the public sphere as "a network for communicating information and points of view" which becomes public opinion.

[104] A copy of these paintings may be found in Peter Fryer's, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (London and Winchester: Pluto Press, 1988), 36-38. There are several other paintings depicted throughout the text, displaying black-skinned persons performing in music and dance.

beneath their shoulders" displaying a continuance of ideas on Africans from travel journals of the time.[105] The manifestations of these black representations in theater production reinforce the stereotypes that were prevalent in European society. These plays also assisted in the validation of slavery's institution through representations of blacks as beast of burden in several plays. In 1588, a line in the play *Tamburlaine, Part Two* by Christopher Marlowe states, "With naked Negroes shall thy coach be drawn."[106] Another writer, Thomas Lodge, portrays blacks in a similar fashion by stating in the play *Wounds of Civil War*, "in his chair triumphant of gold, drawn by four Moors before the chariot."[107] These dramas were an active part of society and they introduced or reinforced the stereotypes of Africans while and also validated the ideals behind the slavery system. Theater had a major effect on society because it allowed the display of a visual belief system for persons of all ages and from all backgrounds: literate/illiterate, upper/lower classes. These plays were often performed in the New World.

Travelers' observations created images of Africans and were actively disseminated amongst the populace. High quantities of publications on Africa and its inhabitants from the perspective of European travelers greatly infiltrated and influenced the development of the New World. The new synchronic novelty

[105]Found in Peter Fryer, Black People in the British Empire, An Introduction.

[106] Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine The Great*, J. S. Cunningham, ed. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

[107] Thomas Lodge, *The Wounds of Civil War,* Joseph W. Houppert, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1969).

of printing developments allowed for knowledge of the unknown outside world to be disbursed to other substantial groups of people. "Between 1500 and 1800 an accumulation of technological innovations…mediated through print-capitalism, was making this type of imagining possible."[108] The sixteenth century was an age of transformation in European life. During this time of geographical exploration throughout the world, the Christian Western ideas of manifest destiny collided with the new technological revolution of printing.[109] The beginning of a printing society directly affected the formation of outside cultures and histories in a fundamental manner. The method in which records were duplicated, knowledge was transmitted and information was stored and retrieved all directly shaped and affected African cultures. With this new technological invention, culturally supercilious and ethnocentric observations of African peoples were given immortality in western culture by the printed word.

In his seminal *Understanding Media,* Marshall McLuhan argued that during the shift from an oral to a written culture, the human mental processes changed. [110] His argument was that the printed page narrows the dimensions of reality, thus causing a more lasting effect on the reader. This assists in explaining the long term influence the travel journals had on African and later African American culture and history. With the printing revolution, there was a

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[108] Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), 188.

[109] Cole, 59-67.

[110] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: The MIT Press, 1964), 178 and Glenn Wilmott*, Modernism in Reverse* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996).

rise in reading material which allowed for a larger audience and resulted in writers trying to appeal to a less educated audience. The transition from an elitist society, where few people had access to books, to a broader general public, having open access to a variety of literature, caused a change in writing style. The writers, including the travel journalists, found a need to appeal to the masses with interesting, sometimes mythical stories. The rise of the printing revolution and its effect on the European world (including North America) would not have been as influential without the rise of literacy during the sixteenth century.

In 1533, half of England was semi-literate to literate.[111] "Africa was but a blank canvas for Europe's imagination."[112] The culturally arrogant and ethnocentric observations of these explorers were given immortality in western culture by the printed page.[113] Regardless of the known biases in these documents, they were the main intellectual source on the history and culture of Africa during the inception of the Atlantic slave trade.

The images of Africa and its inhabitants were plagued with pervasive myths that were distributed to the public through these writings. These misrepresentations were manipulations and perversions of Africans and their culture that were distributed and created by travelers' accounts of this distant land and its people. Additionally, they justified the assertion of European hegemony, therefore setting the foundation for tenets of race and racism in the

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[111] Bennett, 169.

[112] Jacques, 201.

[113] Cole, 59.

New World. The misrepresentation of Africa and Africans reflected the European's personal feelings of superiority between the conquerors and the conqueror. Through these travel accounts, Europeans created "domestic subjects of Euro-imperialism", therefore allowing for the subjugation of Africans in the European (and North American) public sphere.[114]

[114] Pratt, 4.

Conclusion

In this relationship between the African and the European, a growing disparity in power was created and, consequently, Africans' true culture, history and tradition were often hidden from the Western World. The misrepresentation of African culture paved the way for the establishment of slavery and centuries of mistreatment of Africans by Europeans or Euro-Americans. Through records that testified to the Africans "nature," European travelers created a negative image of blacks to the western world that ultimately laid the foundation for the conception of racial hierarchy. This hierarchy placed whites safely at society's pinnacle as a physically, intellectually and morally superior race, while blacks were relegated to the bottom.

Music and dance still play an important part in West African society, although their role has changed greatly. With colonialism and imperialistic aspirations, the culture and performing arts development in the New World has been directly influenced. The perverted public image of blackness developed with the growth of Ethnocentrism (predecessor to whiteness) within Pratt's contact zones, and contributed to an overall American culture and its racial expectations. The construction of the European (self) and the African (other) was solidified in travel journals and contributed to the development of race presenting a popular image of blacks to the outside world that would be ingrained in the development of North America. Since, for the most part, the majority of the English population did not travel to far places, they were content to learn of

foreign matters at home through various travel accounts.[115] "The sheer accumulation of derogatory references in narratives, plays, poems, and other printed and visual material in the second half of the sixteenth century is surely telling."[116] "In the milieu of revived religious zeal, the geographical discoveries of the Renaissance, and the rapid creation of a printed book culture lay the origins of a new cultural trait, the intensification of ethnological pride and the formation of the myth of color."[117]

The distortion of music and dance in Africa, through travelers' words, directly led to the commodified black body and the offered justifications for slavery and resulted in further injustices toward the black body. The Africans who were exported to North America became physical representatives of this myth that flourished throughout travel journals. The Africans' fate brings to the forefront questions on how these perversions affected Africans captured in the transatlantic slave trade. What were the main changes made to the African music and dance culture due to these myths? How did these ideas of the African as an innate singer and dancer affect the role of the African in America? Also, how did the alleged traits contribute to the foundation of an American culture?

[115] E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage,* 4 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923).

[116] Vaughn & Vaughn, 42.

[117] Cole, 59.

CHAPTER TWO: STAGING RACE

Introduction

> [The image of] Slaves when on deck for an airing was one of the most shocking known to the trade. For the slave captain knew how much brooding over their wrongs tended to promote disease, and his chief object in bringing them on deck was to cheer them. He wanted them to sing and dance, and he saw that they did it too-he applied the lash not only to make them eat, but to make them sing. There they stood in rows and as the brawny slaver, whip in hand, paced to and from, they sang their home-songs, and danced, each with his free foot slapping the deck.[1]

John Spears' statement refers to the common occurrence of African captives being forced by their white captors to perform music, dance and song throughout the Middle Passage. This quote recognizes the "lash" as the provocation that incited blacks to dance and sing throughout their horrendous voyage on the slave ship. Spears also displayed this scene as a common event throughout the Middle Passage experience as a manner to preserve the health of the human cargo. But this event extends beyond the Atlantic voyage; it was an active part of slaves' overall experience in the New World. Spears' statement displays only one aspect of a complicated dynamic that occurred throughout the slave era: blacks performing for a white audience. These forced performances created structures that contributed to the development of race and racial hierarchy in the New World.

"Race," defined as perceived cultural differences rather than biological/phonological variations, has been debated and reviewed by numerous

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[1] John R. Spears, *The American Slave Trade: An Account of Its Origin, Growth, and Suppression* (Williamstown, Corner House Publishers, 1990, 1907, 1970) 78.

authors. The broader dimensions of scholarship have often reflected on the production of aesthetic judgments of difference, but there are avenues of investigation that can make substantial contributions to discourses on race. The relationship between performing arts and the construction of race brings several questions to the forefront. How did Africans' perceived propensity for music, song and dance contribute to the foundation of race and racial hierarchy in America? How did these myths affect the role of the black body in the slavery system? How were the performing arts utilized to subjugate the black body? This chapter will present performance scenes throughout the slave experience: the Middle Passage, the slave coffle, the auction block and, ultimately, the slave-based plantation system.

The racial structures of domination and subjugation in the New World were a dialectical process of social and cultural configuration that were largely based on the perversions presented in travel journals and continued in the North American slavery system. The mythical distortions of African culture and traditions contributed to the subjugation of the black body in the public sphere which was maintained in the North American slave system.

The Middle Passage Experience

The voyage across the Atlantic marked an undeniable connection between Africa and the New World. The dialectical struggle between the races began on the slave ship and was evident through the relationship between the African captives and white slavers. The Middle Passage was the aqueous passageway across the Atlantic Ocean that human African cargo traveled to the New World. The transportation of Africans into foreign slavery was not initiated with the North American system but the Atlantic slave trade has attracted scholarly attention because of the "magnitude of its historical legacies."[2] The Middle Passage featured the worst conditions experienced by any humans ever transported across the Atlantic.[3]

Africans were captured from various regions throughout West Africa and brought to the Atlantic coast to be sold into the slave system. They were then transported to the slave ship and presented for sale. This event marked their transition from person to commodity. Then, "the ship's surgeon would carefully examine every bit of their anatomy," a rudimentary process that determined the quality of the "product." [4] Throughout this process, men and women alike were stark naked and remained openly exposed throughout the entire voyage. More inhumane treatment followed: the Africans were branded with "irons hot in a fire"

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[2] David Northrup, ed., *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), xiii.

[3] Charles Garland and Herbert S. Klein, "The Allotment of Space for Slaves aboard Eighteenth-Century British Slave Ships," *The William and Mary Quarterly,* 42, 2. (April, 1985), 238.

[4] John Barbot, "Description of North and South Guinea," in *Churchill's Collection of Voyages*, (London, 1746).

that were “applied…between the shoulders of the shrieking” captives.[5] The male captives (and sometimes female captives) were coupled together in iron chains and held below the ship’s deck. They were “frequently stowed so close as to admit of no other posture than lying on their sides,” while women and children were often kept on the top deck.[6] They were kept within a small space, often in their own waste, leading to a high rate of foreign infections and diseases. These harsh conditions of the exposed and branded African bodies were under the direct control of the slavers.

The Atlantic trade represented the visual veneer of race being developed through these images of subjugation. The configuration of the Africans into homogeneous black bodies took place during the Middle Passage. Not only was it a passage to the New World, but it also transformed the captives into objects of subjugation through performance, humiliation and rape.

The recorded experiences on the slave ship make it evident that whites degraded African captives through their assertion of power. One slave ship captain, William Snelgrave, explained the instructions given to captives: “that, now they are bought for, that they may be easy in their Minds…I then acquaint them, how they are to behave on board; towards the white Men…or…they must expect to be severely punished.”[7] Snelgrave’s speech to the African captives

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[5] Richard Drake, *Revelations of a Slave Smuggler: being the Autobiography of Captain Richard Drake, an African Trader for Fifty Years-from 1807 to 1857(*New York, 1860).

[6] Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London, 1840), 135.

[7] William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave Trade* (London, 1734), 192.

displays that many whites believed that slavery was a paternalistic system in which the slaves, once removed from their homelands, should be "easy in their Minds" and therefore relaxed and content.[8] The physical construction of the subjugated black body began on the slave ship through intentional plans developed by white slave traders. The interaction between African captives and slavers reflected a relationship built on suppression and power in preparation for chattel slavery. The physical and mental abuses were precursors to the African captives' experiences in the New World and reflected their conditions of existence. Throughout this Atlantic journey, music and dance appeared as an important signifier of subjugation and distortion.

Throughout the Atlantic voyage, slaves were abused mentally and physically, and this often resulted in high mortality rates. The tight living quarters, lack of nourishment, physical beatings and rampant disease all contributed to high death rates. The mortality rate on slave ships was staggering, so it was advantageous for slave ship captains to take some measure to ensure a profitable cargo. One of the methods slavers used to protect their investment by promoting healthy cargo was explained by Thomas Philips: "We often at sea in the evening would let the slaves come up... and make them jump and dance for an hour or two to our bagpipes, harp, and fiddle, by which exercise to preserve them in health."[9] This quote was just one of the many examples of a common practice of Africans being forced to dance and sing throughout the Middle

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[8] Snelgrave, 192.

[9] Elizabeth Donnan, ed. *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930), 35.

Passage. Philips's recollection of the instruments present also attests to the regularity of the custom of dancing the captives. Many slavers brought native instruments along for the journey, not only to entertain themselves during the long voyage but also to provide music for the well-known practice of dancing the slaves. Alexander Falconbridge's 1780 account of 'dancing the captives' said:

> Exercise being deemed a necessary for the preservation of their health, they [slaves on board] are sometimes obliged to dance, when the weather permit their coming on deck. If they go about it reluctantly, or do not move with agility, they are flogged; a person standing by them all the time with a cat-o'-nine tails in his hand for that purpose…The poor wretches are frequently compelled to sing also.[10]

Falconbridge's account displays a common practice that began with the Portuguese and continued with the North Americans, that of exercising the African captives throughout the Middle Passage through the use of dance. Performing arts were viewed as a way to "preserve" the health of the cargo through physical exercise. Falconbridge describes a scene in which Africans were physically forced to dance for exercising purposes but he himself expresses chagrin that the slaves were also compelled to sing. The captives' singing changed the nature of the exercise from simple health preservation to entertainment. Although this practice initially began as a way to save the human cargo it also created an interesting dynamic that entailed the development of racial images through the use of entertainment.

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[10] Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (London: J. Phillips, 1788), 23.

The imagery centered on black bodies performing during the Middle Passage contributed to the construction of race. Africans, forced to dance and sing while chained and under the direction of the whip, created an influential image of blackness for whites, and it gave physical reality to the accounts of early travelers.[11] For over 150 years, African captives on slave ships were forced to sing and dance for the health of the human cargo.[12] The practice was well-known and it was not uncommon for slaving captains to advertise for persons in the crew that "can play on the Bagpipes, for a Guinea ship" for the purpose of "dancing the slaves."[13] This advertisement shows that it was common knowledge that Africans were performing music, song and dance throughout the Middle Passage, continuing the myth that blacks were innately suited to the performing arts. This perception would follow them to the New World. In addition to preserving the health of the human cargo through the physical movements, the music, song and dance scenes were also considered ways to create a cheerful disposition for the captives.

One witness on a slave ship stated "the suffering of slaves" was alleviated through music and dance, a purposeful "effort to make them cheerful."[14] The coerced performing arts throughout the Middle Passage were often considered

[11] The term blackness will periodically be used in order to refer to the pubic expectation or misrepresentation of African American culture.

[12] Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 7.

[13] Found in Daniel P. Mannix and Malcolm Crowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1518-1865* (New York: Viking Press, 1962).

[14] Spears, 72.

innately related to the contentment and happiness of the African captives. Slave ship captain Hugh Crow commented that to "amuse" the slaves "they were permitted to dance…to keep them in good spirits."[15] The white captors wanted to believe that making their captives dance and sing contributed to the happiness of the Africans. This idea was well known among the slavers, which was evident through the similar language and events mentioned throughout personal accounts of the slave ship voyage. The white slaver believed that "dancing and cheerfulness" were innately related to the African captives.[16] That performing arts would bring happiness to slaves was an obvious falsehood, as shown simply by the conditions of the performance. African captives were often bound by chains on their ankles and "flogged" to jump on the slave ship. A slave ship surgeon stated that Africans were "excoriated by the violent exercise they are thus forced to take of which they made many grievous complaints" and the shackling of their ankles resulted in "the swelling in their legs as made it painful to them to move at all," and "were compelled to dance by the" whip.[17] African captives only grudgingly moved their bodies in dance through the force of the whip not from an innate desire to perform music, dance and song.

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[15] Bodleian Library, editor. *The Memoirs of Captain Hugh Crow: The Life and Times of A Slave Trader Captain* (B*odleian Library: University of Oxford, 2007).*

[16] George Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies*, 2nd ed. (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1816), 25.

[17] Great Britain, House of Commons, Minutes of the Evidence Taken before a Committee of the House of Commonsbeing a Select Committee Appointed to Take the Examination of Witnesses Respecting the African Slave Trade (London, 1791), 33.

The conditions described earlier completely expose the self-serving myth that associated performing arts to the Africans' purported happiness. Several witnesses recorded the continual force of the whip and negative environment of the African captives' performances, even though these eyewitness accounts were often downplayed to reinforce the innate happiness of dancing slaves. In another example, George Pinckard described the dance aboard a slave ship: "In dancing they scarcely moved their feet, but threw about their arms, and twisted and writhed their bodies into a multitude of disgusting and indecent attitudes."[18] Pinckard's statement failed to mention the shackles that bound many of the male slaves' feet, which resulted in their shuffling motion. He also neglected the external stimuli of the whip that continually forced the performance of the Africans throughout the horrendous journey that may have contributed to their "disgusting and indecent attitudes." The simple acknowledgment of Africans' "indecent attitudes" shows their reluctance and unhappiness throughout the Middle Passage performances. Regardless, the continual display of African captives performing music, dance and song distracted attention away from the physical and emotional abuse throughout the Middle Passage.

The recollections of slave performances exhibited the physical abuse required to force Africans to perform, and they belie the slavers' insistence that the slaves were happy. One attendant on a slave ship stated that slaves "very

[18] Pinckard, 25.

seldom amuse themselves by it-they were ordered to sing by the captain."[19] The utilization of force was an omnipresent element of nearly all scenes of music and dance throughout the Middle Passage. Ironically, the continual physical abuse used to force song and dance from the captives did not necessarily contribute to the elimination of happiness and musicality myth for blacks. John Riland's account of the slave ship experience in 1801 displayed the forced nature of these performances. He stated that African captives "shewed no inclination to" dance or sing until "the *cat* was called then, indeed, they began to sing and skip about."[20] It was evident that African captives were not disposed to "make cheerful" during these horrific voyages. Slave smuggler Richard Drake stated, "Our blacks were a good-natured set, and jumped to the lash so promptly."[21] The language used by Drake implied that the "good-natured" African captives were inclined to move due to their disposition, and the use of a whip was demoted as only a minor impetus to "jump." White slavers masked their cruel activities (and, perhaps, salved their consciences) by essentially ignoring the miserable state of their African cargo. One slave ship captain stated, "We do all we can…to promote the happiness of the slaves on board…they are encouraged

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[19] Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Minutes of the Evidence…Respecting the African Slave Trade,* XXXIV, 14,20, 22, 34, 36. Found in Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 9.

[20] The "cat" refers to the cat of nine tails which was used as a lash. See John Riland, *Memoirs of a West Indian Planter.* (London, Hamilton, Adams, 1828), 46-60.

[21] Richard Drake, *Revelations of a Slave Smuggler: Being the Autobiography of Captain Richard Drake, An African Trader for Fifty Years-from 1807 to 1857; During Which Period He Was Concerned in the Transportation of Half a Million Blacks from African Coasts to America,* (New York: Robert M. DeWitt, 1860).

to dance-in chains…by the application of the whip."[22] The whip was often briefly mentioned

to downgrade the coercion used to make Africans perform, and to reassert the innately happy predisposition myth associated with blacks. The myths presented in travel journals perverted the black body through the innate correlation of performing arts and happiness while it also contributed to the continual physical and sexual abuse of female captives.

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[22] Found in Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

The Female Middle Passage Experience

The immoral reputation of African women (at least by European standards) gleaned from travel journals shaped the women's treatment throughout the Middle Passage. Europeans had read in travel journals that African women possessed an over-sexualized nature, as evidenced by the perceived sexual nature of traditional song and dance. The forced display of African women singing and dancing, along with their particular vulnerability, sometimes completely naked on the ship's deck, contributed to their continual sexual and physical abuse throughout the Middle Passage.[23]

African women were normally kept on the top deck during the voyage, making them accessible to the crew members and permitting near-constant sexual and physical abuse. Black females experienced abuse throughout the Middle Passage as sexual "companions for our crew."[24] The women were vulnerable on the top deck; although often unbound, they were continually forced to dance and sing at the slavers' beckoning call.[25] There were several accounts that illustrated the exposure of black women and their entertainment role for the slavers. Black women lacked the (white) female gendered protection, which allowed for sexual acts to transpire throughout the voyage and on the shores. Richard Drake, a slave ship surgeon, witnessed black women being sexually

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[23] Theodore Canot, *Adventures of an African Slaver. Being a True Account of Captain Theodore Canot, Trader in Gold, Ivory and Slaves on the Coast of Guinea: His Own Story as Told in the Year 1854 to Brantz Mayer,* Malcolm Cowley, ed. (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1928), 73.

[24] Canot, 73-74.

[25] Riland, 46-60.

abused throughout the Middle Passage. He commented on the experience, stating "Once off the coast, the ship became half bedlam and half brothel"; the slavers "danced with black wenches…and lewdness seemed to rule all.[26] The rape of female captives was a common aspect of the Middle Passage. Here again, travel journals described African women as being over-sexualized and the authors cited African dance styles as evidence of this characteristic. This assigned attribute encouraged the behavior of the white slavers and laid the foundation of black women and white men's relations for centuries. One slaver stated, "On board some ships the common sailors are allowed to have intercourse with…black women. The officers are permitted to indulge their passions among them at pleasure."[27] The invariable onslaught of sexual assault on black women was only heightened by the degradation of forced song and dance.

Slavers often described the good care they applied to the captives and downplayed the sexual vulnerability and abuse of female captives. James Barbot, who sailed off the coast of Guinea in 1698 and 1699, described the treatment of female captives in the Middle Passage: "the females being apart from the males and on the quarter deck and many of them young sprightly maidens, full of jollity and good humor, afforded us an abundance of recreation."[28] Barbot purposely omitted any overt reference to sexual abuse

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[26] Drake, 44.

[27] Drake, 44.

[28] Found in George Frances Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* (Salem, Mass.: Marine Research Society, 1927), 50.

forced upon African females, and instead described the women as happily willing participants of the sexual and lewd activities present throughout the voyage. Their commodity status and the misinterpretations of their culture assisted in the validation of their continuous rape and proliferation of the myth of the over-sexualized black female.

Theatrical Performance and Domination

Myths assisted in the roles imposed on Africans throughout the Middle Passage. The myth of the over-sexualized black female and innate cheerful singer and dancer were forced upon the captives. In order to better understand the roles performed by the African captive and slavers, an analysis of theatrical performance is needed. Julian Hilton described that space, time and an actant are required for a performance to take place.[29] The space of the forced performance was the slave ship (later transferred to the auction block, coffle and plantation), and it represented a stage where race was performed and scripted. One slaver in 1860 described the deck of the ship as a “stage” from which the African captives performed their pre-determined role as the other.[30] The time was determined by the white captors and directed by the whip. Africans were the forced “actants” who entertained and reinforced the dominance of whites. One element that Hilton’s theory lacked was the audience; a performer always needed some form of an audience. The audience is constantly evaluating the performance; the performer has to please the audience. In the Middle Passage, whites were the audience and the directors that determined the scenes and script for the “actants” or captives.

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[29] Julian Hilton. *Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishing,1982). Hilton is not a historian nor is he referring to daily activities as performance scenes. The text is directed to the aesthetics of the theater that will greatly contribute to my argument that these incidents throughout slavery were a part of an act for white spectators.

[30] The term “stage” in reference to the slave ship’s deck was used in a narrative written by Edward Manning on the slave ship *Thomas Watson.* Found in Edward Manning, *Six Months on a Slaver: A true narrative* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1879).

The coerced physical exercises of the captives represented more than a desire to preserve the human cargo: they also made Africans into entertainers and simultaneously made whites the audience. H.M. Schooner's narrative of the slave ship experience showed the amusement that these exercising activities presented to the ship's crew. The slavers during the voyage witnessed that "every evening" the slave ship crew "enjoyed the novelty of African war songs and ring dances."[31] Schooner's statement reveals that white slavers "enjoyed" the forced performances of Africans, which transformed these scenes from merely a manner to preserve the cargo into a form of entertainment for the ship's crew. The term "entertainment" was often utilized by white slavers in reference to the forced performances of the African captives. One slaver continued the idea of white amusement through the statement that, "after one of these musical evenings…the tired performers were stowed again between decks.[32]" This reference to African captives as "performers" definitely portrays blacks as not only a commodity but also a form of entertainment. African captives were also forced to entertain the captain and his guests on the slave ship.

One Dutch slave trader who dined with a slave ship captain on one of his vessels stated that, "When I dined with the Dutch general at the Mine, I saw her (a young, female African captive) there, being brought in to dance before us."[33] The statement shows that "dancing of the captives" was not merely a manner to

[31] Drake, 43.

[32] Drake, 44.

[33] Found in Hazzard Gordon, 9-10.

preserve cargo but an entertainment genre that were a part of the Middle Passage culture and continued onto the shores. Also, the African captive referred to in the quote was a female, which may insinuate the sexual nature of this performance for the captain's guest.

The extent of the public's knowledge of what happened on slave ships is debatable, but some conclusions may be drawn. Many travel journals were written and published on this experience and there were several accounts that may demonstrate public knowledge of these events. In 1788, the British Parliament asked Ecroyde Claxton, "Did the Slaves on board your vessel ever amuse themselves by singing?"[34] This is only one example that the performing arts throughout the Middle Passage went beyond the slave ship and was public knowledge. Even here, it seems that the questioner lacked any knowledge of the coercion that was used to force Africans to dance. Neglecting this facet contributed to the belief that Africans were natural or innate dancers, musicians and singers, regardless of their physical or emotional state. The infiltration of the Middle Passage experiences into the public sphere is an area that could be further explored and developed. The Middle Passage represented a staged satire of music and dance that contributed to the structure of dominance and subjugation in the New World.

