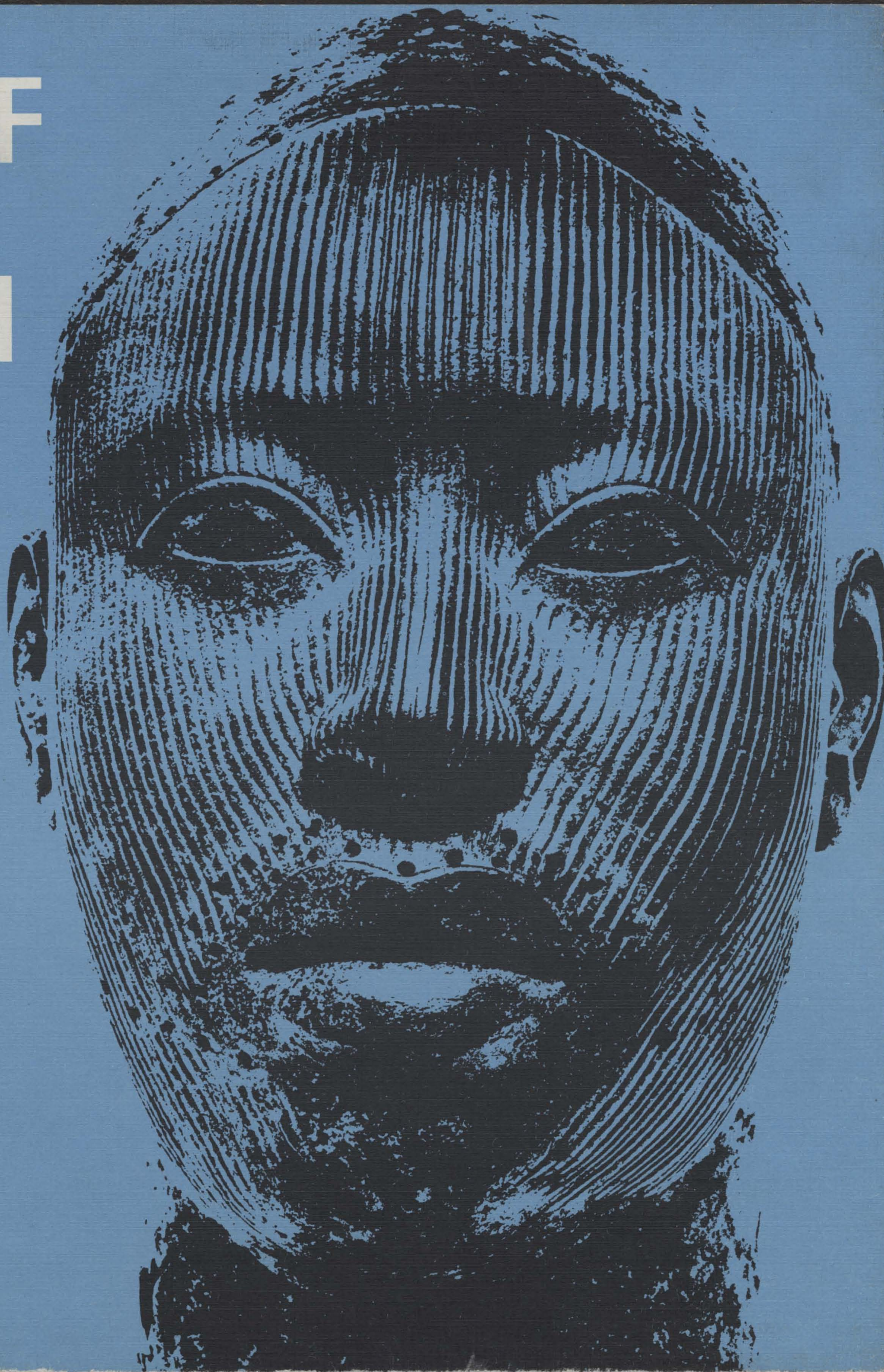


ROOTS OF BLACK MUSIC IN AMERICA

Some
Correspondences
between the
Music of the
Slave Areas of
West Africa
and the Music of
the United States
and the
Caribbean
Compiled
and Edited by
Samuel Charters

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2694



FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2694

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Compiled and Edited
by Samuel Charters

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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2694

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ROOTS OF BLACK MUSIC IN AMERICA