Race was the theatrical performance in which whites and blacks contributed to a cultural script. These forced performances assisted in the development and continuation of the fictional ideals of natural black dancers and

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[34] Donna T. Andrew, ed., *London Debating Societies, 1776-1799* (London Record Society, 1994).

singers. The performances also demarked the boundaries of race in the constructed and contested space of the slave ship. The terminology of stage, spectacle, and scene were utilized to relay the reality that the "crimes of slavery are not witnessed but staged."[35] The slavers on the ship were active participants in the performance style of the African captives. The components of actant, time, space and audience assisted in the forced performances of blacks that contributed to the continual manifestation of romanticized myths of the black body.

Hilton examines the relationship between the perception of the black body and the performing arts. He writes, "Myth in performance becomes incarnate; the performer becomes the tangible embodiment of a defining element in the collective consciousness."[36] The parallel of Hilton's creation of myth and the romanticization of the impelled performances of African captives (and later black slaves), both displayed the relationship among institutionalized slavery, theatrical performance and travel myth.

The development of the fable was assisted by the continual influx of these performance scenes distributed in the public sphere. The story of the innate, cheerful black performer and the over-sexualized black female was an accepted part of the culture of Africans to America. This tale is not necessarily negative within itself (although it was necessarily self-serving), and it grossly distorted and

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[35] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making In Nineteenth Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17.

[36] Hilton, 8.

generalized a large group of diverse individuals. The diversity of African music and dance cultures represented on the slave ship was simplified to a homogeneous group of black bodies. These forced performances downgraded and perverted the ritualistic connection between music and dance and transmitted it as amusement for whites, while also demoting the intellectual and emotional capabilities of the African captives.

The coerced performances on the slave ship perverted the normally sacred or ritualistic dances and songs of African cultures. Africans traveled the Middle Passage with a rich legacy from their native land that was tainted for the purpose of humiliation, degradation and white entertainment. The scene of blacks singing while whites watched (performing as the audience) began on slave ships for health reasons, but ultimately led to the continuation of this terrorized enjoyment.[37] The coerced singing and dancing of black bodies only enhanced the horrific circumstances of the slave ship. Olaudah Equiano's testimonies represented the rare records of the Africans' perspectives of the Middle Passage journey: "The first object which saluted my eyes…a slave ship…filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror."[38] Equiano relays the sheer horror that the Africans experienced in the slave trade.

[37] The notions asserted in the two preceding sentences are hypotheses of the writer that will be examined further in future studies. Many ideas presented in these sentences are taken from Saidiya Hartman's work.

[38] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself,* ed. Angelo Costanzo (Canada: Broadview literary texts, 2001), 70.

There are only a few accounts of the slave trade from the Africans' viewpoint. The perceptions of this voyage are gathered and represented by white observers that created a complicated dynamic. The displayed performing arts throughout the journey presented to the outside world an erroneous perception of the newly approaching population culture and ideals. One poem, "Sorrows of Yamba" from the eighteenth century, described the horror of the slave ship and the widely known practice of African performance: "At the slave Captain's beck; Now like brutes they make us prance; Smack the cat about the deck; And in scorn they bid us dance."[39]

The Middle Passage stood between history and fiction with the amalgamation of mythical traits and the beginning of racial consciousness. The slave ship was the medium between African cultures' historical past and the traditions and the future development of America's black race. According to Michael Banton, the term "race" entered the European language in the sixteenth century and it referred to a part of a lineage that was a group of people that shared a common ancestry with similar qualities.[40] In this definition, race as lineage, the role of appearance is not a fundamental identifier. The rise of the African slave labor system resulted in the extension of the definition of race

[39] Hannah More, The Sorrows of Yamba; or, the Negro Woman's Lamentation (London: Cheap Repository Tracts, 1795) and William Meade and Thomas Bacon, Sermons Addressed to Masters and Servants, and Published in the Year 1743 (Winchester, VA; J. Heiskell, 1813). This quote only represents one stanza of a poem that's accurate author and publication date is unknown. Hannah More has been continually represented as the author but many historians dispute this claim. Also, the original date of publication is under debate. This poem has been published in numerous works since the 18th century.

[40] Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

beyond its first connotation, with the addition of hierarchy, which was strictly enforced in the triangular trade.

The silencing of the black voice and traditions did not begin in the Middle Passage but instead followed an older, pervasive myth. The first impression of whites dominated historical texts and assisted in the construction of a racial hierarchy that (in many ways) formed the foundation of the New World. Mia Bay gave voice to the subjugated group of Africans but there is a substantial lack in resources to accurately depict this early time period.[41] Olaudah Equiano's experience displayed the captives' initial view of whites, therefore placing whites as the others, but it also portrayed the character of the Africans. His first impression of whites was that "Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language…the white people looked and acted…in so savage so manner."[42]

The perspective of Equiano brings to the forefront a novel manner of viewing race. The reference to difference in appearance and savagery ironically places whites as the "other" (in many ways) to Africans. The white image in the black mind was completely removed from history; instead only the opinions and ideals of whites have prevailed. The silencing of African voices contributed to veiling their culture to the (white) public and laid the foundation for the burgeoning African American culture. The lack of black power within the

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[41] Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African American Idea about White People, 1830-1925* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[42] Equiano, 70.

development of race resulted in the white construction through stereotypes of the nature of blackness. Race developed through the imagination and domination of whites initially lacking a true account from the burgeoning black population. "The Middle Passage thus emerges not as a clean break between past and present but as a spatial continuation between Africa and the Americas."[43]

[43] Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Carl Pedersen, ed. *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

The Atlantic Exchange

The Middle Passage carried not only black bodies but also a culture that was introduced to and incorporated into the foundation of the newly formed American culture. African culture was able to travel on the slave ship not only in the memory of the captives but also via the musical instruments, music and dance movements. The performing arts display was evident throughout the slave ship and was encouraged by the white slavers through coercion and their role in preserving African musical pieces. "The instruments which accompanied this dancing could have been almost anything…African instruments were also used, being collected and brought on board for this specific purpose."[44]

White slave traders were unwitting agents in the transmission and continuation of African culture in the New World. Bryan Edwards comments on the continuation of African instruments during the middle passage, "In the intervals between their meals, they [the slaves] are encouraged to divert themselves with music and dancing; for which purpose such rude and uncouth instruments as are used in Africa, are collected before their departure."[45] The collection of native instruments displays the continuance of Africanisms in the slave trade that resulted in cultural exchange between the slaver and captive.[46] Another travel journalist, in 1796 stated, "A slave-ship, belonging to North

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[44] Epstein, 14.

[45] Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London: J. Stockdale, 1801).

[46] The term Africanism is used to describe the continuance of African cultures and tradition in the Diaspora.

America, and bound to Savanna in Georgia…with a cargo of Negroes on board…were made to exercise, and encouraged, by the music of their beloved banjar."[47] For many years, the banjo was considered to be a folk instrument in North America, but it was originally an African lute, and it was brought to this country from Africa by blacks and was played almost exclusively by them until the 1830s.[48] According to Robert Winans, the banjo was the second most common instrument on the plantation that was utilized by slaves.[49]

The banjo is important through its continual reference in travel journals, its continuance in America and its transformation into a folk American musical style.[50] George Dobson, a well-known banjo instructor in the 1880s, stated, "the natives of Africa have musical instruments which, though differing in minor particulars, possess essentially the same basic peculiarities as the banjo."[51] The origin of the banjo is still debated among musicologists but many scholars agree that the American banjo derives from a "long-necked plucked lute instrument that was commonly seen in West Africa centuries ago."[52] This

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[47] Pinckard, 97-103. As discussed in previous chapters, The "beloved banjar" is a native instrument of Africa that ironically later became an American folk instrument.

[48] Eric Charry, *Mande Music: Traditional and Modern Music of the Maninka and Mandinka of Western Africa* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[49] Robert Winans, "The Folk, The Stage and the Five String Banjo in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Folklore*. 89, 3121 (October, 1976), 407-437.

[50] Although, the fiddle was also an instrument directly descending from West Africa and often referred to in travel journals and in North American slave texts, this instrument did not reach the notoriety of the banjo as the American folk instrument.

[51] Philip F. Gura & James F. Bollman, *America's Instrument: The Banjo in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 11.

[52] Gura and Bollman, 12.

instrument would fall under the category of the chordophones because it produces sounds through vibrating strings after being plucked. Michael Coolen explains that the playing of the *xalam,* the Wolof lute, resembles a traditional playing style of the banjo, such style as the "claw-hammer in which the fingers play the melody and the thumb plays the drone."[53] Also, Cecilia Conway states that there was an African "protobanjo" that continued its development and growth in the United States through the travels of the West African slaves.[54] A variety of evidence makes it apparent that the American folk instrument, the banjo, was transported from Africa to the New World through the Atlantic slave trade.

Many white slavers brought their own instruments on the journey, such as the fiddle, bagpipes and harp, which musically mingled several ethnicities and races on the slave ship. The Middle Passage provided a setting for the interaction and exchange of African and European culture that subsequently contributed to the development of a unique American culture. White slavers contributed to the continuation of West African traditions through the transportation of native objects; therefore they contributed to the development of a black culture that consisted of an amalgamation of the numerous African groups kidnapped into slavery.

The space between the ships' hold and captain's quarters represented the public sphere in which culture was being created through the performing arts.

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[53] Michael T. Coolen, "Senegambian Influence on Afro-American Musical Culture," *Black Music Research Journal,* 11, 1, (Spring 1991), 13-14.

[54] Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 190.

The black captives displayed their native background and discovered modes to cope with the depressing conditions, while whites asserted their authority in the public sphere of the top deck. The first intricate networks of cross-cultural influence were exhibited in this space with the amalgamation of Europeans and various indigenous groups throughout West Africa.

The slave ship experience was the first introduction of Africans into the chattel system, and it contributed to the foundation of the captive's role as the subjugated "other." These scenes of subjugation, arranged on the slave ship and choreographed by whites, entangled the ideas of pleasure and terror through the performing arts. The harsh cruelties of the Middle Passage were constantly masked by the forced performances of blacks. The exercising of the African captives for preservation of health became a manner of exhibition of blackness for public display. The myths that centered on the black body were known in the New World and contributed to not only the slavery system but also to the foundation of the North American society. Black performance, physically coerced by whites, continued into the New Word. The coerced performances throughout the Middle Passage persisted onto America's shores and were evident in the coffle, auction block and plantation. Examining these events shed light on the expansion of black subjugation through performing arts for a white audience. Forced performance scenes and the expectation of blackness from whites created a romanticized world of slavery that needs to be further explored. The construction of a slave society contributed to the structured world of racial imagery that portrayed subjugation and domination. A review of the forced

scenes of music and dance throughout the major episodes of the chattel culture, without appropriating black agency, will bring to the forefront the expectations of blackness and the desired social structure of whites that contributed to the creation of whiteness. The experiences of black slaves consisted of the coffle, the auction block and the plantation, all of which were influential factors in the foundation of a burgeoning American culture and society.

The Coffle Experience

The slave coffle was an active part of the slavery system; it was an organized transportation network of slaves to the auction block and part of the interstate/intrastate slave trade. The slave coffle was a public event in which black slaves were forced to travel, often by foot, over long distances. This was an exhibition that whites would often watch with fascination and curiosity. For slaves, the coffle meant the loss of a family member or a friend to a distant and feared destination. For many slave owners, the coffle represented a strategic economic decision for commodities but it also enhanced their feelings of control and domination. These public displays of black subjugation were only heightened in the continued coercion of slaves to sing and dance throughout the coffle experience. The exhibition of black slaves chained and singing while they walked past whites in various communities reinforced blacks' social status as the other, simple and content in their role slaves.

Slaves were compelled to sing and dance in order to veil their sorrow during the slave coffle. These slave marches through the intrastate/interstate trade were often public events that always relayed a false reality for whites in attendance. One traveler, George W. Featherstonhaugh, commented on a coffle scene: "(the slave drivers) endeavor to mitigate their (slaves) discontent by… encouraging them to sing…. [The] poor Negro slave is naturally a cheerful, laughing animal, and even…in chains…is seldom melancholy."[55] The utilization

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[55]George William Featherstonhaugh,*Excursion through the slave states, from Washington on the Potamic to the frontier of Mexico; with sketches of popular manners and geological notices* (New York: Negro Universities Press, Reprint 1968), 120-124

of music in this public march reinforced whites' preconceived idea of blackness, and offered a way for whites to ignore the pain of the discontented slaves. Featherstonhaugh's reference to the "poor Negro" in many ways represented whites' beliefs that black slaves were simple, docile, ignorant creatures who were content in slavery. Ironically, the term "poor" also indicated sympathy from Featherstonhaugh, but the blacks' negative disposition was reduced through their assigned status as naturally cheerful. The "chains" represented the status of blacks as slaves but the degrading experience was also created through the association of slaves as docile, happy animals, therefore removing their humanity. These innately "cheerful" blacks marching to music while singing reasserted to the white spectators the misrepresentations of blackness and reaffirmed to whites that slavery was a valid and good system. The coffle also illustrated the image of the black racial body to the white population; therefore these racial images reinforced the black "other" in society.

Slave coffles became traveling theatrical performances for white audiences. The slaves' unhappiness in many ways was consciously masked by the slave drivers and ignored by (many) whites. Within these contortions of culture, whites were entertained by the coffles; henceforth they became the active audience, through their overall acceptance of the conflicting ideals of the cheerful slave. Nehemiah Adams, during his three months in the South in 1854, witnessed a slave coffle and was delighted by its musical display: "the music of these colored men, affording a northerner…pleasant thoughts…the music made by such men…cheered…them." In this statement Adams is an amused

spectator who transforms this scene into a positive image of the Southern experience. As a northern visitor, Adams experienced "pleasant thoughts" as he witnessed the coffle scene, and these thoughts may have accepted the slavery system as good while also justifying his position in the white dominant class. He continued the myth of innately happy blacks by asserting that this scene displays "the proverbial love of music in the colored race."[56]

The phrase "proverbial love" ignores the physical and mental abuse used to create and reinforce this common scene throughout the slave coffle. This statement also removed the cultural relics and expressive lyrics present in these coffle scenes. These types of statements were repeated throughout many accounts and they represented public sentiment during the antebellum period. One witness to these coffle scenes stated, "Negroes are naturally prone to gaiety."[57] This statement was found in many travel narratives of Northerners visiting the South. Another observer commented that, "both music and dance are of a savage nature." [58] The terms "savage", "natural" and "gaiety" were often associated with the performing arts and blacks in order to downgrade blacks' humanity. The forced music, dance and song displays throughout the coffle contributed to perverting blackness while creating a positive image of the institution of slavery. Although whites validated the slave institution through a

[56] Nehemiah Adams, D.D., *A South-Side View of Slavery; or, Three Months at the South in 1854* 2nd Edition (Port Washington, Kennikat Press, 1969), 22.

[57] Hartman quotes N. Herbemont, *On the Moral Discipline and Treatment of Slaves*. 1836.

[58]Roger D. Abrahams, *After Africa: extracts from British travel accounts and journals of the seventeenth, eighteenth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 294.

romanticized view of the coffle, it was quite evident through the demeanor and song lyrics that this was one of the worst aspects of slavery to blacks.

The facade of happiness was the only acceptable image for white spectators, and it did not reflect the emotional and physical hardships the coffle represented for the black community. The coffle signified terrible suffering, separation of families, loss of friends and destruction of communities. Although the music, dance and song performed by the slaves represented entertainment and jollity for whites, these performances were a way to express sadness and valediction for the slave population. Former slave Sella Martin comments on the coffle experience:

> Oh! What heartbreaks there are in these rude and simple songs! The purpose of the trader in having them sung is to prevent among the crowd of Negroes who usually gather on such occasions, any expression of sorrow for those who are being torn away from them; but the Negroes, who have very little hope of ever seeing those again who are dearer to them than life, and who are weeping and wailing over the separation, often turn the song thus demanded of them into a farewell dirge.[59]

Martin sheds light on the actual meaning of the coffle song for the slave as a "farewell" hymn and explains the slave trader's purpose for forcing slaves to sing during such a horrific time. Slaves were compelled to sing to "prevent …any expression of sorrow" for the whites in attendance, and to display a false reality. Blacks were singing to say their goodbyes and to express pain in the allowable art form of music. Whites were often aware of the unhappiness blacks were experiencing within the coffle but the association of the performing arts and

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[59] John Blassingame, ed. *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews* and Autobiographies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1977), 705.

cheerfulness assisted in reducing the humanity of blacks, thus salving white consciences. Sella Martin's comments, however, make it plain that blacks were fully aware of the slave traders' intentions for the coffle performances. Slaves were able to use their ingenuity to retain some semblance of agency and control. The unique lyrical style of the songs allowed West African culture to continue while also offering a manner of self-expression for the slave population. Whites often intentionally ignored this aspect of the coffle songs. Music, song and dance were used to veil the mental and physical atrocities of the coffle scene. The macabre play-acting continued onto the auction block.

The Slave Market Experience

The auction block represented an interesting dynamic that exemplified the black body as a subjugated commodity in American society. The auction block was where blacks were bought and sold. These sales took place in public places and were often considered (predominantly male) social events in several regions. Black bodies were placed on display, inspected and given a monetary value. These public sales were often advertised through flyers and newspapers and they were attended by some of the most elite slave masters throughout the region. Within these public scenes, the racial imagery of blacks placed on wooden stages or auction blocks and publicly sold contributed to the status of blacks as the subjugated others and reasserted the dominance of whites. Throughout this setting, the price of blacks was negotiated and constructed through the creative stories relayed by slave traders of the potential abilities of black bodies. [60]

At the slave markets, not only were slaves being sold, but a fantasy for whites was also created.[61] "Buying slaves…represented a fantasy of mastery embodied in the public subjugation of another," according to Walter Johnson.[62] Johnson argued that this "fantasy of mastery" was restricted to the auction block

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[60] Walter Johnson. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[61] Johnson, 170.

[62] Johnson, 107. The entire argument in Walter Johnson work is not being presented in this analysis. All areas addressed in his work do not necessarily agree or correlate with the overall argument of this dissertation. For this review, I am only using the term "fantasy of mastery" to emphasize the imagined world that was created by whites during slavery. The idea that whites are buying more than just black bodies but they are receiving status, reasserting white authority, and in many ways displaying their masculinity throughout the institution of bondage.

but it actually existed throughout the slave society. The "fantasy of mastery" specifically signified the creation of whiteness with its ideals of superiority and normality while it linked blackness with the subjected group. This cultural belief supported the image of the black other and assisted in the creation of an imagined community among whites.[63]

The foundation of whiteness was based in a mythical world or imagined community that grew simultaneously with the "fantasy of mastery." This did not originate on the auction block but was evident in the accounts of early European exploration. Whites defined their status through their creation of the black "other" by subjugating the characteristics initially assigned. Specifically, at the auction block, blacks and whites were renegotiating their relations and status in society. Blacks recognized their position in society and, to survive, played their role in the imagined community where whites held absolute power and blacks were willing, even happy, subjects. Through specific activities on the auction block, blacks were continually forced to display jollity. The imagined community of slavery was intertwined with these staged performances of cheerfulness. Whites were buying human chattel not only for economic profits, but they also contributed to the fantasy that they were kind, benevolent masters who provided a positive service in their purchase of black bodies. The continued display of black bodies performing on the auction block contributed to whites' beliefs that they bought innately happy and contented slaves. In *Slave Life in Georgia*, John Brown

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[63] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983, 1991).

reflected on the auction block experience,

> After dinner we were compelled to walk, and dance, and kick about in the yard for exercise; and Bob, who had a fiddle, used to play up jigs for us to dance to. If we did not dance to his fiddle, we used to have to do so to his whip…the poor wretches who are about to be sold, are instructed to look "spry and smart": to hold themselves up, and put on a smiling cheerful countenance.[64]

John Brown's memory of the auction block experience shows the continual force applied to slaves to perform for white spectators. His comments on slave pen activities transform this auction block setting into a continual performance that was used to validate slavery while and to exhibit black contentment within the slave system.

The unhappiness of the auction block was consciously masked by slave traders and enforced on blacks to continually commoditize blackness. Brown's description is reminiscent of similar occurrences throughout the Middle Passage and coffle. The conspiracy of appearances forced slaves to hide their pain and display false demeanors. As a part of the auction block experience, many slaves were forced to "dance through the streets and act lively" when they reached the town of the public sale; this performance was thought to heighten their "chances" for being sold.[65] These performances were used as not only a manner to induce whites to attend the slave auction but they also represented a public display that could be used to validate the entire institution of slavery.

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[64] L. A. Chamerovzow, ed. *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Suffering, and Escape of John Brown* (London: W.M. Watts, 1855), 112-118.

[65] Federal Writers' Project, Slave Narratives, IV, Part 3, p.1.

The facade of the auction block disguised the real events of the slave experience. Ex-slave Jolly Old Uncle Buck, described his experience in a slave pen and stated,

> De white man auctioneer was bustlin' round.…Dat nigger wid de banjo settin' on de bench waitin' to be sold, he plunk his banjo…Fred 'gin ter shuffle...He slap his big feet on de banjo table, an' we all pat wid de banjo music. White man laugh an' clap dey han's. Make him dance some mo'. Wouldn't let the auctioneer start till Fred dance de buck-an'-wing…De white man what bought Fred say he done paid hundert dollars mo' fo' dat nigger cause he could dance like dat![66]

This statement displays the continuance of slaves' duty to perform on the auction block in order to increase their chances of being sold. The ex-slave's name, Jolly Old Uncle Buck, reveals a great deal about the expectation and status of many slaves. The term "Jolly" expresses the desire of whites to have "happy darkies" and the latter portion of the name "Buck" refers to a male animal or an extremely virile male. This ex-slave's name also reveals much about his slave masters. The duty to provide hard labor in the fields, while displaying happiness through music, song and dance served to validate the apparent injustices of the institution.

The quote also displayed the continuance of blacks to perform within the slave pen and hinted of the power of slaves had in influencing who bought them. "Fred" purposely determined the energy or agility he asserted within the auction block through his performance and also influenced his future destination. The account above also reveals the continuation of West African culture among the

[66] Orland Kay Armstrong, *Ole Massa's People: The Old Slaves Tell Their Story* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1931), 261.

slave population. The use of a West African derived instrument, the banjo, was used within the slave pen and the buck and wing was a common dance among the slaves.[67]

The repeated mandate for slaves to dance and sing "to cheerfulness" caused a separation of black bodies from their humanity and reaffirmed their position as commodities.[68] The normality of performances reinforced the audience and spectator perception of slavery through the staged shows through the slave trade. The actants were the slaves, and the whites were the spectators who determined the value (literally and figuratively) of black bodies. Throughout these incidents, blacks asserted some control over their purchase via their actions and appearance. Ruth Galmon recalled the stories told by her grandmother about the slaves' power on the auction block. "They brought her down here and sold her you see they have them on a big block…and make them stand up and act a certain way…if they think you good they buy you… you didn't act right they wouldn't buy you."[69]

This comment displays the power many blacks asserted in the slave market with respect to determining their potential masters. Communication among blacks assisted in their knowledge of future masters, which affected their performance in the slave pens and on the auction block. The entire market process required that the slave energetically put on an act to fulfill the imagined

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[67] Emery, 89.

[68] Johnson, 163.

[69] Ruth Galmon, Personal Records, Interview, December, 2001.

community or fantasy of mastery in order to be purchased. The desire or lack thereof for a particular plantation or planter by the slaves determined their activities within the slave pen and on the auction block. Although white traders were quite influential on the activities of blacks, many slaves found clever ways to gain agency throughout the market experience.

The performance of blacks in the slave market allowed for "blackness or proximate whiteness" to be bought and sold.[70] The auction block confirmed the race-based role of blacks and whites in the American slave-holding society and justified the slavery institution while it also contributed to the ingenuity in the slave community. Throughout the slavery experience the social and cultural foundation of the New World was continually being developed. Although these episodes were important, the plantation system represented the pivotal scene that sculpted the expectations and relations between blacks and whites for centuries.

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[70]Ruth Galmon, Personal Records, Interview, December, 2001.

The Plantation Experience

The Southern plantation society was the most thorough representation of the slave experience and it contributed most to the overall culture of North America. Although the majority of whites (even in the South) were not slave owners, the plantation experience was an influential factor in the foundation of the United States. Within this important cultural determinant, the plantation performance scenes represented a complicated dialectical system of agency and subjugation among the black population, although only the latter will be reviewed in this section.

The creation of both black culture and white self-identification was portrayed throughout the complicated structure of the plantation. Solomon Northup described the common plantation scene of slaves being forced to perform as a manner of humiliation for blacks and assertion of power by white masters. He stated,

> "Dance you damned niggers, dance," Epps would shout. Usually his whip in his hand, ready to fall about the ears of the presumptions thrall, who dared rest a moment, or even to stop to catch his breath…With a slash, crack and flourish of the whip, he would shout again, "Dance, niggers dance,"…spurred by an occasional sharp touch of the lash, sat in a corner, extracting from my violin a marvelous quick stepping tune.[71]

Northrup's account revealed the forceful and abusive nature of many performance scenes on the plantation. The slave master, Epps used the impetus of the whip in order to force the music and dance from his slaves; this

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[71] Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin' on Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969), 323-324.

was a manner to assert control and to humiliate blacks. In many ways, Epps and the slaves were both performing. Each group performed their racial role and status in society.

Among blacks themselves, the music, dances and songs were often referred to as a frolic or frolicking. Marrinda Jane Singleton's oral testimony relayed the common incidence of blacks frolicking for white entertainment. She stated, "If dar was any who could dance and sing right kindey good, why dey was always taken to de "'big house'" to entertaining Marster and Missus guests."[72] In this statement, Singleton portrayed the fluidity of black performance as a form of white entertainment. It is also evident that black slaves who were recognized by white masters as musically talented were allotted special opportunities in the plantation community. Another example of slaves receiving special recognition for their performing arts talents was the competitive cake walking tradition, which was often hosted by the slave master and mistress. One ex-slave commented, "De couple dat danced best got a prize…slave owners come o dese parties 'cause dey enjoyed watchin' de dance, and dey 'cided who danced de best."[73] Whites were audiences/participants to these slave performance scenes. They encouraged these scenes for their own entertainment, to control the few moments of personal time blacks may have enjoyed, and to distract slaves from rebellious activities.

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[72] Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden and Robert K. Phillips, ed., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville: University of Press of Virginia, 1976), 267.

[73] Virginia Writers' Project, *The Negro In Virginia* (New York: Hasting House, 1940), 89.

The system of labor in the New World, in mainly the Southern areas, contained a strict, but surprisingly fragile, network of power and control. This early American social, cultural and economic system largely functioned to keep a large group of persons submissive while simultaneously allowing another set of persons to remain dominant. "In a country depending principally upon slave labor…it would seem that a system for the general and minute management, in detail, of slaves, had to be introduced into general use and practice."[74] The intricate web of dominance (and fear) was supported and guided by the words and writings of mainly white men determined to uphold the imagined communities of slavery. This system contributed directly to the creation of whiteness in American society. Slave masters and other whites in the community followed particular rules in order to remain in power, which greatly assisted in the foundation of whiteness being based on the idea of ordained domination. One Alabama planter stated, "on the...'management of Negroes'…. In this matter we are mutually interested; for, if I mismanage mine, that mismanagement will be reflected in yours as can be amply shown."[75]

The concerns and issues of masters were evident through their words on management. The slaveholders' ideals assisted in understanding their control, actual or imagined, over black bodies. The earlier statement showed the delicate nature of managing slaves and how the white class bonded to organize unified

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[74] Charles Woodson, "On the Management of Slaves," *Farmers'* Register 2, (September, 1834), 248-249. Found in James O. Breeden, ed., *Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 32.

[75] Woodson, 30.

control. This principle was evident throughout many letters and essays written by white masters. One Virginia planter testified that, "Harmony among neighbors is very important in the successful management of slaves…. it would render their management much more easy and render the slaves much more contented and happy."[76] This system functioned as a collaborative effort of control by white slave masters and others in the white community. Essay contests, speeches and articles often displayed directions on how to maintain control over the black slave population.

Throughout the planters' thoughts on the subject, two themes were consistent: control and domination. Whites wanted to believe that their authority was sovereign. Slaves are "like the plastic clay, which may be moulded into agreeable or disagreeable figures according to the skill of the moulder."[77] Whites considered themselves to be the "moulders" of black activities, through meticulous daily control of the slave population. This idea concerning the white population's power definitely contributed to the development of whiteness. It also showed the environment in which black culture grew, through veiled events and associations.

The planters tried to reach into every crevice of life on the plantation, especially the performing arts. Whites often commented on their active encouragement of blacks to perform music, song and dance. A Mississippi

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[76] Hill Carter, "On the Management of Negroes. Addressed to the Farmers and Overseers of Virginia," *Farmers' Register* 1 (February 1834), 564-65.

[77] Hill Carter, "Remarks on Overseers, and the Proper Treatment of Slaves, " *Farmers' Register* 5 (September 1837), 301-302.

planter remarks, "The Negroes are permitted and encouraged to clap and dance and make merry."[78] Another slave master stated in 1851 that he "allow[s] dancing; ay, I buy the fiddle and encourage it, by giving the boys occasionally a big supper."[79] These comments were published in agricultural journals and newspapers; they informed planters and greatly influenced the social life on the plantation. Planters believed that the diversion of performing arts would dissuade blacks from rebellious activities. These distractions also represented another manner in which whites could control black bodies. One master stated that recreation prevented the slaves from thinking about their condition: "Allow him (slaves)... some recreation; he is contented and sees not with envy the happiness of others."[80] Such artificially choreographed black performance scenes romanticized the brutal world of white domination and black subjugation.

> Gentlemen may think it beneath their dignity to interfere in any manner whatsoever with the pleasure and amusements of their slaves. It never was thought below the dignity of the sovereign, or the legislator, or of the magistrate to direct the conduct of their subjects or citizens in every thing that may lead to their general good.[81]

This slave master clearly articulated the idea that, in some ways, many whites saw themselves as being equivalent to sovereign status. The statement also identifies that the amusements of slaves, specifically for this analysis, the

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[78] James M. Townes, "Management of Negroes," *Southern Cultivator 15*, (May and June 1857), 140-42, 170-71.

[79] A small farmer, "Management of Negroes," *DeBow's Review* 11 (October 1851), 369-72.

[80] small farmer, 53, 277.

[81] small farmer, 277.

performing arts were an active part of daily management that contributed to the "general good" in the plantation society. "The Negro should feel that his master is law giver and judge, and yet is his protector and friend"[82] Absolute control was an active and necessary part of the white society, though it existed within the imagined community, for the stability of a fragile institution. Complete control was never achieved, because slaves were consistently fighting for agency and self-respect. But regardless of the autonomy blacks achieved, whites needed to believe in their absolute control to stabilize their imagined community.

As a result of these strict (mental) guidelines for whites asserting their dominance over black bodies, very specific myths proliferated about blacks that contributed to white power. "The characters of negroes are not so various as one would imagine they would be, from the difference of the country they are brought from… the only thing they are remarkable for attaining to any degree of perfections, is Musick."[83] As is evident in this statement, blacks in North America were placed into simple categories in order to reduce their culture, traditions and history into unsophisticated concepts. The heterogeneous groups that were brought to the New World through the Atlantic slave trade were continually downgraded into a homogeneous group of slaves. The primitive conception of blacks negated their true nature and replaced it with docility, submission and the supposed desire to serve whites. The myth of the innately, cheerful black performer may seem simple, but it contributed to racially segmenting the black

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[82] small farmer , 91, 41.

[83] Thomas Atwood, *The History of the Island of Dominica* (London, 1791), 265-68, 272-74.

population into the “other” category. The childlike image of blacks assisted in the growth of a fantasized paternalism between whites and blacks. This facade of a paternalistic relationship was quite evident in both sides of the slavery argument.

The myth that blacks displayed happiness through the performing arts contributed to the choreographed slave performances throughout the plantation society these occurrences created an image of the Southern slave system. In 1838, abolitionist Angelina Grimke at the Antislavery Convention addressed the Southern mythical image of the happy slave:

> As a Southerner…I witnessed for many years its demoralizing influences and its destructiveness to human happiness. I have never seen a happy slave. I have seen him dance in his chains, it is true, but he was not happy. There is a wide difference between happiness and mirth. Man can not enjoy happiness while his manhood is destroyed. Slaves, however, may be, and sometimes are mirthful.[84]

Grimke’s testimony as a witness to the injustices of the Southern slave system speaks to the erroneous images planters attempted to project. The forced displays of music, dance and song expected from the slaves attempted to display “mirth” through an exhibit of laughing, smiling and jumping black bodies. Grimke recognized these scenes were staged performances created to justify the subjugation of blacks in the United States. The occasional “mirthful” disposition of blacks represented an exterior view that was created by the white master class but was not representative of the personal turmoil experienced in the slave population.

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[84] *Essential Speeches* (Great Neck Publishing, 2003).

These images of blacks were being created during a time when race and its correlating factors were being defined. Race was a socially contrived development that rose from an amalgamation of myths, contrived and distributed through travel journals that contributed to the development and justification of a system of domination and subjugation.[85] Race was developed under the veil of white myths and negative ideals that greatly impacted the burgeoning group. Beyond the development of race, sex was being reviewed and influenced the black female in society. The black woman's experience represents unique circumstances that extend beyond the black male and white female. Possessing both a racialized and gendered identity resulted in societal expectations and additional attributes assigned to the black woman.

[85] Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997), 10.

The Dual Burden of Female Slavery

Black females were in a vulnerable position throughout the slave era and the forced displays of music, song and dance contributed to their condition. Whites invariably interpreted the physical movements and musical style of black females as lustful, seductive behavior that justified subsequent white male actions. The coercion of blacks to frolic contributed to a system of rape, no less pervasive and structured than the slave system itself. Whites desired absolute control over the black body, and although they never completely possessed it, the rape of black women asserted control over the creation of black womanhood and assisted in developing whiteness.

Researchers have documented the consistency of miscegenation and rape on the slave plantation. The silent acceptance of rape on the plantation was directly related to the (very convenient) idea of the over-sexualized black female. Debra G. White analyzed the creation of this perception of the black woman in America that "first gained credence when Englishmen went to Africa to buy slaves" and "misinterpreted African cultural traditions."[86] The dance style of African women was often misinterpreted through its use of the buttocks and hip areas, and it was often distorted from its ritualistic connections and transformed into evidence of black females' over-sexualized nature. These concepts continued in the United States slave system and were often accepted in the white population. Scholars have often agreed that black women experienced a dual

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[86] Debra G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 29.

burden of race and sex in the institution.[87] As Harriet Jacobs wrote in her memoir of slavery, “Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and suffering, and mortifications peculiarly their own.”[88] Black women had the burden of entertainment and labor, similar to their male counterparts, but also had the horrendous role of providing sexual pleasure to their white masters.

The abuse of black women was well known throughout the slave community. Miscegenation was evident in the continual growth of the mulatto population. The vulnerability of women on the slave ships was only heightened by the degradation of forced performing arts. The link between forced performances and sexual abuse begun on the slave ships continued on to the plantation. The music and dance tradition throughout slavery enhanced the subjugation of the black female by linking promiscuity with passivity. The many accounts of black women being sexually abused and forced to perform contributed to the trauma of slavery.

William Thomas, an ex-slave, commented on female slaves forced to sing by their white masters in order to attract white male sexual attention:

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[87] For more information on the black female experience throughout the institution of slavery such works should be consulted: Jacqueline Jones, “My Mother Was Much of a Woman: Black Women, Work, and Family Under Slavery,” *Feminist Studies* (Summer 1982); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985);Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll, The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); and Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* Edited by Lydia Maria Child (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973).

[88] Jacobs, 79.

> Some masters…make their female slaves prostitute themselves for hire…. hundreds of these women are found on Sundays…where there is plenty of singing and dancing to draw the people to come there.[89]

Forcing black women to seduce white men through the performing arts assisted in their classification as lascivious. The association of black women's sexuality and the performing arts is evident within the quote. Slave masters forced black women to use music and dance as a sexual invitation to white males and through this distortion white slave masters contributed to the misconception of black females as lascivious. The prostitution of black women on the Sabbath underlined the black women's purported lack of morality. Women and girls were compelled to sing and dance in a fashion designed to seem to invite sexual activity and to confirm whites' image of the black woman as seductress. Whites then concluded that black women displayed their lascivious nature through music, song and dance. The over-sexualized black woman was portrayed as a seductress who continually wanted the attention of white men.

The association of music and dance with sexual lewdness among black women was evident in numerous sources. "They played two or three…tunes; about a dozen girls and began a curious and most lascivious dance."[90] It was common for black women's dance movements to be associated with sexuality. The female slave population often continued West African cultural trends in their performing arts style. An acrobatic feat was accomplished within these

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[89] Blassingame, 228.

[90] Found in Dena J. Epstein, "African Music in British and French America," *The Musical Quarterly,* 59, 1 (Jan., 1873), 61-91.

traditional dances which often included the “swinging of hips,” with movements that resulted in the bending of the legs and buttocks outward in a “flowing serpentine stream.”[91] Such movements were often interpreted as overtly sexual. The cultural relics of these dance styles were misunderstood as lascivious displays by black women. The Africanisms of these movements were completely neglected and downgraded by whites. One observer stated, “The female dancer is all languishing, and easy in her motions…particularly in the motion of her hips…the execution of this wriggle.”[92] The use of the lower portions of black women’s bodies within dance movements was used as evidence of their lascivious nature. White men (and, presumably, their wives) used this myth to convince themselves that sexual intercourse with slaves was not rape after all, but an answer to a black woman’s shameless invitation. One slave master stated that “If she was that lascivious-well, a man could scarcely be blamed for succumbing against overwhelming odds.”[93] The forced performance from black slaves, specifically women, validated to many whites that black women were innately over-sexualized and therefore not able to be raped.

As mentioned earlier, White gave a brief glimpse into whites’ interpretation of the black female performing arts and its relation to sexuality. She quoted Louisiana pro-slavery theorist Samuel Cartwright’s ideas of the lewd and lascivious nature of black women through the performing arts. Cartwright stated

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[91] Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance: From 1619 to Today*, 2nd Revised Edition (Hightstown, NJ: Princeton Book Company, 1972, 1988), 55-58.

[92] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaic*a (London: Lowndes, 1774), 242.

[93] Long, 242.

that black females were hurled into “paroxysms of unconsciousness” and “vulgar hysterics” when dancing with members of the opposite sex, and every “likely looking black girl in this state that is not the paramour of a white man” could easily find a white male interest.[94] This comment may be directly related to the religious, voodoo ceremonies that often took place in an area known as Congo Square. These rituals, performed by the black population in New Orleans, were often witnessed and criticized by whites. White does not specifically review the utilization of performance but it is evident that black women were constructed in the public sphere as a promiscuous group that enticed white men. This relationship was most obvious in the Quadroon balls throughout the slave era in Louisiana.[95]

[94] Found in White, 30.

[95] Some information on Quadroon Balls comes from Emery, 149-166.

Black Women in Louisiana

Quadroon Balls were essentially formal affairs in which white men selected black women (most often, racially mixed) to become their concubines. Quadroons were “the child of a mestize mother and a white father, as a mestize is the child of a mulatto mother and a white father.”[96] The term quadroon referred to a person who had one-fourth “black blood,” but they were still considered a part of the black population, although often placed in a higher status.[97] The origins of Quadroon balls are not known, but they were reported as early as 1790. The interconnection with the performing arts and the idea of the sensual black women was displayed in these events; white men selected a quadroon concubine through their requesting of a dance. One witness, Thomas Ashe, commented on the occurrence at these quadroon balls in 1806, “They have… a ball-room of their own, which is well attended, and where as beautiful persons and as graceful dancing is witnessed.”[98] The quadroons in attendance were often free-born blacks but were continually presented as sexualized persons, just as female slaves were.

These quadroons did not feature the same type of hip-vibrating dance movements and musical ensembles as their black slave counterparts, but instead quadroon women were often trained from birth to convey sophistication.

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[96] Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach, Bernard, *Travels through North America during the Years 1825 and 1826* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Carey, 1828), II, 61.

[97] Amos Stoddard, *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812), 321-323.

[98] Thomas Ashe, *Travels in America, Performed in the Year 1806, For the Purpose of Exploring the Rivers Alleghany, Monongahela, Ohio, and Mississippi, Ascertaining the Produce and Condition of Their Banks and Vicinity* (London: B. McMillan, 1809), 314.

Regardless of their education, the women at Quadroon Balls displayed a connection between prostitution and the performing arts. Edward Sullivan stated about the dancing quadroons at these events, “Their movements are the most easy and graceful that I have ever seen…I never saw more perfect dancing on any stage.” These balls were frequented by (normally) elite white males of the region and were notorious throughout the United States. Louisiana’s Quadroon Balls confirmed the image of the black women as sexual objects. The continuance of the myth of the over-sexualized black female and the innately singing and dancing cheerful slave was used to justify the commodification of the black body and to create a society sculptured on the subjugation of the black body and dominance of whites.

Conclusion

The image of blackness was determined and reinforced throughout the institution of slavery. Africans entered the New World with the social status of "other." The fables inherited from travelers' tales were incorporated into the foundation of race and were evident from the initial transformation of Africans into human chattel in the New World. The emphasized contrast to Europeans or whites was an active manner of defining blackness in society. Thomas Jefferson stated in 1781-1782 that the difference between blacks and whites "is fixed in nature, and is as real."[99] These "differences" of blacks were downgraded and perverted in order to recreate the diverse African cultures into the homogeneous, subjugated black others.

The idea of assigning differential statuses to whites and blacks was a significant part of the developing culture of American society, especially with the growth of the slavery system. The romanticized ideals of Africans were prevalent in travel journals and assisted in distinguishing Africans as a separate race, and categorized the diverse populations and cultures into one homogenous group.[100] With the continual development of the slave society, blacks were progressively characterized as an outside group, possessing socially unacceptable inclinations. Africans captured in the North American slavery system represented diverse nations, languages and cultures. Through the bondage system, Africans were

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[99] Merrill D. Peterson, ed, *Thomas Jefferson Writings* (The Library of America,1984).

[100] The erroneous labels attached to the African population was not an uncommon occurrence. It was quite common for foreign groups to be defined and degraded by outside agents during this time of exploration and discovery.

stripped of their traditions and reduced to one black race. The creation of this entity contributed to fictional ideas centered on the black body. In many ways, racism developed as a result of erroneous traits assigned by early explorers but it was enhanced by chattel slavery and an authoritative desire by whites in North America to redefine themselves by contrasting traits. The institution of slavery went beyond the labor system and entered the domain of culture construction in the Middle Passage, coffle, auction block and plantation society.

The pageantry of the coffle, the act of the auction block, and the minstrelsy on the plantation were all evidence of the terror and enjoyment in the institution of slavery. The simulation of jollity and coercion of festivity of the slave trade and the instrumental recreation of plantations document the investment in "black enjoyment."[101] Many of these activities were orchestrated amusements that were a part of a larger effort to disguise the extreme violence of the institution and disavow the pain of captivity, while greatly influencing African American cultural development. This continuation of West African culture in the transmission and recreation of instruments complicated the coercion and distortion of black performance. The dynamics of domination and agency needs to be further analyzed to include the power of the black slave community and the influence of these racial images projected in society. To fully recognize the full dimension of performing arts in the slave society it is imperative to review further the agency and the cultural effects of these racial images. Exploring these scenes will bring to the forefront several questions: Did these myths continue to

[101] Hartman, 20.

manifest and infiltrate in the North American cultural society? How did blacks gain agency through these music and dance scenes?

In this analysis, the white master class effort to create an imagined community within the institution of slavery was addressed but does not reveal the plantation society. The fantasy of mastery formed a part of the unstable foundation of the plantation setting, although within this society, the subjected population of slaves created avenues of agency that needs to be explored to broaden the world that was consistently negotiated between slaves and slave masters.

CHAPTER THREE: DUAL NATURE OF PERFORMANCE

Introduction

> Slaves are generally expected to sing as well as to work. A silent slave is not liked by masters or overseers…This may account for the almost constant singing heard in the southern states….In all the songs of the slaves, there was ever some expression of praise of the great house farm; something which would flatter the pride of the owner, and possibly, draw a favorable glance from him….This they would sing, with other words of their own improvising-jargon to others, but full of meaning to themselves.[1]

Frederick Douglass' interpretation of the meaning of the songs sung by slaves on the plantation reveals the duality of these performances. While whites listening to these slave songs heard flattery and praise, these lyrics expressed a different message to the black population. The slave community had a secret language, heard as jargon (or even gibberish) to outsiders, that was communicated through their music and dance. These songs were often "rude and apparently incoherent songs" for many whites but among blacks it signified "prayer and complaint of souls," "sorrows" of their heart, their personal experience or perhaps even plans to rebel.[2] Slaves used trickster language to gain agency without whites' awareness. Douglass exposes black performances as merely a façade which catered to whites and ironically, contributed to the concealment of the true world of the slaves.

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[1] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 97.

[2] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, ed., Benjamin Quarles (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1845, 1960), 37-38.

The contrived displays of jollity through forced performance were and remain active images of the slave era and they directly contributed to the development of a distinct American and African American culture. Throughout these performance scenes, power was being negotiated between master and slave. The pendulum of control was a complicated aspect of this era that was intertwined within the coerced images of black subjugation and veiled agency all through the performance of music, song and dance.

The performing arts were an aspect of white power over the black body but they also represented a voluntary act of cultural expression among the black population. These conflicting dynamics contributed to the development of not only an American culture but also of several aspects of a distinctly African American culture. Reviewing the layers within these scenes of black performance will present new ways to examine race, culture and entertainment and will bring to the forefront several questions: What did these scenes of music, song and dance mean for blacks in society? How did the performing arts contribute to the agency of blacks and the development of a distinctly African American culture? How did these displays contribute to the foundation of not only culture but also entertainment in America? This chapter will investigate the dual nature and double consciousness of black performance, recognizing the agency blacks managed to appropriate, even while whites created a racial order in which blacks were stereotyped and degraded.

Double Consciousness of Performance

The dual meaning of the performing arts for blacks created a paradoxical dynamic of agency, masquerade and subjugation within the African American community. Black slaves were both active participants in the white-imagined community and contributors to the development of a distinct culture. The conflicting role of music, dance and song was a part of the "double consciousness" that W.E.B. Dubois introduced in *Souls of Black Folk*:

> double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[3]

For the black population, the performing arts offered a conflicting dynamic. On one hand, blacks were seizing agency; on the other, they were fulfilling whites' imagined ideals of blackness. Many slaves understood white ideals of blacks as docile, happy musical and dancing creatures, but they also recognized the power of frolicking. Whites set the standards which often resulted in blacks "always looking at" themselves "through the eyes of others."[4] The white world that looked on "in amused contempt and pity" was representative of both sides of the slavery argument, pro and anti-slavery, therefore influencing their view of the black community.[5] Blacks' constant supervision and criticism contributed to slaves'

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[3] W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk (New York, Toronto, & London: Batham Classic Edition, 1903, 1989), 3.*

[4] Dubois, 3.

[5] Dubois, 3.

ingenious plans to escape white control through coercive activities disguised as performing arts.

Frolicking provided several elements of agency to the black community. Lyrical and dance expression was often a venue for uninhibited (and normally proscribed) acts without the threat of the lash. Ex-slave Celestia Avery commented that, "the only self expression they could indulge in without conflict with the master was that of singing."[6] The positive outlets for black performing arts were intertwined with the negative coercion and the stereotypes that were constructed and enforced. In many ways, slaves were placating whites through their masquerades within the frolics while also asserting their own heritage and agency. Blacks expressed their emotions and occasional happiness through these events. These expressions were evident in virtually every part of the slave life such as work songs, holiday songs, sorrow songs, joyful songs, spirituals, coffle songs, and various other genres of music. They allowed for community and familial cohesion to develop in a tumultuous society. Jennie Hill spoke of the singing in the slave cabins and stated that, "The slaves loved their families…and the happiest time of their lives was when…the day's work was done .…Children learned these songs and sang them."[7] Music, dance and song allowed for further familial and communal development among blacks in the slave society. In addition, these traditions were passed along to future generations. The black

[6]George P. Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), Vol 12: Georgia Narratives, Part 1 & 2, 24-25.

[7] John Blassingame, ed. *Slave Testimony* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1977), 593.

family not only survived, but also expanded through frolics, and created relationships beyond normal familial ties.

Another ex-slave reminisced about the positive outcomes of frolics with her remembrance of a Christmas Holiday celebration:

> General celebratin' time you see, 'cause husbands is comin' home an' families is getting' nunited again. Husbands hurry on home to see dey new babies…go ver to de Saunders place fo' dancin'. Must a been hundred slaves over thar, an' they always had…dances.[8]

Christmas was a special holiday when slaves were often permitted to return to their families (if at a nearby plantation). These occasions allowed some elements of humanity to enter the slave quarters. Although Frederick Douglass stated:

> Holidays were among the most effective means in the hands of slaveholders of keeping down the spirit of insurrection among slaves…but for those [dances, frolics, holidays] the rigors of bondage would have become too severe for endurance and the slave would have been forced to a dangerous desperation.[9]

Douglass' statement directly relates to the double consciousness of slave frolics. Music, song and dance were used as a manner to humiliate and torture blacks while they also allowed for agency and community development within the slave communities. Within the inhibiting world of slavery, performing arts allotted venues of agency and happiness for black slaves although veiled under guises of the "happy darky."

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[8] Roscoe Lewis*, The Negro in Virginia* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 87.

[9] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Dougas: From 1817-1882, Written by himself, with an Introduction by the Right Hon. John Bright,* ed. John Lobb (London: Christian Age Office, 1882), 77-78.