NOTES BY
SAMUEL CHARTERS

AN INTRODUCTION

Three hundred years is a long time in the human experience. Two hundred years - even one hundred years. So much is forgotten, left behind, misplaced. What do you remember of what you were doing last summer? or the summer five years ago? Do you remember the songs you learned in school when you were nine years old? For the black man and the black woman in America the African past is now that long ago, with so little remembered and so little kept from that life and that culture and that distant continent. And yet, in the long measuring of human time, three hundred years is not so long - one hundred years only a moment. There was slave trading until the last years before the Civil War - the 1850's - only one hundred ten years ago, less than three generations. Any black American in his sixties could have had a grandfather, a grandmother, who had been born in Africa. The mother of the New Orleans clarinet player, George Lewis, lived until she was in her nineties and he was in his sixties. She had been born and spent her early childhood in Africa, and still even spoke a little of her own language. The break between the African past and the American present is no more than thirty or forty years - and so much is remembered through so small a moment of time, even if it isn't understood - or even clearly recognized.

But like the things you remember of your grandfather, nothing is very distinct in the memory. There are only impressions, half-forgotten stories, odd lines of a song. Unless the grandfather talked about his own childhood - or the grandmother about her childhood - that life is almost completely unknown. Something will come down through a father and mother - their memories of these old people, when they were not old. If that older generation has passed what it knew on to them - then it can go on to their children, and the link to the past is complete - still living, and forty years, or one hundred and forty years, is only a blurring of time, and not a breaking of it.

I don't think we will ever be able to trace African music through every change and shaping it has undergone in the Americas. Musical styles, particularly styles that are transmitted aurally, are continually shifting, continually changing. I once tried for a year and a half in New Orleans to find out what the first jazz band had sounded like - and I found many people who had heard it. I even had musicians who had played in the band sing their old instrumental parts for me. At the end I put it together, and what I had didn't in any way suit the descriptions that I had of the band. This had been only fifty years before. Already there had been so many changes in the music that it was almost impossible for the ear to remember back to the old sound without hearing newer sounds tangled with it. African music is more than a hundred years in the past, and change has gone on - both Africa and in the Americas. So much so that some points of connection have been almost completely lost.

I am conscious that generalizations like this apply most directly to the United States, since the African culture here has been almost completely obliterated. For a Jamaican, a member of a Kumina Cult, a dancer in a "currulaò" from the coast of Western Columbia, a drummer from an isolated settlement in the Bahamas, a story teller from the mahogany forests of British Honduras, their culture is African. What has been lost is the tribal identity, and when I use the term "African" it has to have a tribal identity. What I mean by it, as music, is the musical culture of the tribes living on the north central coast of West Africa, in the areas stripped by the slavers. It is possible that in some groups, like the kumina cult in Jamaica, there is a sense of tribal identity, but the tribes, in America were generally dispersed. For their own protection the slave holders mixed the population groups so there could be no sense of identity except as slave. This couldn't entirely destroy the cultural base, but it could stifle it, and leave it little more than a small spark, a small point of remembered warmth.

The tribe is so important in any consideration of African music that it is misleading to talk about something as general as music of Africa. But if, by this, only the slave areas are meant, then the concept can be of some use. Music from this area has a wide range of expression - from the drum orchestras of the coastal forests to the plucked string instruments of the northern savannah - and all of it - or almost all of it - has found its way into some area, some kind of music somewhere in North or South America. If we haven't recognized this, if we haven't been aware of it, it's only because we have known so little about the music of Africa.

In the United States it has always been difficult to trace the memory of Africa because of the richness and vitality of the Afro-American musical expression. Black music in the United States has taken from every source, to make a brilliant new music that has as much of the European harmonic practice in it as it has of rain forest drumming. But the elements are there. Even the structure of jazz drumming - the steady rhythm on the metal cymbal, strong rhythm in a heavy floor drum, shifting central rhythms on smaller drums, and accents on wooden or metal strikers - is an elaboration of the structure of the drum orchestra, with complicated pedals and stands to make it possible for a single man to catch some of the sound of drummers of the tribal orchestra.

As Africa has emerged from colonialism and the techniques of field recording have developed here has been a marked increase in the knowledge we have of this African musical background - but we still have only glimpses. We don't know enough yet to make direct connections - or to make anything more than interferences. I'm not trying to do it with these examples of music from the slave areas of Africa and the black cultures of the Americas. I don't feel we know enough yet to make definite associations. What I have done is find what I think of as "correspondences." I've tried to find examples of music from one world that corresponded - in style, sound technique - to music from the other world. If you think of these only as "correspondences" - only as kind of notes toward an understanding of this relationship between two worlds and cultures - then perhaps they can be a beginning to a further, deeper, and more intensive study of these roots of black culture in America.