The performing arts thus assisted in familial and communal development while providing an avenue for communication. This interchange fostered outlets for black slaves while it also contributed to the slaves' ingenuity. Within the style of music, song and dance, blacks created a coded form of communication that greatly assisted in their cultural development.[10] Whites sometimes understood, to various degrees, the coded messages within black music. Ironically, controversial lyrics of mockery were often openly versed in front of the master class but whites regularly ignored the actual meaning. "Go Down, Moses" was one of many songs that represented a dual meaning for the slave population. Disguised as a religious spiritual, the song lyrics also relayed information for escape through the Underground Railroad and also referred to the slave population's potential freedom.[11]

Many black slaves would sharply change the dance style or song lyrics according to the racial makeup of the audience. One example of slaves modifying lyrics comes from the firsthand account of Susan Snow. She reminisced about a lesson learned as a child on a plantation while singing a song about the Union army. The mistress of the plantation heard the anti-South lyrics of the song which resulted in Snow being beaten by the mistress with a broom stick. Snow stated that she often heard the song within the slave quarters but

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[10] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books,), 1972, 1974.

[11] Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977, 2003), 363.

was unaware as a child that the lyrics changed when whites were present.[12] The duality of slave life was clear with the two versions of the same song lyrics. The secret code of alteration in the performance was prevalent within the slave community.

Although whites allowed black performance, slaves often found avenues to frolics without whites' authoritative gaze. Throughout slavery, many blacks in bondage chose to have frolics without white supervision. Secret meetings in the slave quarters or in the forest were known as "stealing away" by the slaves.[13] Blacks were "stealing" or reclaiming control, power and culture through their covert gatherings. This activity was a form of rebellion against the entire slave institution. Although music, song and dance was permitted by white masters, blacks still risked their lives to limit whites' complete control through their (blacks') concealed actions. Blacks established their humanity, created a distinct culture and revolted in the suppressive environment through masquerade.

"Stealing away" represented a form of rebellion which could have resulted in physical danger. This was one of the black community's many survival tactics. Ex-slave Albert Hill reminisced about slaves "stealing away" in Walton County, Georgia, and stated, "Massa…don't 'low de parties…We dances near all night Saturday night, but we has to stay way in de back where de white folks can't hear us. Sometimes we has de fiddle and de banjo and does we cut dat chicken wing

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[12] All of the information pertaining to Susan Snow was found in Rawick, ed., *The American Slave*, Vol 16: Maryland Narratives, Part 5.

[13] Roger D.Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergency of African American Culture in the Plantation South* (New York: Penguin, 1994).

and de shuffle!"[14] Many whites wanted to control the entire black body, physically and mentally. These conditions contributed to the clandestine tradition that developed in the black society. One ex-slave stated, "When they wanted to sing and pray, they would steal off into the woods…Whippings did not stop them from having meetings."[15] Escaping the masters' gaze aided the development of a distinct African American culture.

The private frolic of black slaves separate from the authoritative eyes of whites allowed slaves to "do as we pleased."[16] This sacred aspect of the black experience provided an outlet in a binding institution. Many blacks recognized that they gained a form of independence from these private frolics. Mark Gaffney, an ex-slave from Mississippi, commented on these covert assemblies by stating,

> That was the happiest time of the slaves because the rest of the time it was like being a convict, we had to do just like maser told us. We would get together and dance, talk and have our fun, Maser he would not be there to holler instructions at us.[17]

These events allowed blacks to gain authority over their own bodies. They also enabled many blacks to organize various types of rebellious strategies that often ignited fear in the white community.

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[14] Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves* (17 vols.; Washington D.C.; Typewritten Records Prepared by the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, XVI, Part 2, 137.

[15] James B. Cade, "Out of the Mouths of Ex-slaves," *Journal of Negro History,* XXII, (April, 1935), 328-329.

[16] Rawick, ed., *American Slave,* supplement series 2, vol. 6: *Texas Narratives,* pt. 8, 3520.

[17] Rawick, ed., *American Slave,* supplement series 2, vol. 5: *Texas Narratives,* pt. 4, 1448.

The concealment of frolicking was an interesting aspect of the slave culture. This frequent activity allowed blacks to assert some form of agency while rebelling against an unfair system. With these escapes, slaves were resisting slavery's bondage and degradation. Whites often used music, song and dance as a means of displaying blacks subjugation while, contrastingly, it represented in the black community their familial ties, an African heritage and a form of expression and agency. These multiple meanings of frolics represented conflicting sides in the development and growth of the black community.

Bondsmen had creative ways to limit the sounds of their frolicking. An overturned vessel, normally a large pot turned upside down and placed outside the door, was used in order to prevent the sound of dancing, singing and music from traveling to white ears. Ex-slave Ann Matthews reminisced about these occasions and stated that they, "would turn a pot down en meet at de pot in de nite en sing en pray en de white folks wouldn't 'yer dem."[18] The pot was believed to catch the sound and was utilized to prevent the sound from reaching night patrollers. Although music and dance were activities permitted by whites, blacks preferred to meet in anonymity, even with the risk of physical harm, to express their emotions.[19]

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[18] Rawick, ed., *American Slave,* supplement series 2, vol. 16 no. 11: *Maryland Narratives,* pt. 8, 45-48.

[19] Within these meetings various events occurred from plans of rebellion, religious celebration to the continuation of West African traditions. Frolicking was just one of the many activities that took place in private amongst the slaves.

Africanisms in America

Within the black community, the performing arts were not only representative of white force but also a part of cultural continuances from West Africa. Blacks' practice of music, song and dance during slavery does not automatically connote minstrelsy or white coercion; the performing arts were an active part of West African society and were carried over by the slaves through the Middle Passage. Throughout these performances, it is important to display the agency of those descendents of Africa. This continuation of West African culture in their lyrical and dance expression complicates the coercion and distortion of black performance by whites. Also, the trickster dynamic of these performances was a part of this cultural display and an active element of the slavery institution.[20]

The performing arts allowed for the entrance of West African traditions into the New World culture. As stated above in Chapter 2, the native (African) instruments were brought through the Middle Passage. However, many of the ceremonial dances, song lyrics and musical traditions were sustained as well and they became a part of the foundation of American culture and tradition. The African derived banjo was an active part of the slave performing arts throughout the plantation community. It was common for slaves throughout the United States to be seen dancing to "to the music of a banjo."[21] The use of natural

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[20] Trickster tales, according to Sterling Stuckey, were used during burial ceremonies that were transmitted to North America from Africa by the slaves. For this analysis, the trickster is not necessarily referring to the tales but instead the roles many blacks performed in order to disguise the agency while continually outsmarting whites.

[21] Guion Johnson, *Ante-bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 599.

materials for the construction of instruments was a trait blacks brought from West Africa to the United States. Ex-slave John Cole recalled the methods with which blacks made instruments: “Stretch cow-hides over cheese-boxes and you had tambourines. Saw bones from off a cow, knock them together, and call it a drum. Or use broom-straws on fiddle-strings, and you had your entire orchestra.”[22] The slave population’s ingenuity is evident through this statement but it also displays the continuing cultural practice of using natural resources to create instruments. The continuance of West African derived instruments and the manner in which they were created by the black population was a cultural relic that continued throughout the slave era in North America.

Beyond the musical instruments, many of the dance movements prevalent throughout this period had African roots. According to Sterling Stuckey, many of the dances that the slaves performed, such as the “cutting wheat, pitchen hay, corn-shuckin, and buzzard lope” greatly resembled various ceremonial dances of West Africa.[23] One example of West African dance forms in the New World was the apparent prolongation of a genre known as the “Ring Dance.” Ex-slave Hettie Campbell described, “We does plenty uh dances in those days. Dance roun’ in a ring. We has a big tim long bout wen crops come in an everybody bring sumpm…we gives praise fuh the good crop an then we shouts an sings all

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[22] Rawick, ed., *American Slave,* supplement series 2, vol.16: *Georgia Narratives,* pt. 3, 219.

[23] Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and Foundations of Black America* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 64-67.

night."[24] The Ring Dance re-enacted on the plantations throughout the United States was quite similar to the dances performed throughout various regions on Africa's West coast.[25] The tradition of celebrating after a good harvest was also a part of the culture of West Africa continuing amongst in the slave population. This type of performance was also known as the "ring-shout" or just "shout" among blacks.[26] This form was a religious/sacred dance that survived the Middle Passage and continued in North America. In 1862, Laura Towne witnessed this ceremony and stated,

> Tonight I have been to a shout, which seems to me certainly the remains of some old idol worship. The negroes sing a kind of chorus - three standing apart to lead and clap- and then all the others go shuffling round in a circle following one another…and bending the knees, and stamping so that the whole floor swings…They call it a religious ceremony.[27]

This ceremony varied according to geographical region and title, but it was seen throughout the North and South during the entire slave era. These ceremonies represented self-expression and continued the African tradition of using the performing arts during rituals. These dances were preserved in the minds of the captives through the Middle Passage, although they were altered over time, West African cultural relics remained in the dance movements of blacks in America.

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[24] Georgia Writers' Project, *Drums and Shadows; Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1940), 186-187.

[25]Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance:* From *1619 to Today,* 2nd Revised Edition (Highstown, NJ: Princeton Book Company, Publishers, 1972, 1988), 92.

[26] Emery, 120-121.

[27] Found in Emery, 122.

Scholar Katrina Hazzard-Gordon also stated that, over time, a clear demarcation among sacred, ceremonial and secular dancing occurred within the slave community and contributed to a distinct African American culture.[28] Beyond the continuance of dance styles, the music's sound and lyrics transmitted native African cultures to North America. Many songs created by blacks in America often used an assortment of West African words and African musical technique such as call and response. They also used performance for comparable ritual purposes, such as naming or corn shucking ceremonies.[29] The survival of West African styles in music, song and dance was the foundation of a distinctive African American tradition. Unfortunately, the imagined community of white dominance over the black body also influenced this burgeoning culture and brought misrepresentation and distortion to the practices.

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[28] Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations In African-American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

[29] Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War,* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977, 2003).

Black Musicians-Plantation Elite

Possessing musical skill afforded individual slaves mobility within the black and white communities. They were able to temporarily leave the station of mere slave and to enter into other spheres. Musicians, the "community's secular ministers," often found relief and opportunity in their special talents.[30] Black musicians earned a special position of "folk elite" in the black (and white) communities.[31] If a slave held the position of skilled musician he or she would often receive the opportunity to perform at the Big House. In an autobiographical work, Solomon Northup shed light on the advantages of being a slave musician during his twelve years trapped in bondage.

> I met with other good fortune, for which I was indebted to my violin, my constant companion, the source of profit…I was employed to play…so well pleased were the merry-makers with my performance, that a contribution was taken for my benefit, which amounted to seventeen dollars. With this sum possession, I was looked upon by my fellows as a millionaire. It afforded me great pleasure.[32]

Northup's testimony represented the type of advantages a slave might earn as a result of his or her musical talent, (normally slave musicians were male). His story mirrored those of dozens of blacks who were able to receive recognition for their performing arts abilities. One ex-slave reminisced about the advantages

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[30] Musician in this context is used specifically to emphasize instrumentalists, since those individuals brought their communities together in a frolic. This term is not used in reference to preachers or vocalists. Paul A. Cimbala, "Black Musicians From Slavery To Freedom: An Exploration of an African-American Folk Elite and Cultural Continuity in the Nineteenth Century Rural South," *The Journal of Negro History*, 80, 1 (Winter, 1995), 15-29.

[31] Cimbala,15.

[32] Gilbert Osofsky, *Puttin on Ole Massa; the slave narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 332.

and stated, “how I used to dance in the stores for men and women, they could give me pennies and three cent pieces, all of which…bought me shoes and clothes with the money collected.”[33] Through musical and dance talents, slaves were sometimes able to receive monetary compensation which allowed them to purchase necessities withheld from them because of their subjugated status. Oftentimes, slaves with performance skills recognized by whites could also be awarded with other commodities. One ex-slave, John Adams, stated, “I always like to play for them white boys cause they would make this old Negro plenty toddys, or in other words, give me plenty whiskey to drink.”[34] These benefits received as a result of their musical talents usually did not compare to the recognition received from their own slave community.

Slave musicians were able to experience more freedom because of the ability to play in several locations that often impressed their fellow bondsmen. The instrumentalist was the facilitator of the frolic and in some cases received the title of “captain.”[35] This title also afforded special attention from young women while giving them respect which other slaves did not receive.[36] Musicians were able to loosen the chains of enslavement through their talent and be recognized outside of their slave status. Ironically, they did so while confirming a stereotyped role in society.

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[33]Rawick, ed., *American Slave,* supplement series 2, vol. 16: *Maryland Narratives,* pt. 8, 66.

[34]Rawick, ed., *American Slave,* supplement series 2, vol. 7: *Texas Narratives,* pt. 6, 2469.

[35] Rawick, ed., *American Slave,* supplement series 2, vol. 13: *Georgia Narratives,* pt. 3, 206.

[36] A. J. H. Christensen, *Afro-American Folk Lore Told Round Cabin Fires on the Sea Islands of South Carolina* (Boston: J. G. Cupples, Co., 1892), 3.

The story of “Uncle Dick” sheds light on the significance of the slave musician among blacks. Uncle Dick was an important fiddler and “presence” in society and on his way to a performance he faced great obstacles. During his journey to the “grand wedding festival,” Uncle Dick was traveling through the woods dressed in “carefully polished…glittering glit buttons; and then raised his immense shirt collar…and fiddle in hand” to the festival because he was called upon to be the “officiate or master of ceremonies.” As he continued through the forest, Uncle Dick encountered wolves in the forest that were ready to attack. “Instinctively he (Uncle Dick) thrusts out his fiddle at them.... Instantly the wolves sprang back as if he had fired a gun among them…never before had he played to an audience so fond of music.”[37] “Uncle Dick” was representative of the folk hero status many slave musicians received through their musical abilities from the black community. This skill offered them opportunities that were not afforded to other blacks, thus causing a venue for special recognition by their peers. Black slaves who were recognized within the black and white community as possessing unique talents as performers were rewarded with internal and external benefits for their craft. The elevated status of the slave musician and the continuance of West African cultures within performances allowed for music, dance and song to be important aspects of African American culture.

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[37] The folktale of Uncle Dick, the slave musician comes directly from, Rawick, ed., *American Slave,* supplement series 2, vol. 16 no.11: *Kentucky Narratives,* 68-73, 95-99.

Secret

Many blacks understood the facade of the public performances for whites and that this masquerade fulfilled white expectations of blackness. Therefore, private frolics allowed for open expression. Lydia Parrish, a white woman, commented on the concealment of blacks' true culture from whites. She stated, "The secretiveness of the Negro is…the fundamental reason for our ignorance of the race and its background."[38] She attests to the elusiveness of the slave community. Slave secrecy allowed for agency and some pleasures while it simultaneously kept many whites ignorant of the true nature of black culture. Parrish's comment sheds light on the clandestine world of blacks that was hidden from whites. Many whites were not aware or conscious of the distinctive African American culture that developed under the veil of servitude. One ex-slave reminisced on the secret events the slaves would have, "Sadday nights we'd slip out de quarters an' go to de woods. Was a ole cabin bout five miles 'way from de house, an' us would raise all de ruckus dere we wanted."[39] Slaves preferred to be as far away from the big house as possible. "We used to git back in de end cabin an' sing an' dance by de fiddle."[40]

Some whites recognized the power of these private meetings. One Louisiana planter remarked, "No thing is more to be dreaded than to see the Negroes assemble together… under the pretence of… the dance….for it is in

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[38] Stuckey, 24.

[39] Lewis, 93. (See also , Stuckey, 370)

[40] Stuckey, 67 and Lewis, 93

those tumultuous meetings that they…plot their rebellions.[41] The fear of black congregation was quite apparent in these planters' words and directly conflicted with the idea of slaves' innate relation to jollity through the performing arts. This fear often resulted in legal action against unsupervised meetings of slaves. For example, a 1794 law made it illegal for persons to allow slaves to congregate, dance and drink on their premises without the written permission of their owners.[42] Whites often masked their fear of black rebellion but it was evident in the continuous attempts whites made to restrict blacks from congregating without supervision. Although the 1794 law was not invariably observed, there was another piece of legislation in Charleston, South Carolina in 1740 that stated, "And for that as it is absolutely necessary to the safety of this province that all due care be taken to restrain the wandering and meeting of negroes….or use or keeping of drums, horns, or other loud instruments, which may call together or give sign or notice to one another of their wicked designs."[43] The white population's paranoia was a result of private black congregation, and it sheds light on the fragile nature of white domination. Many whites were aware of their slaves' discontent, even though their fear of black rebellion directly conflicted with white domination and the stereotypes of the black community. The secrecy of black gatherings was also insured by the altering of lyrics and dance movements

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[41] Le Page du Pratz, "*The History of Louisiana, or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina* (London: Becket, 1774), 380-387.

[42] Johnson, 599.

[43] *Statues at Large for the State of South Carolina,* VII, 410. Also found in Hazzard-Gordon, 33.

depending on the composition of the audience. Therefore, performance allowed for a veiled existence to develop in the black community which contributed to a collective mentality.

"White folks do as they pleases, and the darkies do as they can."[44] This slave aphorism illustrates the deceptive ways of the slaves that was quite apparent in their music, song and dance. One white master once remarked, "So deceitful is the Negro."[45] Within the lyrics of numerous slave songs there were numerous examples of the trickster. Many of these songs were blatant displays of the slaves' rebellious acts. It was a common practice for slaves to mock their white masters through their lyrical and dance expression. Numerous slave songs possessed rebellious lyrics. These songs often spoke of potential freedom (either on earth or in an afterlife) and they often spoke of the negative treatment and behavior of whites.

W.E.B. Dubois' theory of black double consciousness was an important element of the culture created by the institution of slavery. Within the performing arts, blacks were able to receive agency in several ways: clandestine cultural practices, continuation of West African culture, trickster activities, and communal and familial development. However, the positive aspects of music and dance for blacks still contributed to the development of negative racial stereotypes within American culture.

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[44] Found in Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121.

[45] Levine,122.

Influence of the Performance Scenes on American Culture

Frederick Douglass sheds light on the multi-dimensional interpretation of slave performances throughout the United States in the statement:

> I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears.[46]

Douglass displays the expressive nature of slave songs but also recognizes the misconceptions of these performances for many whites. The performances either forced by whites or as cultural expressions within the black community, represented to many whites their domination in society while also mentally and socially justifying slavery as a happy and good institution.

The plantation society was a part of a historical memory that distorted expectations and agency through its manipulation of the black body. Slavery's cultural legacy resulted in the creation of blackness, which continually distributed the distorted black body in the public sphere. Blackness refers to the mythical, public image of blacks that was created to justify the slavery system and to present blacks as docile, simple, lazy, over-sexualized, immoral, undisciplined, innately related to music, song-and-dance-contented slaves. Take for example, the following lyrics:

> Me sing all day, me sleep all night
> Me hab no care, my heart is light;
> Me tink not what to-morrow bring,

[46] Douglass, 37-38

Me happy, so me sing.[47]

These slave song lyrics exemplified the myth that was disseminated in society and contributed to slavery, while subjugating blacks and asserting whites as dominant within the public sphere. The active participation of slave masters in the amusement of blacks throughout the slave society created a complicated dynamic of an imagined community.[48] The imagined community was structured on the premise of mastery that was prevalent throughout white society, that black slaves, regardless of physical and mental hardships, were innately associated with the performing arts and happiness. The imagined community also believed that whites were innately powerful and morally right in their status in society.

These ideals veiled white fears of black rebellion and resistance, although the anxiety was quite apparent in society. Southern plantation owners' fantasy of mastery was mainly constructed of images for the public that purposely disguised the continuous agency and distinctive, intellectual and cultural growth that developed with the fields and quarters of black slaves.[49] In many ways, the imagined community was structured on a desire to create a public perception that Southern life, mores and society were morally right and justified. Whether or not whites truly believed in the stereotypes of blacks constructed and enforced within

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[47] Alexander Barclay, *A Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies* (London, 1826), 206-208.

[48] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1983).

[49] Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1999.)

their imagined community, it still assisted in the continued reinforcement of black bodies as commodities and others in society.

The institution of slavery assisted in the continuation of stereotypes that whites constructed on the black body through travel journals, fables and popular literature. "Its function was to justify or rationalize our conduct in relation to that category."[50] These stereotypes ranged from the over-sexualized black female, the innately cheerful dancing, singing slave and various other labels that began during the initial exploration of Africa by Europeans that were enhanced by the power relations within the slavery institution. These black stereotypes, presented for popular consumption, give great detail on white anxieties and their constant desire to control the black body, while justifying a deplorable tradition.

Roger Chartier stated that the "contradictory principles of construction of the social world and the categorizations by means of which individuals, in a given situation, act to classify others and, by doing so, classify themselves."[51] Whites represented the individuals that in a given situation, i.e. slavery, act to classify blacks as inferior while characterizing themselves as superior. For blacks, skin color was all that mattered; it defined their race. For whites, race barely existed as a category. Such disequilibrium permitted the institution of slavery, and permitted white exploitation of the black body through labor and entertainment.

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[50] Gordon Allport,*The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass: Addison Wesley Pub. Co.,1954), 191.

[51]Roger Chartier. *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 47.

Blacks found themselves in society's subordinate category, and came to realize that, to protect itself, white society would do anything to justify the status quo.

> The affiliation of performances and blackness can be attributed to the spectactularization of black pain and racial conceptions of Negro nature as carefree, infantile, hedonistic, and indifferent to suffering and to an interested misreading of the interdependence of labor and song common among the enslaved.[52]

This exploitation was evident in the foundational development of the North American political, social and economic system, with assistance in its enforcement mechanisms. Through these "scenes of subjection," blacks were envisioned fundamentally as vehicles of white enjoyment.[53]

The subjugation of blacks throughout the slave society greatly affected African Americans beyond the development of stereotypes. The result of these horrific conditions on blacks in North America has often been a subject of debate and inquiry. Amiri Baraka introduced the term "slave mentality," which he saw as inevitable: "[T]wo hundred years of bending to the will of the white man had to leave its mark…that mark was indelibly on the very foundation of …black society."[54] Essentially, the continual façade used by blacks to survive the institution greatly affected the cultural development of African Americans.[55] The

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[52] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22.

[53] The term "scenes of subjection" is directly taken from Hartman.

[54] Amiri, Baraka, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed From It* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963), 57. The term "slave mentality" comes from A. Baraka's work and is explained further in his work.

[55]Baraka, 57.

veiled cultural developments in the black community led some blacks to accept the stereotypical roles assigned to them by the white master class.

Slave mentality closely parallels Ron Eyerman's theory of cultural trauma.[56] According to Eyerman, the term "trauma" refers to slavery and its "collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation" of blacks in America.[57] Cultural trauma stemmed from a particular event or series of events that was not necessarily directly experienced. Although not necessarily experienced, it did often result in the tearing of the social fabric of society.[58] Thus, there were some areas in the development of the African American community that were indirect results of the institution of slavery. The specific effect of slavery varies throughout the black community.

The African American community ranges in diversity according to the unique historical experiences in a society with slaves and slave societies.[59] The southern region of the United States was a slave society and it was the main area in which forced public performances occurred. Regardless of the slave status in the region, negative stereotypes gleaned and reinforced from black performance continually affected blacks throughout the United States and contributed to the development of an overall African American community. The

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[56] Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[57] Eyerman, 1.

[58] Eyerman, 61.

[59] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousand Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University of Press, 1998).

common scene of blacks dancing and singing for a white audience was an active part of the culture of slavery, especially in the South. These elements directly correlated with the rise of social, cultural, racial and economic development for blacks and whites in North America.

Slave mentality and cultural trauma were considered results of slavery that specifically affected the African American population; however, they do not fully explain the influences of the slave experience in America. The institution of slavery also contributed to the development of a distinct white American culture, whiteness and blackness; therefore slavery and its influential force should be put in a broader context. Hazel Carby commented on the construction of the social imagination, stating that whiteness as well as blackness should be reviewed in order to make visible what is rendered invisible.[60] In order to accurately review all aspects of these scenes throughout slavery, it is important to incorporate white and black cultural development together into one term: collective mentality.

Collective mentality, for this analysis, refers to the overarching attitudes and behaviors of blacks and whites, in the United States, which formed from the slavery system through its images and stratification of power. Wilbur J. Cash commented that the "Negro entered into white man as profoundly as white man entered into Negro-subtly influencing every gesture, every word, every emotion and idea, every attitude."[61] There was an intimate connection between the actions of the white masters and the reaction from the black slaves. Reciprocally,

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[60] Hazel V. Carby, 'The Multicultural Wars' in Dent, Gina (ed.) *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 187-99.

[61] Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage, 1941), xi.

the actions of blacks also greatly influenced whites resulting in mutual influence on the development of race. Collective mentality encompassed both sides of the slavery argument. “Both racist ideology and the countervailing arguments for a human equality transcending color and condition made by African Americans and their white allies came out of the same…intellectual fervent.”[62] These incidents assisted in the development of racial imagery that was central to the social organization in modern North America.

Dominance and the benefit of being non-racialized developed in the white community. Through visual images, whites were able to display their power over blacks while reasserting their dominance in society. Slave masters created the idea of normality based on white standards resulting in blackness being associated with abnormality or in the other category.[63] Collective mentality contributed to the public construction of black culture to be centered on the expectations of whites. Nevertheless, the black community developed under a veil of ingenuity and deception; therefore, it allowed for agency and a distinct African American culture.

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[62]Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African American Ideas about White People* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18.

[63] The information in this sentence comes directly from Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside The Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999) ; Paula S. Rothernberg, ed. *White Privilege: Essential Reading on the Other Side of Racism* (New Jersey: Worth Publishers, 2002) Essentially, the imagined community or fantasy of mastery pertains to the world which slavery made. Whites had the idea that they were paternalistic and therefore justified in being the dominant group. The idea that slaves were projecting happiness in the singing and dancing was active part of the construction of this community thus allowing the pro-slavery group to believe that blacks were content and happy as subordinates. This imagined community or fantasy of mastery contributed to the development and reinforcement of blacks' masquerade throughout the slave era.

New Orleans and Free Blacks

Many of the cultural characteristics brought to America and continued through the black community were suppressed, forgotten or slightly changed over the generations. Although aspects of the African based music, song and dance tradition continued in North American culture, the performing arts also began to incorporate European based traditions, therefore contributing to the distinct African American culture by the nineteenth century. The clandestine meetings away from whites' supervision allowed for some remnants of African culture to survive. Depending on the ethnic composition of the enslaved Africans, the work routine, the type of labor and the number of generations removed from Africa, the music and dance culture varied geographically through the United States.[64]

In the nineteenth century, New Orleans was home to "the largest Negro population both slave and free, of any American city."[65] France first colonized Louisiana in the early eighteenth century, later passing the colony to the Spanish, who ruled from 1762 until 1800. The presence of both French and Spanish rule contributed greatly to the unique cultural developments throughout New Orleans. The primarily Catholic region was the home to a large number of African slaves, as well as immigrants from Haiti and Santo Domingo, who brought a form of

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[64] Katrina Hazzard-Gordon "Dancing Under the Lash: Sociocultural Disruption, Continuity and Synthesis", Found In Kariamu Welsh-Asante, ed., *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical, and Philosophical Inquiry* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc, 1994. 1998, 2002),102.

[65] Henry Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The formative years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

African-based religion known as Voodoo.[66] These various agents, with large mulatto and Creole populations, contributed to the unique performing arts displays among blacks throughout New Orleans.

Place Congo later became known as Congo Square in later generations as English began to supplement the dominant French language. In the nineteenth century, New Orleans was a diverse city, with French-Spanish cultural influence that contributed to a unique culture in the region.[67] From the beginning of the nineteenth century until 1862, Congo Square was an area where slaves and free blacks would congregate on Sunday afternoons to perform West African derived music and dance. Prior to these performances in Congo Square, travelers to New Orleans continually reported various scenes of black slaves performing religious rituals and African-originated customs throughout the city. As early as 1786, New Orleans, while under Spanish rule, attempted to outlaw the congregation of blacks throughout the city.[68] Regardless, the widespread dancing of Africans and West Indians in New Orleans continued and in 1799 one visitor stated that "vast numbers of negro slaves, men, women, and children

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[66] The information pertaining to Louisiana comes directly from Gwendolyn Mildo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1992).

[67] The information pertaining to Congo Square comes directly from Gary A. Donaldson, "A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800-1862" *The Journal of Negro History,* 69, 2. (Spring, 1984), 63-72.

[68] Donaldson, 63-64.

assembled together on the levee, drumming fifing and dancing in large rings."[69] The reference to dancing in a "ring" specifically referred to the ring dance or ring shout dance that was an active West African continuance throughout the South.

The West African culture was able to thrive in New Orleans due to its large West Indian migrations and the continual supply of Africans into the area. Under Spanish rule, Africans were the "largest group of people introduced in Spanish Louisiana."[70] Also, under the French rule, high numbers of West Indian blacks were brought from the French dominated islands. Haiti's independence in 1804 contributed to a large influx of whites and blacks to the region. "In the late spring of 1809, thirty-four vessels from Cuba set ashore in New Orleans more than 5,500 immigrants; about one-third were white" and the remaining were black.[71] These influxes of Africans and West Indians contributed to the continual revivification of native based traditions. Blacks in the region continually fought against congregation and dance restrictions resulting in the ordinance of 1817 that restricted dancing to Sunday at a designated place. This law created the tradition at Congo Square.[72]

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[69] Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed. *Early western travels, 1748-1846 : a series of annotated reprints of some of the best and rarest contemporary volumes of travel : descriptive of the aborigines and social and economic conditions in the middle and far West, during the period of early American settlement*, (Cleveland, OH: A.H. Clark, Co, 1904-1907), Vol. IV., Reprint Wennawods Publishers, 2000, 363-366. The reference to dancing in a "ring" specifically referred to the ring dance or ring shout dance that was an active West African continuance throughout the South.

[70] Hall, 277.

[71] W. Adolphe Roberts, *Lake Pontchartrain* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946), 113.

[72] John Smith Kendall, *History of New Orleans* (2 vols., Chicago, 1922), II, 679.

Sanctioned performances at Congo Square often resulted in the large congregation of whites as spectators to these events. In 1807 Christian Schultz commented after visiting Congo Square,

> In the afternoon, a walk in the rear of the town will still more astonish their bewildered imaginations with the sight of twenty different dancing groups of the wretched Africans, collected together to perform their worship after the manner of their counter. They have their own national music…The principal dancers or leaders are dressed in a variety of wild and savage fashions…(these events)always attracted the largest circle of company.[73]

Numerous white spectators visited Congo Square to view these black performances, although they often greatly downgraded or ignored the cultural significance of these displays. Regardless of the negative criticism of whites, blacks were able to continue their ritualistic performances in New Orleans allowing for the African based religion of Voodoo to continue.

Whites and blacks throughout New Orleans were well aware that Voodoo was actively practiced among free and enslaved blacks. (Voodoo is recognized as deriving from Haiti but has it roots on the coast of West Africa.)[74] Congo Square hosted Voodoo ceremonies, other religious rituals, and recreational performances of blacks throughout the city. Joe Goodness, an observer of the dances at Congo Square commented, "I can remember the Congo Square dances on Sunday afternoons…People thought they was Voodoo dances and its true that a lot of people who danced there was Voodoos, but they really wasn't

[73] Found in Emery, 157. Originally published in Charles Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage through the States of New-York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee and through the Territories of Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi and New Orleans; Performed in the Years 1807 and 1808; Including a Tour of Nearly Six Thousand Miles. With Maps and Plates*, (2 vols.; New York: Isaac Riley, 1810), II, 197.

[74] *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, Compiled by the Louisiana Writer's Project (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1945).

the real thing…The regular dances wasn't ever held in public."[75] Goodness' statement recognizes that all blacks performing in Congo Square were not necessarily associated with Voodoo. Also, the true rituals and ceremonies associated with that religion were held in secret away from white spectators. Regardless, these black performances in Congo Square represented in many ways entertainment on Sunday afternoons for tourists and natives of the region.

The black performances in New Orleans also contributed to the over-sexualization of the black female body in North America. The style of dances viewed by whites at Congo Square contributed to the belief that black women were innately lascivious. Henry Krehbiel described a scene he witnessed at Congo Square in the nineteenth century; "Yes, I have seen them dance, but they danced the Congo, and sang a purely African song…As for the dance – in which the women do not take their feet off the ground – it is as lascivious as is possible."[76] This style was quite common throughout many accounts of blacks performing in Congo Square, women often were the main participants within these performance scenes. Following West African traditions, black women mainly utilized the lower portions of their body while dancing. One newspaper account stated that "women did not move their feet from the ground. They only writhed their bodies and swayed undulatory motions from ankles to waist….The men leaped and performed feats of gymnastic dancing."[77]

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[75] Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946), 18.

[76] Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs. A Study in Racial and National Music* (4th ed.; New York: G. Schrimer, Inc., 1914), 125.

[77] Found In Emery, 165.

Black women's dance style focused on the lower portions of their body, which was often misinterpreted by white males as lewdness. The acrobatic style of black males was quite common throughout the United States and often used as a competition of dexterity amongst slaves in complicated step routines.[78] These scenes, although recognized as ritualistic, were often viewed as savage and over-sexualized. C.D. Warner resided in New Orleans during the nineteenth century and was able to view the activities in Congo Spare from his home. He once stated that, "While the wild chanting, the rhythmic movement of hands and feet, the barbarous dance, and the fiery incantations were at their height, it was difficult to believe that we were in a civilized city of an enlightened republic…it was so wild and bizarre that one might easily imagine he was in Africa or in hell."[79] The language used in this quote relays to the public that these scenes were of a 'savage nature'. The terms "barbarous," "fiery," and "wild" contributed to the belief that slavery was needed to civilize blacks and that their basic nature was untamed. This quote, among others, portrays blacks as unable to control themselves. Therefore these uncontrollable blacks, specifically women, also encompassed their sexual appetites and contributed to their over-sexualized label. The performances in Congo Square and the unique cultural configuration of New Orleans contributed to the maintenance of African and West Indian culture while also allowing for the continuation of negative racial stereotypes.

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[78] Gordon, 107.

[79] Charles Dudley Warner, *Studies in the South and West with Comments on Canada* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1889), 50.

Beyond the meetings at Congo Square, the free and slave populations were often active elements of the New Orleans music scene. Between 1848 and the end of the century, free blacks (mainly in New Orleans) authored over fifty pieces of printed music. [80] Accordingly, it served as the home of the earliest and most extensive black musical development in an urban, southern region. For example, the first military band of the First Battalion of free men of color was active in Louisiana from December 1814 to March 1815.[81] The Governor of Louisiana, William C.C. Claiborne, approved a bill authorizing the organizing of the free black militia corps on September 6, 1812.[82] This band was one of the earliest known manifestations of the active musical life of the free black population of New Orleans. The distinctiveness of the performances was a direct result of New Orleans' geographical location that allowed for a more potent and active West African culture to continue. The active participation of the free black population as professional musicians, therefore often performing for both white events and black congregations, was evident throughout many sources and was apparent in various regions.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, blacks, both free and enslaved blacks also gained recognition as professional musicians in Wilmington,

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[80] Jean Basile Bares Collection, Archives and Special Collections for Black Studies, Xavier University of Louisiana, New Orleans.

[81] Roland C. McConnell, *Negro Troops of Antebellum Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1968), 67.

[82] State of Louisiana, State Legislature, *Acts Passed at the First Session of the First Legislature of the State of Louisiana, Begun and Held in the City of New Orleans,* July 27, 1812 (New Orleans, Thierry, 1812).

North Carolina.[83] The roles of free blacks were limited throughout North America in a variety of ways. For example, they were restricted in educational and employment opportunities. The fact that many free blacks were able to become musicians was the direct result of the myth of blacks being musically inclined. The status of the slave was closely paralleled by the condition of free blacks. The active role free blacks held in the entertainment world came directly from the scene of slaves singing and dancing on the slave plantation. Free black performers who received recognition included such artists as Frank Johnson, Postlewaite's band, Thomas Green Wiggins, and Blind Tom.[84] The free and slave populations' active participation and recognition in the performing arts was directly related to the stereotypes associated with blacks. This label allowed for a venue for black expression and talent through music, song and dance but negated other abilities they may have possessed.

[83] Nancy R. Ping, "Black Musical Activities Wilmington, North Carolina," *The Black Perspective in Music*, 8, 2 (Autumn, 1980), 139-160.

[84] Ping. See also *Daily Missouri State Journal,* 7 May 1861, 3.

The Caricatures of Blackness

The majority of instances of blacks performing music, dance and song for whites occurred within the Southern plantation society. These scenes and stereotypes that were prevalent throughout public culture in the New World also influenced popular fictional literature. Black characters transformed into caricatures reverberated in various mass mediums, such as trade cards, tin cans, postcards and other advertisements, infiltrating mass culture.[85] Representations of blacks were prevalent in literature centuries before their rise in nineteenth century North America. "The ancient Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Persians, the Spaniards, the French, the Germans, the English-speaking nations have all made the negro, in one way or another, a theme in song and story."[86] Africans have always been a creature of interest and mystery to the outside world. Therefore, fantasized ideas ascribed to the black body found initially in travel journals later influenced American popular fiction literature. Within these works, blacks were deprived of ancestral heritage, and opinion; initially being portrayed as a random character or a part of the landscape of many stories. As time passed on and the slave societies became active aspects of the New World's setting, blacks began to enter literature as specific characters or caricature types determined by whites.

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[85] The term popular culture is a modern term but in this work it pertains to an overall set of beliefs held by a large portion of the North American population. Specifically, I am referring to popular and prevalent works of art or illustration in which Black caricatures are exaggerated, stereotypical display of black characteristics.

[86] John Herbert Nelson, *The Negro Character in American Literature*, (New York: AMS Press, 1926), 7. This source gives a quick review of the history of black representations in fiction literature but the author definitely falls into the fallacy of following black stereotypical ideas in his work.

The emergence of black caricatures represented an exaggerated misrepresentation of the physical appearance, personality and culture of African Americans. These black caricatures conformed to the dominant social and cultural patterns of the time and were represented in some of the most popular fictional literature of the nineteenth century.[87] The development of black characters in literature is an area that has been actively studied.[88]

According to John Blassingame, the main slave characters (or caricatures) that developed in white literature during the antebellum period were Jack, Nat and Sambo. These caricatures displayed the narrow view of the intricacies of the slave community.[89] Jack, later referred to as Uncle or the female counterpart Mammy, was seen as a servant whom "worked faithfully as long as he was treated fairly."[90] Nat, (referring to the rebel Nathaniel Turner), was the "incorrigible runaway, the poisoner of white men, the ravager of white women who defied all the rules of plantation society."[91] Lastly, Sambo was essentially a clown, minstrel, prone to singing and dancing, entertaining and faithful cheerful submission. Focusing on Sambo, this caricature was promoted through the

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[87] Nancy M. Tischler, "The Negro in Modern Southern Fiction: Stereotype to Archetype,"*Negro American Literature Forum,* 2, 1 (Spring, 1968), 3-6.

[88] The review of black representations in American Literature appears in such works as; Sterling Brown, *The Negro In American Fiction,* (Kennikat Press: Port Washington,1968); Seymour Gross & John Edward Hardy, *Images of the Negro in American Literature*, (Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1966) and John H. Nelson, *The Negro Character in American Literature*, (Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 1926).

[89] Blassingame, 224. These titles for the characters or caricatures may not necessarily have been the name of the actual character but it pertains more to the traits or activities of the characters.

[90] Blassingame, 224.

[91] Blassingame, 224.

performance scenes within the plantation society and represented the broader implications of black stereotypes on the culture and entertainment of the United States. The heritage of the caricaturization of blacks was illustrated in several literary texts. The image of the Sambo caricature infiltrated literary texts and assisted in removing individuality, culture and history from blacks. The making of the Sambo caricature was constructed in travel journals and later implemented in popular literature. The outreach of literature allowed for generations of diverse groups to receive similar information.

Popular nineteenth century author James Fenimore Cooper often included blacks' performing arts culture within his works. He was considered the "first American novelist to aim at fullness in his presentation of American life."[92] In the work Satanstoe, Cooper described the Pinkster Day celebration in New York and stated,

> Nine tenths of the blacks of the city, and of the whole country within thirty or forty miles, indeed, were collected in thousands in those fields, beating banjos, singing African songs…The features that distinguish a Pinkster frolic from the usual scenes at fairs…however, were of African origin. It is true, there are not now, nor were there then, many blacks among us of African birth; but the traditions and usages of their original country were so far preserved as to produce a marked difference…Hundreds of whites were walking through the fields, amused spectators. Among these last were a great many children of the better class, who had come to look at the enjoyment of those attended them.[93]

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[92] Sterling Brown, *The Negro In American Fiction* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc, 1937), 7.

[93] James Fenimore Coooper, *Satanstoe or The Littlepage Manuscripts: A Tale of the Colony* (New York: Putnam, 1845), 66-67 and "Pinkster Festival" in *Festival and Celebrations in North America in Ethnic Celebrations,* ed. Genevieve Fabre and Ramon Gutierrez (Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 1995), 13-29. The Pinkster Festival is a celebration of Pentecost and represents the arrival of springtime, is a holiday tradition that Dutch immigrants brought with them to colonial New York and New Jersey during the colonial period. Free and enslaved blacks later adopted this holiday and it correlated with Negro Election Day.

Cooper did not favor slavery and his work sheds light to an important cultural event, the Pinkster festival, which was active in the black population in the Northeast. His story displays the duality of black performances in the United States: blacks were continuing African customs while also providing entertainment for the "amused" white spectators. Similar to other authors, Cooper was quite interested in blacks' performing arts culture. Regardless, Cooper's observation displays the tradition of black performance and white audience which was an active part of American entertainment culture.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of the most influential and controversial books of the antebellum period.[94] It was published in 1852 and sold over 3,000 on its first day of release. Within the first year, over 300,000 copies were in circulation. Stowe was the first author to center her work on the life and emotions of black slaves on the plantation. The abolitionist work specifically appealed to Christian sympathies by emphasizing the horrors of slavery. She displayed blacks from a sympathetic point of view as docile, innocent creatures forced into an unjust, immoral institution. Stowe's work deliberately showed blacks in a particular manner to bring attention to the anti-slavery movement. One major flaw in her work was the acceptance of stereotypes; instead of countering the romanticized views they were incorporated into the text. Although she greatly contributed to the abolitionist cause, the book also influenced the continuation of caricatures in the pro-slavery argument.

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[94] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Cutchogue, NY: Buccaneer Books, Inc.,{1852}1982).

Although abolitionists embraced Stowe's book, the characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were easily distorted by the defenders of slavery.[95] The scene of blacks exhibiting happiness in their singing and dancing was present in Stowe's work. The main character, Tom, was depicted in the novel as "capering and dancing" as a "matter of daily occurrence in the cabin, the declaration no white abated the merriment, till every one had roared and tumbled and danced themselves down to a state of composure."[96] The jollity of Uncle Tom displayed the belief of black's innate relation to merriment and dance that was evident in this scene and throughout the novel. "After a while the singing commenced, to the evident delight of all present…naturally fine voices, in airs at once wild and spirited…for the negro–mind, impassioned and imaginative, always attaches itself to hymns."[97] The idea of blacks possessing "naturally fine voices" displaying their "evident delight" contributed and gave credence to the misrepresentations of blacks. Although Stowe's purpose was to fight the harsh world of slavery, instead she assisted in perpetuating romanticized ideals. This work was not the only literary text of its time that perpetuated these erroneous ideals.

Another popular literary work, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, authored by pro-slavery advocate Caroline Gilman in 1852, reflected on the

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[95] Information on Harriet Beecher Stowe's work *Maya* be found in Jeanette Reid Tandy, "Pro-Slavery Propaganda in American Fiction of the Fifties," *The South Atlantic Quarterly,* XXI (1922), 41-50, 170-78.

[96] Stowe, 25-26.

[97] Stowe, 28-29.

popular slave performance scenes prevalent throughout the plantation South.[98] In the work, a Christmas celebration at a plantation with slaves provided the entertainment for white visitors. "All the musicians kept their own feet and bodies going as fast as the dancers themselves… Hector started up and began dancing."[99] Gilman, similar to other slave era writers, described a scene of slaves performing music, song and dance on the plantation. The portrayal of these scenes in popular literature contributed to the public image of black and the ideals of the contented slave.

Similar to other fictional stories, the musically inclined dancing slave(s) seemed to often appear randomly in many scenes. The Southern landscape in nineteenth century literature often entailed,

> The old plantation; a great mansion; exquisitely gowned ladies and courtly gentlemen moving with easy grace upon the broad veranda behind stalwart columns; surrounding the yard an almost illimitable stretch of white cotton; darkies singingly at work in the fields, Negro quarters, off on one side, around which little pickaninnies tumbled in gay frolic.[100]

This picture consistently appeared in works that were written from both sides of the slavery argument. The myth of the Southern plantation with "happy darkies" and paternalistic whites was continually reasserted in popular culture through literary works. These scenes were constructed to defend the institution of slavery during a time it was continually being attacked through anti-slavery

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[98] Caroline Howard Gilman*, Recollections of A Southern Matron* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co, 1852).

[99] Gilman*,* 116-118.

[100] Francis Pendleton Gaines, *The Southern Plantation* (New York: Columbia Press University, 1925).

newsletters, ex-slave narratives, the growth of abolitionist groups and the European community.

The images portrayed in fictional literature allowed for the caricaturization of blackness and misrepresentations of a black burgeoning culture to larger society. Deconstructing the creation of the Sambo through the fluent images on plantations of blacks singing and dancing greatly contributed to understanding the black image in the white mind. Essentially, the initial knowledge of blacks' life and behavior in America came mainly from the testimony of white observers or the imagination of whites. Regardless, the image they created permeated throughout society and it affected the development of race and culture in America. These images continually manifested in the public sphere of North America and were active elements of the foundation of entertainment.

During America's formative years, there was an intricate web of mythology that entrapped the black body and uniquely shaped the slave and free population. Within this system, the black female body was also trapped in the burden of being assigned stereotypes that entered North American culture. The femininity of black women was complicated by their race, which disallowed them from performing societal prescribed female roles.

Entrapped within this burgeoning world of romanticism, black female traits developed under the direct gaze and authority of whites (commonly males). W.E. B. Dubois once stated that he could forgive slavery itself but one thing he could "never forgive...the persistent insulting of the black womanhood to which it

sought and seeks to prostitute its lust."[101] While the Sambo was being constructed, the over-sexualized, lewd black woman or Jezebel caricature was assigned to black women.[102] Black females suffered under the label of being associated with the conception of naturally cheerful slaves that were prone to music, song and dance but they also suffered under the stereotype of being over-sexualized, lewd creatures. Black females were believed to be "the women to leave their husbands for others, and to submit to the embraces of white men for money or fine clothes"[103] The traits assigned to black woman presented in this comment demonstrated how black woman were considered a group who lacked morals and possessed an inability to control their sexual whims especially for white men. It was not uncommon for whites to believe that black women often displayed or enticed white men through their overly sexualized dancing style.

The lustful black woman was evident in several aspects of publication with one poem stating, "Next comes a warmer race, from sable sprung; To love each thought, to lust each nerve is strung; Warm as her soil, and as her sun-on fire; These sooty dames, well vers'd in Venus' school; Make love an art, and boast they kiss by rule."[104] This was found in public print in 1777, which blatantly displayed black females as being especially sexual.[105] The black woman was

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[101] Douglass, 57.

[102] This term is taken from Debra G. White's work, but the name/title originates from biblical text. (I Kings 16:31)

[103] Thomas Atwood, *The History of the Island of Dominica*, (London, 1791), 265-68, 272-74.

[104] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812,* (Kingsport, Tennessee: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 150.

[105] Jordon, 150.

purposely placed into the lascivious category for several objectives in the white community. "For by calling the Negro woman passionate" whites offered the best possible justification for their own injustices of rape and sexual abuse against black women.[106] Essentially, the view of black women as over-sexual, lewd creatures allowed for white men to rationalize their constant sexual abuse against the black female body. "If she was that lascivious-well, a man could scarcely be blamed for succumbing against overwhelming odds."[107]

The jezebel and minstrel were two caricatures that were a part of the multi-layered black cariacturization created in the imagination of whites and which were infused in the foundation of American culture. The fables infiltrated all forms of popular media and greatly contributed to the foundation of race and culture in America. They simplified blacks into labor, sexual pleasure and entertainment, and allowed for blacks to be considered as lacking emotions and mental capacities resulting in inhumane, docile, creatures of minstrel. The childlike ideals of blacks assisted in the growth of an imagined community existing between whites and blacks therefore creating and continuing a collective mentality.

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[106] Jordan, 151.

[107] Jordan, 151.

Conclusion

The conflicting dynamic of the rebellious nature of private frolics and the benefits received through the performing arts still provided an avenue for continued misrepresentations of the black community. It was evident within the black community that, "The only weapon of self defense I could use successfully was that of deception."[108] The lack of acknowledgment of the white imagined community was directly related to the development of whiteness and taints the perception of future historical accounts. This deception and distortion of images contributed to the rise of the first major form of entertainment in North America, the blackface minstrel show. Specifically focusing on the image of the Sambo, a further investigation is needed of the rise of the minstrel show and its influences on blackness, whiteness and American culture. Exploring the rise of this genre of entertainment bring to the forefront several questions: Why did the minstrel show rise to prominence early in the nineteenth century? Why was this form of entertainment mainly popular with lower-class whites and immigrants in the North? How did the Minstrel show contribute to race, culture and entertainment in America?

Fundamentally, whites and blacks created a collective mentality within the imagery of the plantation in which whites became the dominant (audience) and black the subjugated (performer). The negative stereotypes of the musical, minstrel black and the rationalization of the persistent rape and sexual abuse of black women were interlocked within the performing arts throughout slavery.

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[108] "Henry Bibb", Gilbert Osofsky, *Puttin on Ole Massa; the slave narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 66.

These negative attributes infiltrated the American structure and become evident in the Northern regions through the rise of a new American form of entertainment, minstrelsy.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BLACKFACE OF WHITENESS

Introduction

The displays of black slaves who were forced to perform music, dance and song were influential in the development of race and culture in the United States. These scenes were active elements of the Southern slave system and contributed to the negative public image of blackness. Whites purposely distorted the ideal of the black body in order to assert their difference, and therefore dominance in society. The imagined community of the South transformed the plantation system into staged displays of subjugation through the forced contortions of black performing arts.

The fictional literature and public scenes of black slaves performing music, dance and song allowed for the cariacturization of blackness, resulting in the development of the Jezebel and the Sambo. These erroneous ideals of blacks propagated throughout the Southern slave system and greatly influenced the overall cultural and racial development of the United States. On the Southern plantation stage, the perverted black body was recreated and further developed on the North's theater stages through the rise of the American minstrel show. The American minstrel show was a highly popular form of entertainment in which white men would wear burnt cork, soot, paint or cosmetics to blacken their faces for a satirical performance of stereotypes of blacks in America. The minstrel show sculpted American entertainment and drastically affected the role of race in public society. The American minstrel show became extremely popular in the antebellum North and has often been a topic of scholarly debate.

The study of the American minstrel show has concerned scholars of various disciplines for decades. Numerous texts have debated the true origins and influences of this entertainment genre in attempts to identify the main impetus for its massive popularity in the United States, and later internationally. In many scholarly works, the timing and fame of the American minstrel show has often been credited to the socio-political environment of the 1840s-1880s (relatively), the proliferation of myths of Southern plantation slaves, the rise of the common man culture of Jacksonian democracy, racial prejudice, and/or ethnic and class conflicts.[1] The accumulation of numerous, sometimes conflicting works, has resulted in a proliferation of theories on the American minstrel show, which in itself display its importance.

This work will not attempt to recreate the discussion of previous minstrel scholars nor will it exhaustively review the song lyrics, lines of skits or provide a chronological view of all major minstrel figures. Instead, this chapter will analyze native, white Americans' attempts to preserve their whiteness through the blackface of minstrelsy in the industrial North. The rise of the metropolis in the nineteenth century and the proliferation of southern plantation images were also important elements of this discussion used to understand minstrelsy as a product

[1] Robert Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); James Weldon Johnson*, Black Manhattan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940); Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); George F. Rehin, "Harlequin Jim Crow: Continuity and Convergence in Blackface Clowning," *Journal of Popular Culture* 9 (Winter 1975); Alexander Saxton, "Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology," *American Quarterly,* 27, 1. (Mar., 1975), 3-28 and William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999). This brief review of scholarship on the American minstrel show does not fully reflect all current and past works on the subject.

of the North's collective mentality of whiteness and blackness.

The historical construction of the North contributed to the portrayal of blackness in the minstrel show. Until the nineteenth century, there were blacks in bondage throughout the United States, both North and South. In fact, until 1800, some of the largest slave populations existed in New Jersey and New York.[2] The institution of slavery was an active part of the legal and social organization of the Northern and Southern regions of the United States; although the regions varied is many ways. Ira Berlin distinguishes the two by saying that the North was a society with slaves, while the South was a slave society.[3] Therefore, slavery in the North was marginal in the overall labor system. Slaves in the North were still subordinate in society but they were often able to achieve freedom in their lifetimes. By the nineteenth century, the existence of slavery in the North was mainly discontinued.

By 1830, the North, either by constitutional amendment, legislative act or judicial fiat, had virtually abolished all black slavery.[4] In the beginning of the nineteenth century, The United States represented two different societies; the North represented progression in industry with a mainly free labor system and the South was based on a cash crop plantation system. Although these societies

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[2] Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961).

[3] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousand Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

[4] Mackay, Charles, *Life and Liberty in America: or, Sketches of a Tour in the United States and Canada in 1857-1858* (London: Smith Elder and Co., 1859), 14, Microfilm.

were starkly different, there were still overarching racist ideologies throughout the United States.

The proliferation of erroneous images of the black body was distributed through myths of the Southern plantation system and contributed with the development and popularity of the blackface minstrel show in the nineteenth century. The cultural and intellectual fabric of the Northern states was constructed on racial images that were imported from Europe and actively portrayed in the Southern slave society. Racial imagery of the southern plantation system contributed to the status of blacks and whites throughout North America. Blacks, free and enslaved, were stigmatized since slavery thrived in America, and blackness was characterized as the antithesis of whiteness. The history of America correlated with the negative depictions of black stereotypes. The South's slave system constantly constructed racial categories, often presenting erroneous, negative depictions of blacks while creating (by default) the positive, dominant antithesis, whiteness. Therefore, these images and their racial hierarchical structure assisted in creating a normalcy of culture, uniquely related to the development of the southern plantation system, but also influenced the dissimilar Northern terrain.

The preponderance of information on the South excluded or minimized the coercive power of the whip and essentially bequeathed a romanticized world of benevolent masters and "happy darkies." For pre-Civil War Northern audiences, minstrels frequently recreated the fantasy of plantations populated by imagined blacks who were happy in their bondage, devoted to their masters and content to

frolic like children all day.[5] The forced music, dance and song performances throughout the stages of slavery were reconstructed on the minstrel stage. These choreographed acts were also witnessed and accepted by many whites. The numerous travel journals and fictional literature of Northerners and Englishmen often positively described the South's plantation setting.

Northerners representing both sides of the slavery argument were often influenced by the images of blacks presented in Southern plantation folklore. Although some stereotypes were recognized as erroneous by abolitionists, the negative images of blacks still dominated American culture. The acceptance of these images by many white abolitionists was evident in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* As discussed in Chapter Three, this fictional anti-slavery work displayed the supposed natural happiness of slaves and insisted upon an innate relationship between the performing arts and blacks' good-natured naivety. Regardless of Stowe's intentions, it was evident that whites' continual fixation with black amusement contributed to the construction of blackness on the minstrel stage in the North. Stowe's anti-slavery text was distorted, adapted and performed over 300,000 times on the theatrical stage, according to Stowe's son, Charles E. Stowe.[6] Stowe's novel was released in 1851, and although minstrel caricatures existed prior to its publication, this anti-slavery text contributed greatly to the diversity of black caricatures portrayed on the minstrel stage.[7] Uncle Tom

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[5] Scott Herring, "Du Bois and the Minstrels," *MELUS,* 22, 2, Popular Literature and Film, (Summer, 1997), 8.

[6] William Torbert Leonard, *Masquerade in Black* (Metuchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1986), 164.

[7] Toll, 28.

may have been the most popular black caricature taken directly out of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and portrayed on minstrel stages throughout North American and Europe. [8] Although this text was instrumental on both sides of the slavery argument, there were several black characters who were actively portrayed before and after Stowe's novel.

The stark difference between a slave society and a society with slaves resulted in North America being divided into Southern and Northern regions. "The Yankee (Northerner) and the Virginian (Southerner) are very unlike each other; they have no great love for each other, and are often at variance."[9] The estrangement of the Northern and Southern regions was further complicated by the controversy concerning the new western regions. The settlement of the West fueled debate on the status of slavery in this new region. The South's plantation economy and the North's industrial society caused these two regions' economies to follow different paths. Commercial and industrial ventures in the urban markets and improved transportation facilities of the North caused this area to follow a new economic path. Economically and socially, these regions were continually drifting apart.[10] In the southern regions, cotton was king and slavery existed at the center of the economy and culture of society. The public image of black status in the South was solidified, therefore reaffirming the master-slave

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[8] Saxton, 8.

[9] Michael Chevalier, *Society, Manners and Politics In the United States Being a Series of Letters on North America* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan and Company, 1839),114.

[10] Leonard Dinnerstein, Roger L. Nichols, and David M. Reimers, eds., *Natives and Strangers: Blacks, Indians, and Immigrants in America,* 2nd edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 64.

relationship. The slave society in the South was established, but the North in the nineteenth century was undergoing a radical social, cultural and political transformation.

This transformation to a modern society through industrialization was often viewed and criticized by foreign travelers. The English traveler in North America during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was quite critical of the young, developing nation. There was scarcely an English "traveler of any consequence that undertook the voyage to the States without recording his adventures, superficial though they might be."[11] There were visitors to North America from all over Europe, but English visitors were the main group that reviewed and criticized the burgeoning nation. "English tourists in America become better acquainted with life of…America-than any other."[12] The interest of England in America was often centered on the belief that America represented its lost children. English observers often negatively criticized America and its inhabitants, due to the fact that America was different "to, what they have known at home…Being different, Englishmen naturally think it is worse."[13] Although all English travelers' accounts did not represent negative portrayals of American life, the beginning of the nineteenth century definitely was a defining time for American culture.

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[11] Francis Hodge, "Charles Matthews Reports On America," *Quarterly Journal of Speech 24,* Vol. 36 No. 1, (February, 1950), 492.

[12] Thomas Low Nichols, M.D., *Forty Years of American Life 1821-1861* (New York: Stackpole Sons Publishers and the Telegraph Press, 1937).

[13] Nichols, 71.

The English observations of North America reported on the varying cultures of the North, South and the developing West. "It is possible to travel through America without meeting many specimens of the…Yankee, the broad Western man, or the distinctive Southerner of the strongest type; but they all exist abundantly."[14] This statement described the Southerner and Westerner with specific terms, such as "distinctive," "strongest type" or "broad." The English visitor observed Americans in comparison to Englishmen, attempting to recognize the unique American cultural developments. The Southern society was structured on the slave institution and the West was a new area for pioneering adventurers, but the North lacked a slave culture, though it possessed diversity in the cultures present. The lack of a slave culture in the North contributed to the development and popularity of the American minstrel show. Images of the South permeated throughout society, displaying an organized society in which whites were dominant and blacks were subordinate. Although slavery throughout Europe and the North was a contentious topic, the South's public image was solidified through the established master-slave society. Whites, regardless of class, had power and status when compared to the enslaved blacks. The plantation South represented venues where whites practiced the art of domination and believed in their "natural right to rule," therefore fulfilling their whiteness in society.[15] The image of the South was filled with grand plantations of paternal whites and "happy darkies". This fallacious idea was distributed

[14] Nichols, 65.

[15] Berlin, 98.

throughout newspapers, fictional literature, songs and folklore. The image of black slaves performing music, dance and song for a white audience contributed to the negative, misrepresentation of blacks and to the performance display of blackface minstrels.

The stereotypes of contented black slaves were continually propagated to justify the subjugation of blacks, but it also masked the continual fear of rebellion against Southern whites. The erroneous images were representative of the imagined community that was created and continued by Southern whites. This imagined community was often viewed and accepted by English and Northern travelers. During her tour through the Southern states, Northerner Fredrika Bremer stated, “I have often heard it said by friends of slavery even in the Northern states, as a proof of the happiness of the slaves that they dance and sing on the plantations. And so, I thought, now I might have a chance to see such a dance.”[16] This romanticized view contributed to the view that Southern life possessed a “distinct flavor of America” at least in comparison to Northern society.[17] An English visitor in the early nineteenth century stated that, “The Virginian of pure race is frank, hearty, open, cordial in his manners, noble in his sentiments, elevated in his notions, he is worthy descendent of the English gentleman.”[18] Although the South was often negatively reviewed for its

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[16] Fredrika Bremer, *America of the Fifties: Letters of Fredrika Bremer*, Adolph B. Benson, ed. (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 104.

[17] Hodge, 493.

[18] Chevalier, 114.

continuance of a slave system, it was still recognized for having its own culture centered on slavery. The influential images of the South permeated American culture and manifested in the entertainment of the North through the blackface minstrel show.

The Roots of Blackface

The lack of slavery in the North does not negate the active racism in the region. Although, slavery slowly declined in the area, a new form of socialized racism developed in the public sphere through the rise of blackface minstrelsy. The American minstrel show that began in the nineteenth century was not the beginning of blackface performances. Whites' performing in blackface existed in North America prior to the Revolutionary war and pre-dated the colonization of the New World.[19] As early as the Middle Ages, blackface was used in religious pageants to represent the villain, evil or in theatrical scenes throughout Europe.[20] As exploration and discovery progressed, the usage of blackface on the stage began to change in order to identify newly encountered peoples of the world.[21]

The sixteenth century witnessed a rise in the variety of blackface characters with the popularity of William Shakespeare's theater plays. The role of blackface characters in Shakespeare plays in the sixteenth century changed from merely symbolizing evil and began to signify social expectations and ideals of black people. Blackface theater had a long tradition that originated in England and traveled to the New World through Shakespearean theater.

The English performance style of Shakespeare was an active part of American high culture that would continually be altered according to the audience. Regardless, American life and entertainment in the nineteenth century

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[19] Toll, 26.

[20] Leonard, 126; Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-4.

[21] Rehin, 686-692.

was saturated with Shakespearean shows. One scholar, Ray Browne, describes that in Philadelphia from 1800-1835, seven of the most popular Shakespeare plays were performed a total of 256 times.[22] The most enduring black masquerade character was Shakespeare's *Othello,* probably the longest running blackface role in theater history.[23] The dominance of Shakespeare also sheds light onto the continual presence of English performers gaining great popularity in the New World. The prevalence of theater in the United States that emerges in the nineteenth century enjoyed a rich mixture of high, low and folk culture.[24] Shakespeare plays held a place in the American public sphere while a distinct folk culture continued to develop within these plays and contributing new linguistic styles, dances, skits, gymnastics and songs.[25] The first black theater in North America, known as the African Theatre, was established in 1821 and centered its performances on the numerous works of William Shakespeare.[26] The English theater style was continued in the United States and contributed to the foundation of minstrelsy through its use of white actors in the performance of black characters. The blackface theater in America furthered developed and became a distinctly native contribution through its incorporation of Southern

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[22] Ray B. Browne, "Shakespeare in American Vaudeville and Negro Minstrelsy," *American Quarterly*, 12, 3. (Autumn, 1960), 374.

[23] Leonard, 9.

[24] Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[25] Levine, 50.

[26]Leonard, 43-45.

plantation folklore. Throughout the 1820s, traveling blackface entertainers continually grew in recognition and were constantly attempting to develop their performances. These performers, known as "Ethiopian Delineators," were whites in blackface who often entertained with music and dance during the intermissions of theater presentations.[27] These Ethiopian Delineators existed in North America prior to the American Revolution and usually portrayed black characters as either noble savages or comic buffoons. The parade of whites masquerading as blacks was an active part of United States and European theater. The term Sambo was initially used as early as the late 1700s, portraying a comic, American black on the American stage.[28]

In fact, the theatrical depictions of blacks came directly from Europe and were continued and furthered in North America.[29] Normally these characters were only referred to as black through their blackened faces, but their style and manner reflected European manners. Not until the nineteenth century did Ethiopian Delineators begin to mimic black dialect and mannerisms and incorporate these styles into their performances. The 1820s introduced to white Americans many blackface performers who often claimed to perform "legitimate Negro songs and dances" in circus style performances.[30] These performances

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[27] Information on Ethiopian Delineators and the history of blackface performances in America was taken from Toll, 25-30.

[28] Leonard,159.

[29] Sam Dennison, *Scandalize My Name: Black Imagery in American Popular Music* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1992).

[30] Toll, 26-27.

were often a part of the intermission between plays, often Shakespeare plays, and were a minor aspect of American entertainment. The intermission shows allowed for original lyrics that reflected American folklore, itself mainly derived from the images and stories flowing from Southern plantations. The performance of these Ethiopian Delineators represented an exaggerated view of black life and culture. The transition of Ethiopian Delineators from minor characters to the cultural phenomenon of the American minstrel show, a full blackface staged production, was directly related to the attractiveness of Southern folklore.

The mass popularity of the American blackface minstrel show began with the first introduction of the minstrel character, Jim Crow. According to the myth, a white actor named Thomas Dartmouth Rice limped on stage, donned blackface makeup and in tattered clothing performed a dance while singing these lyrics, "Wheel about, an' turn about, an' do jis so; Eb'ry time I wheel about, I jump Jim Crow."[31] Rice imitated an elderly black man who was slightly deformed due to rheumatism while wearing ill-fitted clothes and over-sized shoes, along with his blackened face. [32] T.D. Rice performed "Jim Crow" throughout the North, and ignited a new phenomenon in American popular entertainment culture. Although not the beginning of blackface minstrelsy in the United States, it still represented a rise in popularity and status as "the only true American institution."[33] Jim Crow

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[31] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 23.

[32]Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[33] Toll, 2.

became “one of the best-known and most-loved theatrical personalities of his day both in the United States and in Great Britain.”[34] Rice’s act created a public sensation and was considered one of the “most popular characters in the world.”[35] He continued to perform Jim Crow throughout his career and led the way for many of the first American celebrities.

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[34] Dale Cockrell, “Jim Crow, Demon of Disorder,” *American Music,* 14, 2. (Summer, 1996), 161-184.

[35] *Boston Post,* July 22, 1838. Quoted in Cockrell, 161.

From Blackface to Minstrelsy

Rice's routine of "Jump Jim Crow" was the first major blackface character introduced in North America that sparked the rise of a new type of minstrelsy. The term minstrelsy may be traced back to as early as the 12th century to describe traveling, male entertainers.[36] The actual date or location of Rice's performance of "Jump Jim Crow" has varied throughout numerous scholarly texts.[37] The dates ranged during 1828-1831 and the initial location of the introduction of Jim Crow varies from Louisville, Cincinnati, or Pittsburgh, contingent upon the source.[38] The main reason for these disparities surrounding the first performance of Rice's Jim Crow was most likely due to the fact that he may have performed this character numerous times prior to it becoming a popular figure.[39]

The popularity of the American minstrel show peaked from the 1840s to the 1880s with the formation of numerous minstrel troupes. The Virginia Minstrels - Billy Whitlock, Dick Pelham, Frank Brower, and Dan Emmett - formed in New York City and debuted in 1843.[40] The Virginia Minstrels was the first major group that established the full theatrical enterprise of the Minstrel show.

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[36] Alfred Bates, ed., *The Drama: Its History, Literature and Influence on Civilization* (London: Historical Publishing Company, 1906).

[37] Dale, Toll, Lott, and Cockrell.

[38] Cockrell, 63.

[39] T. Allston Brown and Charles Day, "Black Musicians and Early Ethiopian Minstrelsy," *The Black Perspective in Music,* 3, 1. (Spring, 1975), 77-99.

[40] Leonard, 227.

The Virginia Minstrel contributed to the diversity of musical entertainment combining the violin, bone castanets, tambourine, banjo and fiddle. They were advertised as "negro extravaganzas" that introduced the "oddities, peculiarities, eccentricities, and comicalities" of "humanity."[41] The next major minstrel troupe that developed was the Christy's Minstrels. They made their debut in New York City in 1846 and made significant contributions to the popularity of minstrel songs. Christy Minstrels were "the first to harmonize negro melodies, and originators of popular type of Ethiopian entertainments, authors of all the most popular negro melodies that have been introduced in concerts of this character."[42]

Thomas Rice, the Virginia Minstrels and the Christy Minstrels represented the earliest pioneers who set the standard of American minstrelsy. The American minstrel show was initially performed primarily in the Northern cities, eventually traveling to the West throughout the antebellum period.[43] The common thread of these minstrel founders were that they were all Northern white men who gained fame from negatively portraying blackness, particularly by mimicking black slaves in the South and free blacks in the North. The American minstrel show was popular because its satirical-style performance of blacks as buffoons. Blackened white male minstrel actors reenacted the portrayal of Jim

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[41] Leonard, 227-242.

[42] Leonard, 241-247.

[43] Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara, eds., *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Reading in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1996).

Crow, an elderly black slave, dancing and singing for decades. The satirical display of Southern blacks' often ill-fitted clothing and slow and dimwitted language in a plantation background emphasized blacks' ignorance and contentment in the slavery system.

Beyond this black caricature, the Northern dandy became a standard aspect of minstrelsy. The dandy was representative of urban, free blacks and often referred to as the Zip Coon, Dandy Jim or the Urban Coon.[44] The "dandy darkies" were often a necessary aspect of minstrel shows, emphasizing the foolish, egocentric manners of Northern free blacks. The Northern free blacks were often portrayed formally over-dressed and depicted using complicated language improperly while continually showing what not to do in the city.[45] Skits portrayed Northern dandies frequently "tricked out of their money by con-men, run down by trolley's, shocked by electric batteries, and jailed for violating laws which they did not understand."[46] Essentially, the Northern dandy on the minstrel stage was meant to show that free blacks were incompetent and unable to handle the developing Northern metropolitan environment. The minstrel show displayed blacks as foolish and too inept for Northern life and freedom. It followed, therefore, that blacks were best suited to be slaves protected under the South's paternalistic plantation system. Minstrel caricatures were often portrayed as having unattractive, distorted facial and body contortions through the use of

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[44] Mahar, 210.

[45] Cockrell, 92.

[46] Toll, 69.

exaggerated “beef-steak lips,” wooly type hair and robust buttocks.[47] The minstrel show of the North purposely perverted the superficial features of blackness while reinforcing the active stereotypes propagated from the Southern plantation folklore.

These negative attributes assigned to the black body were infused into the development of race and culture in the New World. The development of whiteness and blackness, as discussed in the previous chapters, specifically occurred within the imagined community of the Southern slave society. The institution of slavery fostered an environment in which black subjugation was staged by whites. The staged display of race in the South contributed to not only the development of race, and therefore racial prejudice, while it also indirectly characterized whiteness. The white choreographed acts of the performing arts forced upon black slaves in the South were reenacted by Ethiopian Delineators, and later by blackface minstrels initially through a desire of native whites to preserve their whiteness. The North’s uncertainty during this time period and need to reassert a white identity amongst the growing population of wage laborers contributed to the popularity and development of the American minstrel show. Although the Southern slavery system was often viewed as regressive, ironically, the North in many ways still envied the (false) image of whiteness presented in the plantation society and therefore recreated the fantasy on the theater stage. The burgeoning modern bourgeois society and the rapid growth of a working class dominated more and more by immigrants and the growth of

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[47] Toll, 69.

slums created the phenomenon of “nativism” amongst Anglo-Saxon whites in the North.[48] The beginning of the nineteenth century brought industrial development, a rise in immigration, dependence on wage labor, and urban growth in the North. In a society increasingly categorized by class status, native whites depended on their racial identity to reassert their power. To emphasize their whiteness, they used the distortion of blackness in the American minstrel show. Examining the setting that fostered the rise of the American minstrel show directly explains the mass popularity of representative black humiliation and subjugation through blackface in the nineteenth century industrial city.

After the War of 1812, the United States witnessed rapid economic, social and political change. An economy based on farms, artisans and local markets became one marked by commercial farming and national markets.[49] This Jacksonian Era brought not only a new market revolution, but also the rise of a metropolitan industrialization in the North.[50] In the North, dramatic improvements in transportation, communication and other technological advancements were revolutionizing the country. Innovations in transportation fostered the development of factory systems, and centralizing and expanding cities allowed for an upsurge in an urban working class and a decrease in artisan fields in this

[48] Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the rise of the working class, 1788-1850* (New York and London, UK: Oxford University Press), 4.

[49] Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[50] Wilentz, 266.

new industrial age.[51] Nineteenth century capitalism reordered formal social relations by class.[52]

The changing Northern terrain, marked by the growth of factories and rising urban populations, contributed to the development of reform movements for blacks. The growing urban (white) working class reacted to these social changes and the increase in the free black population with more broadly based political and social organizations such as trade unions and labor movements.[53] The nineteenth century witnessed the rise in abolitionism that focused on elevating the status of blacks and the growth of black leadership for civil rights, resulting in increased consciousness toward the plight of blacks in America.

The anti-slavery movement and the end of artisan republicanism brought new fears about the status of native, working class whites in northern society. If blacks were capable of being intellectually and morally equivalent to whites, and able to receive social and political rights, then how would that affect the status of whites and whiteness? Also, if whites equated wage labor to slavery then the demarcation between white and black was blurring.[54] For centuries, the foundation of whiteness in society was defined as the antithesis of blackness. Therefore, whites gained status through the degradation of blacks. Whites' dominance, regardless of class status, was always prevalent as long as the

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[51] George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1977).

[52] Wilentz, 5.

[53] Wilentz, 392.

[54] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 13.

subjugated black class existed. Therefore, the lowest working class white family asserted its whiteness to gain power in the burgeoning modern society. Whites did not want to compete with blacks for political power or employment opportunities or status in a society increasingly conscious of class. Thus, race and racism remained important in American society. Racial identity and nativism rose to the forefront to counter an emerging society that was continually being categorized by class status, resulting in the development of laws and organization that stripped the political, economic and social rights of free blacks in the North.

In New York State, for example, the Constitution Convention of 1821 required free blacks to possess $250 worth in property to receive voting rights.[55] Urban centers began to restrict the black vote, since Northern blacks often placed a crucial role in local politics. In Boston, black votes constituted three percent of all ballots although they only represented 2 1/3 percent of the city's population.[56] Blacks were active elements politically, economically and socially in these developing urban regions, although they often only represented a small minority of the population.

As the demographics began to change in the industrializing areas, whiteness and all it entails further transitioned. Class-consciousness resulted in the reassertion of whiteness and contributed to the popularity of the blackface

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[55] J.B. D. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States* (Washington: A.O.P. Nicholson, 1854), 192.

[56] DeBow, 395.

minstrel show. Therefore, in creating a "new sense of whiteness" whites donned blackface in order to re-create or reinforce a "new sense of blackness" in the North through entertainment.[57] Native whites were continuously losing power in the developing industrial cities and they wanted to assert some control over their leisure amusement. This was especially evident in the "eight hour movement" amongst working class in the late nineteenth century.[58] "Eight Hours for Work, Eight Hours for Rest, Eight Hours for What We Will," this chant emphasized the working-class fight for control over their leisure time.[59] The continual growth of entertainment venues, such as saloons, parks, clubs, and minstrel theaters, for the male working class population shows their continual struggle for control in their private sphere.

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[57] Roediger, 23.

[58] Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight hours for what we will: Workers and leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, London, New York & New Rochelle: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

[59] Rosenzweig, 1.

Changes in White Status

The centralization of low and working class whites in growing urban areas allowed for the collaboration of these groups (as whites) resulting in the continual decline in rights of the free black population. The transitioning terrain introduced great advancements but also witnessed a rise of over-populated slums, disease and racial and ethnic conflicts. The early nineteenth century industrial revolution brought an influx of European immigration to the United States.[60] A large portion of the incoming immigrant population was comprised of poor laborers in search of opportunity in the urbanizing North and newly forming West.[61] Many migrated from countries that previously experienced industrial revolutions and migrated to avoid further decline in economic status in their native country.[62] One travel journal stated that "The United States are certainly the land of promise for the labouring class."[63]

The incoming immigrant populations were some of the main contributors to the progression of whiteness to counter class and ethnic prejudice. Ironically, many of the historically oppressed immigrant groups were proponents of black subjugation through minstrelsy, mainly to cast a minority population in a lowered

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[60] W.E.B. Dubois , stated that "nineteen million immigrants entered the United States" in the nineteenth century. W. E. B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction In America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1935,1962).

[61] Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1975).

[62] Bodnar, 56.

[63] Chevalier, 341.

status than themselves. Regardless, native whites were the first group that popularized blackface performances. The highest number of immigrants who entered the United States were the Catholic Irish who mainly migrated to the industrialized North during the antebellum period. "The number of Irish immigrants nearly doubled on an average every half-decade from 1821 to 1850, and they settled in New York in inordinate proportions."[64] These new immigrants had a long history of being second-class citizens in Ireland and had experienced numerous years of oppression by the English, mainly for their Catholic religious beliefs.[65] Ironically, by the 1850s, mainly Irish immigrants displaced native born white (and black) labor in the vast majority of trades.[66]

The industrial revolution of North America contributed greatly to the influx of immigrants during the nineteenth century. "In the years between 1820 and 1930, America received more than 37 million immigrants, mostly from Europe."[67] Immigrants from Germany, Ireland, England, Scotland and several other European countries went to America because of poor economic conditions in Europe and prospects for a better life in the developing nation. The increase in European immigrants, the progress of the free black community and the movement of women from the home to factory drastically changed the American setting.

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[64] Dinnerstein and Reimers, 12 and Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 186.

[65] Dinnerstein and Reimers, 12-20.

[66] Wilentz, 118-119.

[67] Dinnerstein and Reimers, 10.

The role of women began to change with the industrialization of the Northeast. For example, in the textile mills of New England in the early nineteenth century, young, unmarried women were the main employees.[68] Textile mills in New England allowed for women to leave the homes and establish independence external to their family. By 1855, the twenty-two Lowell textile mills of New England employed twice as many women as men, with 8,800 female employees and 4,400 male.[69] The centralization in production allowed women to disconnect from the general family labor system and earn a new form of independence. Mainly white and immigrant women were able to establish a new status as laborers in society which contributed to their separately led protest and organizing movements.

Industrial America's growing labor diversity allowed for increased competition among immigrants, blacks and native whites, often resulting in violent public disputes.[70] The extremely high immigrant population and thriving free black population both faced great hostility in New York.[71] The social conflicts of that region resulted in it being considered the "birthplace of the minstrel show…until after the Civil War."[72] The hostilities in New York were

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[68] Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 26-30.

[69] Licht, 28.

[70] Lacy K. Ford, Jr. "Making the 'White Man's Country' White: Race, Slavery and State-Building in the Jacksonian South," *Journal of Early Republic* 19, 4 (Winter, 1999), 713-737.

[71] Michael Kaplan, "New York City Tavern Violence and the Creation of a Working-Class Male Identity," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 15, 4 (Winter, 1995) 591-617.

[72] Toll, 32.

representative of the atmosphere throughout the industrializing North, which resulted in New York City hosting the premiere debuts of many of the minstrel first major troupes, such as the Virginia Minstrels and Christy Minstrels. Anti-immigrant and anti-black sentiment grew amongst native whites in their attempt to combat the inequalities associated with the developing capitalist system. Forgotten native, working class whites resisted making the transition from artisans to wage laborers and the influx of economic competition in the ever-growing urban slums. Beyond the heightened racial and ethnic tension in these Northern cities, European tourists also often negatively criticized lower-class whites.[73]

Many European visitors criticized native born, white working class males in the North. An English minister visiting America early in the nineteenth century stated that Northerners, "have the appearance of a people suddenly raised in the world…very ignorant and awkward."[74] The continual increase of European immigrants and wage labor dependence in the North resulted in the loss of the native, white American. One European visitor early in the nineteenth century stated, "This foreign immigration that constantly flows into their population from all parts of Europe, will it not at length destroy the homogeneity of their race?"[75] Fear was apparent amongst many American born whites in the North, especially

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[73] The sections concerning racial tensions and class formations during the industrial era were taken from Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993)

[74] Davies, 79.

[75] François-René de Chateaubriand, *Travels In America*, translated by Richard Switzer (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1969), 192.

amongst the low and working classes with the continual competition for status and power in the new city. The working and lower classes were often negatively portrayed or degraded in European travel literature. Beyond literature, Europe's interest in the New World was also displayed on the theatrical stage. "Englishmen know the Yankee chiefly as he appears in literature and on the stage."[76]

Charles Mathews was London's top comedian and actor who performed in satirical, one-man performances throughout England. [77] By 1803, Mathews was "the most popular actor that ever appeared in the Yorkshire Theaters.[78] The English heightened interest in the American scene contributed to the travels of Mathews through American states from 1822-1823.[79] His observations of travels through the Northern states of Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston were incorporated into his theatrical performance. Mathews presented his views of American life and culture through mimicry in his stage performance entitled *Trip to America.*[80]

Charles Mathews has often been recognized as influential with the performance style of the American minstrel show. The use of satire and the

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[76] Nichols, 65.

[77] Hodge, 492.

[78] Henry Gallup Paine, "Charles Mathews," *Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States: The Kembles and Their Contemporaries*, Brander Mathews and Laurence Hutton, eds. (Boston: L. C. Page & Company, 1886), 198.

[79] Toll, 26-27.

[80] Hodge, 492.

development of low brow entertainment was an active aspect of Mathews' performances that were incorporated into blackface minstrelsy. Also, in *Trip to America,* Mathews introduced an American black as a part of his skits. He witnessed a song titled, "Opossum Up a Gum Tree," performed by the African Theater in New York and mimicked this piece. He was the "first to build Negro stage characterizations on detailed observations of black Americans."[81] Mathews' performance of an American black, low brow humor and use of satire has been viewed as setting the stage for minstrelsy. Robert Toll credited *Trip to America* as the first major example of a "white man borrowing Negro material for a blackfaced act."[82] This direct connection has yet to be proven, especially since Ethiopian Delineators like Bob Farrell, George Washington Dixon, George Nichols and Thomas D. Rice were touring the U.S. performing blackface song and dance acts during the 1820s and Mathew's work was not presented until 1824.[83] Regardless, Mathews made significant contributions to the performance style of the blackface minstrel show through his innovative satirical display of blacks in America. Many scholars have recognized him for influencing the mimic of blackness onto the theater stage but his involvement extends further through his perspective of native, working class whites in the urban North.

Mathews' desire to catch a glimpse of an authentic picture of the native American resulted in pessimistic comments and negative portrayals of working

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[81] Toll, 26-27.

[82] Toll, 26-27.

[83] Toll, 27.

class white Northerners on the theatrical stage in England and the United States. He wanted to understand the "real" American, whom he described as whites who were born in America. Mathews commented, "If I enter into conversation with a coachman, he is Irish; if a fellow brings me a note, he is Scotch. If I call a porter, he is negro. I can't come at the American."[84] This quote refers to the ever-growing European immigrant population and the continual decline of native-born, white representation throughout the North. It also clearly displays the time that blacks born in the United States were not considered or categorized as native Americans. For many European tourists, only native born whites were considered "authentic Americans." Through his travels, Mathews was able to slowly come into contact with "authentic Americans."[85] Mathews viewed the "middle and lower" classes as "never to be civil or apparently kind to a fellow creature."[86] He mimicked the "Yankee, Negro, Dutch, Irish, Scotch and French" to the amusement of "English ears."[87] Mathews equally mocked these groups with little discrimination between native whites, free blacks and the European immigrants.

Mathews' comical exaggeration of the "distinct flavor" of America on the theatrical stage throughout England and North America resulted in the negative backlash from many Americans.[88] An example of the negative reaction of *Trip to*

[84] Quoted in Hodge, 494.

[85] Hodge, 493.

[86] Mrs. Mathews (Anne Jackson), "Memoirs of Charles Mathews, comedian," microfiche (London: R. Bentley, 1838-39).

[87] Hodge, 498.

[88] Hodge, 493.

America stated “The scoundrel ought to be pelted from the American stage, after writing his book...Matthew's caricature of America. This insult upon Americans ought to be met with the contempt it deserves...[D]rive the ungrateful slander from our stage forever.[89]” This sentiment was especially representative of the working-class, native white men of the North, who received the most criticism throughout Mathews' performance. Mathews created a character in his show who represented “the home-bred American prototype, a country fellow, unpolished” who was named, Jonathan W. Doubikin.[90] This “Yankee” character was depicted as unintelligent, often using terms such as “the doubtful-I guess, I reckon, I calculate.”[91] Mathews openly criticized the working class whites in the North and drew a satirical picture of the American scene at a time when the North was being re-established as an industrial metropolitan core.

The public ridicule of the native, white Americans of the North contributed to the development of the blackface minstrel show. In Charles Mathews' satirical performances of America, he mocked American blacks and American white men, representing them as a class below Englishmen. The lack of racial separation and the continual onslaught of negative descriptions of the native, American resulted in a desire for racial clarity. “The (*laborers)* people in the Southern

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[89] Dennison.

[90] There are no remaining copies of Charles Mathews' *Trip to America.* The information pertaining to the stage performance comes directly from Hodge Yates and Mrs. Charles Mathews' publication of Charles Mathews' memoirs.

[91] Hodge, 497.

States, are slaves…In the Northern States, the labouring classes are white."[92] Blurring the distinction, however, was the European practice of referring to native whites working in the industrial sphere of the North as "wage slaves."[93] The minstrel show distinguished whites from blacks and immigrants by emphasizing their whiteness. Whiteness became "firmly established and well-posed to remain a central value formed…not just on economic exploitation, but on racial folklore."[94] Beyond whiteness, the continual subjugation of blacks contributed to the "stability and continuity of American democracy" for whites.[95]

Native, white males wanted to live their own whiteness, which was shaded through the rise of the immigrant populations, dependence of wage labor and the progress of free blacks.[96] During the first years of prominence, native, working class white males dominated the American minstrel show. Although the European immigrant and free black population eventually became the main blackface characters in minstrel performers, native, working-class white males were the originators of this entertainment genre. The main founders and first celebrities of the blackface minstrel show were often native, working class whites. The first major minstrel actor, Thomas D. Rice, once apprenticed as a woodworker, similar to, Dan Emmett, a member and founder of the Virginia Minstrels, once worked as a printer. Billy Whitlock, another member of the

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[92] Chevalier, 347.

[93] Roediger, 71.

[94] Roediger, 14.

[95] Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 156.

[96] Kaplan, 595.

Virginia Minstrels, was a typesetter before donning blackface on the minstrel stage.[97] The first major minstrel performers came from working class backgrounds that allowed them to create blackface performances that identified the particular longings and fears and the hopes and prejudices of the Northern Jacksonian urban working class white male. Essentially, "white poverty could be ignored and whites' paranoia of each other could be overlooked primarily owing to the distinctive American feature" of racial divide between white and black peoples.[98]

The lowered status of working class whites and a lack of power in society resulted in native whites in the nineteenth century creating their own imagined community in which they possessed control.[99] The amusements chosen by this class centered on a "fantasy of mastery" (of the North) that was portrayed on the minstrel stage through assertion of whiteness through the degradation of blackness.[100] Native working-class white men were able to re-establish the dominance and power that came from their whiteness through the continual degradation and representative subjugation of blackness through the minstrel show. "The simple physical disguise- an elaborate cultural disguise-of blacking up served to emphasize that those on stage were really white and that whiteness

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[97] Carl Wittke, *Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1930).

[98] West, 157.

[99] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

[100] Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: life inside the antebellum slave market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

really mattered."[101] Therefore, the blackface minstrel show that displayed negative, stereotypical images of blacks was actually more representative of whites than blacks. Lower class whites did not want to bear the brunt of English ridicule, nor be subjugated through (what they termed) "slavery of wages" and as a result through black subjection they gained power and dominance.[102]

The emphasis on difference between the blackened faces of the minstrel and the white minstrel actors was often stressed throughout the performances. David Roediger examined minstrel song lyrics to highlight the positions of minstrel actors as white, "There is not a man in the whole Minstrel Band; Who would ever go back on a friend; Tho dark be his face, yet the black can't efface; The kind deeds which through life him attend."[103] This song accentuates the minstrel actors, and their native, white audience, desire to represent themselves as the "whitest of white folks."[104] Also, many advertisements for minstrel shows often displayed a split view of the white minstrel actors blackened while wearing tattered, ill-fitting clothing and then without blackface in well-tailored suits. These advertisements represented the double view many minstrel performers and audience members created within their collective mentality. The minstrel stage became the imagined community of Northern whites, similar to the facade of forced black slave performances in the South.

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[101] Roediger, 117.

[102] Roediger,117-125.

[103] Roediger, 117 and E. L. Rice, *Monarchs of Minstrelsy: From 'Daddy' Rice to Date* (New York: Kenny Publishing Co., 1911).

[104] Roediger, 117.

W.E. B. Dubois' theory of "double consciousness" may be further expanded beyond the black community and white community of the South (as mentioned in the previous chapter) and applied to the audience and participants of the blackface minstrel show.[105] Native, working class white males were aware of their low and working class status in the urban, industrial society therefore they could see one's self through the lens of others, i.e. Europeans, upper classes and Southern planters. The end of artisan republicanism in a competitive environment, and the lack of hope in ever worsening slums contributed to the rise of nativism that manifested itself in mob violence, anti-abolition, decline in black political/economic rights and also, the popularity of blackface minstrelsy. The public sphere of the theatrical stage allowed for race to be performed in the minstrel show amongst the blackface caricatures and the white audience characters. The mainly white male audience members were a stark contrast to the blackface characters on the minstrel stage and able to assert some power in their lives through the preservation of their whiteness in the private sphere of entertainment. Native, white males were aware of their "twoness" within the industrial metropolitan areas of the North, and with their lack of power in the public sphere. All of this unpleasantness could be countered by the power of whiteness reaffirmed in the minstrel theater.

[105] W. E. B. Dubois, *Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903).

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed important factors in the rise, popularity and influence of the blackface minstrel show in the entertainment culture of the United States and internationally. The foundation of the minstrel show performance does not lie directly with the European immigrants or the black population, both groups later dominating the minstrel stage; instead it came directly from native, working class whites. European immigrants with their entrance on and dominance of the minstrel stage later followed the desire for whiteness during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Also, the blacking up of blacks in America comes from a desire to be accepted in the entertainment industry and to gain power and recognition, (maybe whiteness) through the minstrel stage. The blackface of African Americans represented the detachment from black culture to the blackness portrayed on the minstrel stage. The stereotypes promulgated from the minstrel stage reinforced the negative images that were continually constructed from the Southern plantation. Ironically, while the minstrel show represented a distorted view of the black body, there were several elements of this staged performance that accurately displayed African American culture.

Blackface was not representative of blacks in America; many of the dance and music styles were representative of a distinct African and African American culture. Toll described a 1850s minstrel performer, Dave Reed “emerged with a dance he said he learned from Negroes when he was working on Mississippi

riverboats."[106] Throughout the minstrel era, traditionally African American dances continually appeared in the blackface displays, such as the Buzzard Loop, Buck and Wing, The Walk-around and the Cake Walk.[107] The minstrel show's satirical style often resulted in the incorporation of African and African American culture into American culture. Therefore, the minstrel show allowed for various aspects of black culture to accurately be depicted in public society, and also created a crevice for blacks to enter American entertainment. The desire for accuracy resulted in several aspects of the American minstrel show to incorporate black culture while also distorting the culture, all within the same staged performance. There has always been a complicated dialectic between black cultural forms and their appropriation by white blackface performers that delicately relates to the development of a white racial identity or whiteness.[108]

The importation of blackface from Europe, and the desire to re-establish whiteness within the ever growing immigrant and free black population of the industrial North, directly contributed to the rise of the blackface minstrel show. The blackface minstrel show was a manifestation of the American cultural tradition of perpetuating negative stereotypes of the black body in the public sphere. Blackface minstrelsy has often been viewed as the foundation of American entertainment culture. In many ways, this assertion is quite accurate. Minstrelsy contributed greatly to the development and circulation of America's

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[106] Toll, 44.

[107] Toll, 44.

[108] Lott, 52.

ideals of race, culture and entertainment. The blackface minstrel performance style continued through the development of various mass media: radio, film, music, television and literature. The minstrel show was also influential in the negative depictions of blacks in America not only in mass media but fluently through daily American life relics.[109] Although quite influential, the minstrel show was a manifestation of the continual forced distortion of black culture and life that derived from the Southern plantation tradition. The minstrel show has been recognized as one of the most influential entertainment genres that has greatly contributed to the overall development of society in North America.

[109] Patricia Turner, *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994).

The Roots and Rise of the "New Negroes"

The entertainment culture of North America often reflects, implicitly or explicitly, the status of race and racial hierarchy in the public sphere. Racial constructions of blackness and whiteness were staged on the shores of Africa, on the deck of slave ships, on the auction block and throughout the coffle and plantation, and they continued on to the theater stage of blackface minstrelsy. The mass consumption of racialized entertainment often constructed blackness or the black body as "other," a subordinate being who was completely incompatible with whites, and just as naturally suited to serve or to amuse whites. Frantz Fanon stated, "White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro…the black soul is a white man's artifact."[1] Throughout the foundation of North America, the black body was negatively constructed, therefore resulting in blackness being erroneously categorized through myths and stereotypes. Although the "black soul" was not a "white man's artifact," the public image of blackness was purposely distorted by some whites to propagandize negative images of blacks in America.

The performing arts scenes common throughout the slave era assisted in reinforcing the myths which were first propagated in travel journals. These racial stereotypes are now threaded into North America's very culture. These slave era images were transformed after the Civil War when some blacks began donning blackface in minstrel shows. Although the blackface performance style

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[1] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Translated from French by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 14.

originated in Europe, the rise of the minstrel show in the antebellum era represented a distinctly American form of entertainment which reflected American society's collective mentality. The postbellum era witnessed the emancipation of black slaves in North America and the early roots of blacks' entrance into minstrel shows. Although there were professional black entertainers before the Civil War, such as Black Swan, Thomas J. Brown, Blind Tom and the Whitehouse Sisters, these entertainers had limited success compared with those of the postbellum era, when large number of blacks rose in the entertainment industry.[2] Black minstrel troupes developed throughout the United States in the 1860s and gained great popularity as "authentic" darkies or "genuinely negroes."[3]

The popularity of black minstrel troupes in postbellum America gave some validity to blackface theater, and it also brought African American entertainment to the forefront of American public sphere. However, blackface minstrelsy still represented an imitation of an imitation of plantation life with "happy darkies" and paternal whites in the ever present imagined community. James Weldon Johnson recognized that the American minstrel continued the tradition of

[2]Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Source Book on Early Black Musical Shows* (Metuchen, New Jersey & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1980), 1.

[3] Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 262 and Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

displaying blacks "as only an irresponsible, happy-go-lucky, wide grinning, loud laughing, shuffling, banjo-playing, singing and dancing sort of being."[4]

Although the American minstrel show was filled with negative stereotypes of black life, it also provided essential theatrical training and experience for black actors and actresses. Blacks in the postbellum era witnessed popularity and fame on the minstrel stage. Many black minstrel performers were able to add diversity in skin complexions, instead of the single black complexions present with white minstrel performers. They also introduced cultural dance styles and new characters to their blackface acts as well as gain national and sometimes international recognition.[5] Black minstrel performers led the way for the further development of black professional entertainment ventures. However, regardless of the strides black minstrel troupes made, they still represented a "veil of misunderstanding and make-believe" for white audiences; blacks were continually silenced and selectively viewed and whites saw their "cherished fantasy made briefly real."[6] The negative images of blacks propagated in American entertainment culture came to the forefront of controversy in the

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[4] James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), 93.

[5] Henry Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1980) and Tom Fletcher, *One Hundred Years of the Negro in Show Business* (New York: De Capo Press, 1984).

[6] Scott Herring, "Du Bois and the Minstrels," *MELUS,* 22, 2, *Popular Literature and Film,* (Summer, 1997), 10.

twentieth century with the rise of the New Negro.[7]

The racial imagery of the Middle Passage, the coffle, the auction block and the plantation were influential in the development of black caricatures. These images were later projected onto the theater stage with the rise of the American minstrel show reappearing in open and artistic dialogue amongst the New Negroes of the Harlem Renaissance. Blacks "were never…unreflective sambos," instead using ingenuity to develop and express cultural values.[8] Slaveholders attempted to severely circumscribe blacks' lives; however, whites never fully defined blacks. The misrepresentation of blacks was created by whites, but the misrepresentation did not inhibit the development of blacks' distinct culture, though it did often result in their true expressions being publicly stifled.[9] The Harlem Renaissance represented a time when the New Negroes were attempting to assert control over the public image of blackness and their own bodies. Historically, blacks were forced to perform and create stereotypes that benefited whiteness, but the New Negroes, although under the influential eyes of white patrons, were able to verbally respond to this didactical relationship. The tradition of white expectation and influence over the image and cultural development of American blacks was openly explored through literary,

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[7] The New Negro represented the young, black generation that excelled in philosophy, arts, theater, literature and other academic pursuits that migrated to Harlem, New York in the early 1900s. This new generation critically assessed the plight of Blacks in America and attempted to be representatives of the race.

[8] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousand Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 2.

[9] Several blacks throughout the slave era were able to express their slave experiences through personal narratives once they earned freedom but they were often censored in their publications.

artistic and intellectual conversations of young blacks in New York City during the early twentieth century.

During the Harlem Renaissance, blacks used the arts to display their culture to the larger society. Initially, blacks were able to express their talents primarily due to whites' continued desire to control black bodies and black culture. The display of black bodies began on the shores of Africa hundreds of years earlier and continued during the Harlem Renaissance, but for nearly the first time, blacks were able to express a response to their distorted public image. The white fascination with controlling the image of blackness was openly addressed during the Harlem Renaissance. This chapter will not be a comprehensive review of the events and people of the Harlem Renaissance, but it will examine the manifestation and ramifications of the collective mentality formed during the slave era through the complex interplay of black performance and white audience.[10]

The Harlem Renaissance represented a double consciousness for blacks. The conflicting dynamics of the minstrelized black body and the desire to assert black agency continually plagued the New Negro. The Roaring Twenties represented drastic changes in New York City for the African American population that began with the migration of black Southerners to the North.

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[10] For a review of the people, events and history of the Harlem Renaissance see: David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Ann Douglass, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1995); Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. ed., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York, Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1990); Cary D. Wintz, ed., *The Emergence of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996).

> They weren't even there yet and already the City was speaking to them. They were dancing. And like a million others, chests pounding, tracks controlling their feet, they stared out of the windows for the first sight of the City that danced with them, proving already how much it loved them. Like a million more they could not wait to get there and love it back.[11]

The "Great Migration" began in the early 1900s with an estimated 1.5 million blacks migrating from the South to the North. A large portion of these blacks moved to Manhattan and settled in Harlem. "In 1890, one in seventy people in Manhattan was a Negro; in 1930 one in every nine."[12] Many of these black migrants were young and talented and they brought with them the jazz of New Orleans, the blues of Mississippi, the folklore of the Sea Islands, and the cakewalk of the southern plantation. These young blacks became trendsetters by introducing Harlem to innovative performances and path-breaking literary works focused on the black experience.

In the 1920s, America was at its interwar height of prosperity, and both whites and blacks benefited. New York rose to the international forefront in the arts; it boasted over forty-one theaters in early 1900.[13] The vaudeville shows of blackface minstrelsy were transferred to black voice on radio and continued on the big screen through film.[14] This period introduced Harlem as the cultural

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[11] Stated by Toni Morrison in Maria Balshaw, *Looking For Harlem: Urban Aesthetics in African-American Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 1.

[12]Douglass, 73.

[13] Douglass, 20.

[14] Robin Means Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1998).

"Mecca" of Black America.[15] In 1924, *Vanity Fair* published an article entitled, "Enter, The New Negro, A Distinctive Type Recently Created by the Coloured Cabaret Belt in New York."[16] A few months later, Alain Locke, a young, black Rhodes Scholar published "Enter the New Negro" in which he chronicled the great migration of blacks from the rural South to the urban North and the cultural and social changes taking place in Harlem. He stated, "[I]n the Negro's case a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern…In Harlem, Negro life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self determination."[17] *Vanity Fair*, Alain Locke and several others incited a multitude of interest in and writings by black and white media on the cultural explosion occurring in Harlem.

In 1925, the New York Herald Tribune stated, "we are on the edge, if not in the midst, of what might not improperly be called a Negro Renaissance."[18] This article, along with others, helped label the cultural movement flourishing in Harlem. The Negro or Harlem Renaissance was an artistic movement that displayed black culture through the arts. Alain Locke's essay described the significance of Harlem to blacks: "Harlem…is the home of the Negro's 'Zionism.' The pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem." [19] The race leaders

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[15] Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Atheneum, 1925).

[16] David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979).

[17] Locke, 6.

[18] Lewis, 116.

[19] Locke, 14.

of the Harlem Renaissance were referred to as New Negroes, a term formally titled and introduced by Alain Locke in 1925.

Harlem and the New Negro were supposed to be the prototype of blackness for the larger white and black world. Blacks were to learn from the New Negro and aspire to make their own Harlem across America. These blacks were supposed to be free thinking individuals, unbound from the rules of society by displaying black culture in the epicenter of Harlem. "Representing the Negro race for whites" was the self-appointed responsibility of these New Negroes in the Harlem Renaissance.[20] The New Negroes attempted to promote racial advancement through artistic and literary creativity while continuing to negate the negative stereotypes that flourished throughout the United States. Initially, this Renaissance in Harlem mainly stayed within the bounds of New York City, but it later spread to major cities throughout the United States, especially Chicago. The Harlem Renaissance was definitely one of the first major movements that attempted to understand an accurate image of black culture in larger society.

America's public society often poorly depicted the black community through continual misrepresentations often displayed in entertainment and mass media of the day. The Harlem Renaissance wanted to depict an untainted view of blacks, without the buffoonery, violence and over-sexual generalizations common in public culture. The early 1900s witnessed the beginning of minstrel shows broadcasted through radio to homes around the world and the negative

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[20] Alain Locke, "The New Negro," In *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, David Levering Lewis, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 47.

racial imagery presented in propaganda films, such as Thomas Dixon's *Birth of a Nation* released in 1915. This resulted in the New Negroes' desire to display a more accurate depiction of blacks in America.[21]

[21] Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight hours for what we will: Workers and leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, London, New York & New Rochelle: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Coleman.

What the Harlem Renaissance Did Not Achieve

A major problem with the Harlem Renaissance was its elitist ideals, and especially with its broad assessment that the New Negro was sufficiently qualified or prepared to represent black culture to the larger white world. Alain Locke described the New Negro as,

> vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem into the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life.[22]

Locke's statement brings to the forefront questions such as: Who are these "professional observers" and what is wrong with the "Old Negro?" The "Old Negro" was described by Locke as "more a myth than a man" who "was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy."[23] The distorted black body was a part of North American culture which produced unjust stereotypes created by whites and forced upon blacks. Instead of recognizing the influence whites had on the development and proliferation of these misrepresentations, Locke and some of the New Negroes simply rejected the "Old Negro" instead of the Old White or Whiteness ideals. For example, Locke stated that the New Negro musicians "organized Negro music out of a broken, musically illiterate dialect and made it a national and intellectual music."[24]

The negative character of Locke's statement does not negate the general

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[22] Locke, 47.

[23] Locke, 47.

[24] Locke, 65-66.

sense that the Harlem Renaissance was, in many ways, positive for the burgeoning African American community. Unfortunately, the New Negroes and the Harlem Renaissance were dominated by mainly black intellectuals while the majority of “ordinary Negroes” were unaware of the movement during the time.[25]

Although the Harlem Renaissance did achieve great strides in race relations, black musical culture previously associated with negative characteristics and immorality became accepted as an art form by many whites and was therefore transformed into acceptable “high” art. The Harlem Renaissance represented a time of personal discovery amongst young African Americans attempting to go beyond the past’s misrepresentations and to rediscover the beauty, talent and intellect present in black culture. Nevertheless, Locke’s ideal of recreating blackness to be approved by whites was quite flawed and depended heavily on placing black culture and blackness for sale. The increase of the black population and displays of black culture within Harlem attracted great attention from whites throughout New York City.

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[25] Hughes, 228.

Caucasians Storm Harlem

The popularity of Harlem as the center of black culture attracted the curiosity of whites. The presence of white spectators contributed to the continual desire for white approval by many Harlem Renaissance artists. “White men consider themselves superior to black men…Black men want to prove to white men at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect.”[26] New Negroes’ desire for white acceptance only reasserted whiteness in society while it also stressed blackness as being childlike, humble and submissive. “Caucasians Storms Harlem,” this statement represented the affluent young whites whom flocked to the new nightclubs and theatres of Black Manhattan.[27] A fresh sound, dance, and style emerged from Harlem and these young whites wanted to experience the new scene. The most gifted blacks gravitated to this new hub of blackness on 125th Street in upper Manhattan with a multitude of white patrons. Harlem became of place of white spectatorship or audience with blacks and black culture as the amusement. Writer Langston Hughes gives a first-hand account of Harlem during the roaring 20s in his autobiography, *Big Sea*.[28] He recognized the problem of white spectatorship throughout Harlem’s streets and nightclubs:

> White people began to come to Harlem in droves….They were not cordial to Negro patronage, unless you were a celebrity…Nor did ordinary Negroes like the growing influx of whites toward Harlem after sundown, flooding the little cabarets and bars where formerly only colored people laughed and sang, and

[26] Fanon, 10.

[27] Found in Lewis, 165.

[28] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940).

> where now the strangers were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers-like amusing animals in a zoo.[29]

Hughes highlighted the intrusive nature in which whites flooded the Coloured Cabaret district (Harlem). Many of the most famous Harlem theaters and nightclubs, such as the Cotton Club, Connie's Inn, Lafayette Theater and Lincoln Theater just to name a few, were establishments that featured black music and dance performances for an all-white, segregated audience.[30] The Harlem Renaissance not only displayed black artistic work as a source of entertainment for whites, but the overall black community was a subject for white observation. The relationship of black performers to white audiences during the Harlem Renaissance was reminiscent of many plantation scenes in which slaveholders would invite guests and create stages for black entertainment. These performances contributed to displaying the difference between blacks and whites and reasserted whites' dominance in society. The idea of "slumming it" or urban spectatorship only continued whites collective mentality that blacks were exotic spectacles fated to exist only as sources of entertainment.[31]

All of Harlem was vulnerable to whites' curious gazes and lurid imaginations. Whites could enter Harlem freely, but blacks were not able to intrude into the "holy places of whites."[32] The white "stampede to the exotic and

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[29] Hughes, 216.

[30] Douglass, 74; Barbara Engelbrecht, "Swinging at the Savoy," *Dance Research Journal,* 15, 2, Popular Dance in Black America (Spring, 1983), 3-10.

[31] Flourney Miller Professional Papers, Schomburg Library Archive Collection.

[32] Claude McKay, "Dream of the Jungle," in his *The Passion of Claude McKay: Selected Prose and Poetry, 1912-1948*, Wayne Cooper, ed. (New York: Schocken, 1973), 145.

forbidden" occurred throughout the Harlem Renaissance, continually asserting the black body as a commodity for white consumption.[33] Black Harlem's dance movements and musical styles were often characterized by whites as sexually suggestive and as providing further evidence of blacks' erotic nature. Although the black performance style of music and dance was viewed and imitated by whites across New York, it was still viewed as "jungle," an overly sexualized, animalistic display.[34] The continual development of music and dance ensembles of (often light-skinned) black "beautiful girls" barely dressed, in such productions as *The Creole Show, The Octoroons* and first black Broadway play *Shuffle Along,* attempted to display a progressive view of African American talent on the theater stage. However, the plays may have owed much of their popularity to the public display of the black female body in an eroticized manner. Claude McKay recognized that these plays effectively turned "clowning to artistry" but wondered at the social cost of these advancements; if they were achieved by inducing "adventurous" whites to gawk at semi-naked black women.[35] The influential success of *Shuffle Along* broke many barriers for black performers in "vernacular comedy, song and dance" and allowed them to exhibit their talents beyond the minstrel stage, but the barriers for black entertainers remained within the music, dance or comedy spectrums.[36]

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[33] McKay, 145-146.
[34] Douglas, 51.

[35] Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home* (New York: Prentice Hill, Inc., 1937), 142.

[36] Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968).

Within blackface minstrelsy and throughout the Harlem Renaissance black performance demonstrated the saturation of African and African American cultures into United States traditions. The productions during the Harlem Renaissance introduced new genres of music and dance contortions that influenced national and international communities, regardless of race. Although blacks were limited in the opportunities afforded to them through the entertainment arena, the popularity of the Black Bottom, Charleston and the Staircase dances throughout the world represented the continual propagation of black culture into the core of American culture. White impersonations of typically black performing arts were directly related to the white continual obsession with the activities of blacks, which continued from the plantation to Harlem in the 1920s.

There was a tradition of whites being interested in the amusements of blacks that was continued during the Harlem Renaissance. Consequently, whites' fascination with the black body and black culture throughout the cultural movement maintained the notion that blacks were the exotic "other" and whites or whiteness was the standard or "normal." "Harlem's famous image spread until it swarmed nightly with white people from all over the world. The tourist buses came there….Blacktown crawled with white people."[37] Blackness was exhibited and romanticized within the boundaries of Harlem, New York. White spectators in Harlem did not get any sense of the economic or social problems of the region;

[37] Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1977), 216.

instead, whites believed that "Harlemites left their houses at sundown to sing and dance in cabarets, because most of the whites saw nothing but the cabarets, not the houses."[38] The façade of black happiness and contentment was created in the slums and poverty-stricken streets of Harlem for white urban spectators. Whites gazed not only at the entertainers at the local nightclubs, but also "colored customers amuse themselves."[39] Harlem became the stage and blackness was the performance that whites watched, criticized and emulated.[40]

The performance of blacks for a white audience within Harlem also applied to the New Negroes. New Negro writer Arna Bontemps remembered that, "When we were not busy having fun, we were shown off and exhibited and presented in scores of places to all kinds of people. And we heard the sighs of wonder, amazement and sometimes admiration when it was whispered or announced that here was one of the 'New Negroes."[41] The young, black leaders of the Harlem Renaissance were not only scrupulously observed and judged by white patrons, but they were also financially supported by whites.

The Harlem Renaissance was the height of black intellectual, literary and artistic production. Moreover, whites began to recognize the potential of black artistic creativity and intellectual abilities. Although an exceptional group of black

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[38] Hughes, 225.

[39] Hughes, 316.

[40] Engelbrecht, 3-10.

[41] Quoted in Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Music in the Harlem Renaissance: An Overview," in Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., Ed., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York, Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1990), 4.

men and women rose in the arts, the movement did not spread throughout the United States; the liberal arts did not flow into other black urban areas. Ironically, although this movement stressed the emergence of an autonomous "New Negro," its independence was contingent on white patronage.

Stealing Away

Peripheral to the white invasion of Harlem, there were other private spheres that were not yet bleached by continual white supervision. There were several nightclubs that remained dominantly black, and due to the lack of economic opportunities, many blacks in Harlem hosted house-rent parties.[42] House-Rent parties comprised of all black parties, often in private residences, that were often thrown to raise money to assist the tenants in paying continually elevating rent prices. Hughes referred to these gatherings in his autobiography as events that blacks could "get-together of one's own, where you could do the black-bottom with no stranger behind you...a non-theatrical" event without the spectatorship of whites.[43] Hughes' reference to house-rent parties as "non-theatrical" specifically refers to the uncheorographed nature of these private, gatherings in which African Americans did not have to perform their blackness. For a reasonable admission fee, blacks throughout Harlem could "steal away" from the white gaze and power into the small, cramped spaces of house-rent parties. These black private spheres in Harlem were reminiscent of blacks "stealing away" to dance, sing and speak freely from the white gaze during the slave era. The performing arts used during the house-rent events often differed from the performances blacks used to entertain whites in Harlem. House-rent parties not only represented monetary assistance during a time of limited

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[42] Frank Byrd, "Rent Parities" in Lionel c. Bascom, ed., *A Renaissance in Harlem*, ed. (New York: Avon, 1999).

[43] Hughes, 228-229.

economic options, but they also represented uninhibited spaces in which a distinct African American culture could be experienced.

Another controversy that arose during the Harlem Renaissance was the predicament of black artists being sponsored by whites. Throughout history, artists have subsisted through sponsors who monetarily supported the artist but who also contributed their ideas to the final artistic product. Many artists, writers and thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance were financially sponsored by whites. The New Negroes attempted to display black culture without racialized stereotypes and minstrelsy while under the critical and influential eyes of whites. Hughes relayed his experience as a black artist during the Harlem Renaissance with a white a sponsor:

> My patron… had been devoted in a mild way to the advancement of the Negro…Everything born to Negroes in those days of the 20's she knew about…Concerning Negroes, she felt that they were America's great link with the primitive, and that they had something very precious to give to the Western World…She felt that we had a deep well of the spirit within us and that we should keep it pure and deep.[44]

Hughes' patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason, was an elderly woman who could not remember a time that she was not "interested in primitive peoples."[45] Mason was actively involved as the patron of such New Negroes as Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, Aaron Douglass, Claude McKay and numerous others. The New Negroes literati who were under the direct patronage of whites throughout New York were often impersonally referred to as Niggerati's, a term coined by Wallace

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[44] Hughes, 316.

[45] Lewis, 225.

Thurman and Zora Neale Hurston.[46] Ironically, Zora Hurston was considered "the most amusing" of the niggerati, according to Langston Hughes.[47]

The New Negroes, especially those associated with Mason, were expected to continually perform their "primitive" nature or blackness for white spectators. In 1976, Dorothy West recalled times that Hurston would be called upon at any time to be the "entertainer" for whites through "coon stories" or any form of blackness capers.[48] Also, Langston Hughes was often referred to as the "most precious child" by his patron whom was affectionately referred to as "godmother" by the New Negroes Mason supported. Mrs. Mason was just one of many examples of whites who were "interested in the exotic" and wanted to continually present blacks as sources of amusement for white enjoyment.[49]

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[46] Wallace Thurman, *Infants of the Spring: a novel* (New England: Northeastern University Press, 1992).

[47] Hughes, 223.

[48] Lewis, 153; David Levering Lewis Collection, "Voices from the Renaissance" transcripts, New York Public Library, Schomburg Library SCM 87-15.

[49] Alfred Knopf, when speaking of Carl Van Vechten, a white writer who was active in the Harlem Renaissance, said, "Oh, he was always and obviously interested in the exotic." Found in David Levering Lewis Collection, "Voices from the Renaissance" transcripts at the New York Public Library, Schomburg Library.

White Control over the Harlem Renaissance

It is difficult to understand the power that whites had on the display of black culture in Harlem, but it was evident that whiteness was continually asserted while black culture continually veiled and exoticized. White patrons' belief in the Harlem Renaissance that blacks were primitive comes directly from the stereotypes that began during the institution of slavery and which continued throughout the minstrel era. White patrons' notions about blacks' childlike simplicity or primitive natures oftentimes influenced blacks' artistic works. The Harlem Renaissance witnessed the continual influence of whites on the public ideals of blackness, as spectators and patrons in Harlem; whites were able to continually assert their whiteness. In the text *Harlem Renaissance*, Huggins asserted that "Even if Harlem blacks had wanted it…there was little chance they would have been left alone to shape and define their own identity."[50] The monetary support, either through financial patronage or as the audience of whites, distorted the images, literature and performance style of the Harlem Renaissance artists. White patrons' control over black cultural contributions was quite evident during the separation of Hughes and Aaron Douglass from their "godmother" Charlotte Mason. When Hughes "did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging" through him and no longer produced the exotic literature desired by Mason, there was sullen anger towards Hughes and a complete termination of all financial support. Mason also asserted her power against

[50] Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 88-89.

future endeavors of Hughes. This was an example so eloquently exposed by W.E.B. Du Bois in “Souls of White Folks”:

> So long, then, as humble black folk, voluble with thanks, receive…from lordly and generous whites, there is much peace and moral satisfaction. But when the black man begins to dispute the white man’s title to certain alleged bequests….then the spell is suddenly broken and the philanthropist is apt to be ready to believe that negroes are impudent, that the South is right.[51]

The double consciousness of the New Negroes was evident in the dynamic interplay between attempting to accurately represent black culture and doing so while under the direct supervision of white supporters and patrons. Blacks were forced to look at themselves through the eyes of others and attempt to represent their culture, history and contributions to America for white consumption, acceptance and approval. The Harlem Renaissance conflicted with the blackface minstrel buffoonery and the subjugated black body of the plantation through its assertion and figurative illustration of black culture, but it was still stifled by continual white supervision. The collective mentality of black culture being publicly displayed through expectations of whites continued from the plantation to Harlem in the 1920s and has been maintained in American entertainment. The New Negroes did not scrutinize whiteness; instead, blackness was continually reviewed, analyzed and questioned.

The collective mentality that manifested during the Harlem Renaissance was a direct result of the negative images of power displayed within the scenes of subjugation staged throughout the foundation of the North America.

[51] W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk,” Fisk University Archives, Box 18, Folder 5.

Regardless, the Harlem Renaissance opened a door into the culture, talent and ideas of the young and gifted black generation of the New Negroes. The New Negroes represented the "exceptional men" of W.E.B. DuBois' talented tenth that would "be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people."[52] The continual distortion of blackness in the American public sphere was openly attacked through by "the Best of this race"[53] and their productions that came to the forefront during the Renaissance. The desires of the Harlem Renaissance New Negroes were explained in Langston Hughes poem entitled, "Black Clown":[54]

> I am the fool of the whole world.
> Laugh and push me down.
> Only in song and laughter
> I rise again-a black clown.
>
> Cry to the world
> That all might understand:
> I was once a black clown
> But now-
> I'm a man!

The desire expressed by Langston Hughes broadly entails the history and treatment of blacks in America. The Harlem Renaissance was the first major response to the forced displays of jollity on the plantation and the blackened

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[52] W.E.B.DuBois, "The Talented Tenth," in Charles Waddell Chesnutt, *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of Today* (New York: James Pott and Co., 1903), 38.

[53] DuBois, 40.

[54] Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Arnold Rampersad, ed. (New York: Vintage Classics, 1995).

buffoonery of the minstrel. However it also represented the collective mentality embedded in the culture of America. The staging of race allowed for veiled black turmoil that was often perverted to provide appeasement for whites in order to uphold the tradition of black subjugation and white dominance.

The Harlem Renaissance allowed for the temporary unveiling of blacks' double consciousness in America. The internal conflicts of many Harlem Renaissance artists with white patrons were periodically explored through their works. The American and the Negro were explored and reviewed publicly through literature, theater, music and dance. The New Negro represented a progressive stance of the black community's attempt to enter into mainstream America. Blacks wanted recognition beyond the position of caricature but instead as a diverse, learned society that have distinct cultural contributions. White capital and influence were consistently present through Harlem during the Renaissance and obscured the culture of the African American community present in New York. The façade of black culture within the slave community and minstrel stage continued with the Harlem Renaissance and is evident today through entertainment. The degradation of African Americans in popular culture gives insight into what masses of people are thinking, feeling and fantasizing.[55]

The culture of American entertainment was based on displaying African Americans in images constructed and reinforced throughout the slave era that created blacks as child-like, simple, humorous, exotic others. Popular culture in

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[55] J. Stanley Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920," *American Quarterly,* 29, 1. (Spring, 1977), 102-116.

North America is fixated with displaying African Americans as minstrels. During the height of the Harlem Renaissance, blackface radio thrived with the beginning of "Sam 'n' Henry" on January 12, 1926, later known as "Amos 'n' Andy" in 1929.[56] The comic, Sambo black body was celebrated through this minstrel radio program until 1960, later progressing to a television series that lasted until 1953.[57] The entertainment of slave masters and white working class in the urban North continued into the venues of television, radio and film therefore maintaining the distorted black body in the public sphere.

The present state of American entertainment continues to spark controversy over the negative images of African Americans. The misrepresentations present during the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade progressed into many of the symbolic black-faced displays currently in mass media and entertainment. The creation of race, racism and racial hierarchy was based on the development and proliferation of erroneous images that was distributed through literature, music, theater, entertainment and folklore that were embedded into the overall cultural structure of the United States.

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[56] Melvin Patrick Ely, *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

[57] Ely, 158-159.

Forms and Continuity of White Cultural Domination

As early as the sixteenth century, the Western world saw itself as the world's moral leader. Europe created the ethical and social code that provided justification for the subjugation of Africans within a slave trade through the popular literature of travel journals. This distorted view of West African music, song and dance culture contributed to stereotypes of blacks, such as their being innately childlike performers with over-sexualized black females, therefore contributing to the development of race and culture in the New World.

The negative image of Africans transmitted through travel journals, and contributed to their subjugation and treatment in the United States. The myths created by whites on the shores of West Africa were forced upon blacks captured within the Atlantic slave trade and were evident throughout the slave era. The main stages of the chattel system consisted of the middle passage, the coffle, the auction block and the plantation, all of which show the continual abuse of black bodies and culture through the enforcement of constructed racialized behavior. These stages represented the public sphere of slavery that continually forced black bodies to perform for a white audience. These forced performances reasserted the myths of blacks being over-sexualized and innately related to the performing arts, which were used to justify the commodification and subjugation of the black body while also reasserting the dominance of whites.

Slavery was a fundamental part of American life during it's formative years. The romanticized view of the black body greatly affected the development of race and resulted in negative attributes assigned to blacks in America. By

forcing blacks to perform, whites were able to project a social atmosphere that mentally justified slavery. The forced performances of slaves in the middle passage, the coffle, the auction block and the plantation system displayed the evidence of terror and agency in the institution of slavery and contributed to the racial and cultural constructions of the United States. Whites organized a system that portrayed black music, dance and song culture as proof that slaves were innately submissive, childlike, simple minded and over sexualized. The imagery of forced black performances throughout the slavery system provided entertainment for whites, but it also pacified white ideals of natural superiority in the developing society.

While whites were reaffirming their status in society, blacks were receiving agency and continuing their African culture through music, song and dance. The double consciousness of the performing arts contributed to the collective mentality of whites and blacks in America. The performance of blacks throughout the slavery system contributed to a racial mask for African Americans. The blackface façade worn by slaves on the plantations for whites continued with whites adorning blackface with the rise of the American minstrel show. Blackface minstrelsy, similar to the forced performances of black slaves, was more representative of whites' desires than African American culture. Although many aspects of the minstrel performance style reflected the contributions of entertainment from the black community, the manner in which blacks were portrayed represented the fears of the working-class, native white population. The blackface minstrel was a continual assertion of whiteness first by native

whites, later by the immigrant populations of the North. Essentially, the desire for democracy and power within the industrial society resulted in the popularity of the American minstrel show.

The culmination of these events, from the travel journals of West Africa to the forced performances of blacks throughout slavery and the rise of whites in blackface, resulted in the debate and confusion amongst the New Negroes of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. The Harlem Renaissance represented an unveiling of expression and discussion amongst blacks about the state of the race in the public sphere. The continual influence of whites on this intellectual, artistic and literary movement was also reflective of the nonstop dynamic of white influence over African Americans' cultural expressions. Furthermore, the Harlem Renaissance simply represented the first major discussion within the African American community on the relationship between race, entertainment and images of blackness. This discussion contributes to the numerous works on entertainment, race, culture and racial imagery in order to further understand the continuance of negative displays of African Americans in the public sphere of mass media.

The negative portrayal of African Americans continues today throughout various forms of media. Robin Means Coleman analyzed the history of African American representations in mass media for over fifty years. She reviewed the various trends and portrayals of blacks and determined that the minstrel show was active in the foundation of mass media and it has presently resurged in what

Coleman labels the Neo-Minstrel Era.[58] The revival of minstrelsy was also mentioned by mass media scholar J. Fred MacDonald in his work on the history of television.[59] He referred to the displays on black in television in the 1990s as a new form of minstrelsy, with blacks displaying negative stereotypes instead of whites in blackface. The continual display of negative black stereotypes through mass media is representative of the entertainment culture present throughout the Unites States and several other cultures. The popularity of black stereotypes influences the present state of American media today, according to scholars and activist who consistently acknowledges its resurgence. Essentially, it must be recognized that an active part of American culture and entertainment has continual elements of racism. The United States' collective mentality is constructed on the premise of whiteness ideals with blacks continually contesting their status.

The collective mentality present in mass media was addressed in the controversial film *Bamboozled. Bamboozled* is a satire about the history of black representations in television and film. Director and writer Spike Lee personified Coleman's Neo-Minstrel era through a film that recreated the blackface minstrel show in current times with African American actors in a series titled the New Millennium Minstrel Show. Lee satires a network television station displaying its racial prejudices in the manner it creates new series. In pursuit of ratings, an African American creates a stereotypical comedy show that reinvents black face

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[58] Coleman.

[59] J. Fred MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV: African Americans in television since 1948* (Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishers, 1992).

minstrels on a plantation setting. The television series becomes a cultural phenomenon among blacks and whites, although often under attack from various community activists. Lee addresses numerous controversial topics within this film in order to shed light on the degradation of blacks throughout popular culture. He states in an interview that the negative images of blacks in mass media are "painful—the pain comes from looking at the images. How people of color in this case specifically African-Americans have been portrayed since the inception…of film, radio and television….we have to look at the way we portray black collectibles…we're viewed as less than human sub-human and that stuff is painful."[60] Lee's comments represent the turmoil many blacks face as a result of the continual distortions of race in American entertainment culture. He later states in the interview that, "And film roughly is 100 years old and now we're the beginning of a new century. And what will the next hundred years bring." This comment recognizes the continual racism present in the history of film but the characterizations that it displays have been representative in American culture since its inception. The entertainment culture has centered on the negative representation of blacks while placing whites or whiteness as the non-racialized, dominant representations. This study broadens discussion on race, racial representations and entertainment in the culture of the United States.

[60] Interview with Spike Lee, http://www.banboozledmovie.com. Internet, accessed May 10, 2007.

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