SOME ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would never have finished this study without the encouragement and assistance of Moses Asch of Folkways, who made available to me all of the material in the Folkways catalog that related to African or Afro-American music, and I must acknowledge my immense debt to the many people who did the recordings that make up that catalog. I've tried to include their name with each example, and I strongly recommend that someone interested in any of the music here should go to the album it came from to get a larger perspective on the selection. I have used some unissued field material from my own collection - blues pieces by J.D. Short and George Montgomery recorded in the early 1960's - but I hope that they will be issued sometime and it will be possible to hear their music in its own context.

A number of people have been doing valuable work in this area for many years, and I have found a number of insights in their work. I include in this the musicologists Melville Herskovits, Curt Sachs, and Harold Courlander. The blues historian Paul Oliver has recently published a very important study Savannah Syncopators, centering on African retentions in the blues, and it is particularly useful for its gathering together of so much scattered material relating to the subject. He has also shown some interesting parallels between blues instrumental techniques and the playing of the griots of Niger in the recording released in connection with the book. Ten years ago my wife, Ann Charters, did considerable research into travelers documents and other background materials for a projected study of the contemporary response to black music in the United States, and I have taken the early documentations from some of her materials.

Side A Drums and Drum Styles

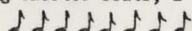
Band 1. Nigeria. Hausa - Simpa

Recorded in Ghana by Ivan Annan, from Folkways FW 8859

The Hausa people are centered in northern Nigeria, north of the Yoruba tribal groups who center along the coastline. Of all the peoples in this area the Hausa were the most strongly influenced by the Muslim Arabs who ruled them for centuries, but despite the scattering of the tribal groups that is going on in West Africa they retain their dialect and costume wherever they settle. In the coastal areas, however, their drumming is more in the style of the coastal music, as Ivan Annan, who recorded this example, notes in his introduction. They adopt "... the pulsating steady rhythm and melodies of the coast folks in their own dialects." This example, "Simpa," is widely popular throughout Ghana, as well as in their own area of Nigeria. This drum group has many of the characteristics of the West African drum orchestra. It is a complex texturing of three main percussion rhythms. As in many other areas and styles there is a steady rhythm played on small scrapers or shakers - often this is played on metal strikers or bells. Deeper toned drums play in a slower rhythm below the scrapers or shakers, their shifts of accent centered on the dominant rhythmic pulse. The third percussion unit is often lighter toned drums whose accents shift and cross in a complex interplay. Paul Oliver has quoted and discussed J.H. Kwabena Nketia's paper on the History and Organization of Music in West Africa, in his study Savannah Syncopators, and this describes some of the elements in the music's structure. "Professor

Nketia has pointed out that the rhythms are conceived either unilineally with the patterns 'assigned to one drum or a pair of drums played by one man, or to many drums played by different men. In the latter case, a number of the same type of drum or different drums may be playing the particular set of rhythms together', or multilinearly, where 'a number of rhythm patterns are assigned to two or more drums, each drum or group of drums beating different patterns or adopting different sequences of patterns in such a way as to offset some beats of their respective patterns. Against these may be placed hand-claps, often by two or three individuals or groups of people, whose clap rhythms are played against each other, while the 'gongs' or clapperless bells establish a metronomic time signal. The suggestion that the master drummer may 'do just what he likes' is rather misleading, for the length and character of the rhythmic phrases is determined by the function, the nature of the dance and the piece that is being performed. Improvisation, in fact, is strictly controlled."

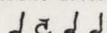
"Simpah," with its strong surging rhythm, and its dramatic bursts of sound, has this same multi-leveled texturing. There is the regular rhythm of the shakers or scrapers, the deeper drums generally accentuating what would be the European third and fourth beats of the phrase, counting the beats of the scrapers as 4/4. The middle drums have a shifting, crossing pattern. One drum is playing shorter beats, a



another is accenting,



another in a different accent,



And within these patterns there is continual shift and emphasis.

Band 2. Bahamas Islands - Jumping Dance

Recorded on New Providence Island, Bahamas, by Marshall W. Stearns, from Folkways FE 4502 C/D

In his note to this example of Bahaman drumming Harold Courlander has commented, "Drum music in the Bahamas appears to be largely influenced by African traditions, though the rhythms frequently have a New World character and appear to be related to general West Indian hybrid forms. On the whole, Bahaman drumming belongs to a vigorous rhythmic tradition that extends through the Antilles to the South American mainland. . . In this piece three drums are used, accompanied by claves (known locally as 'cleavers') and a saw. The saw is played by scraping a knife along the teeth, and tone changes are effected by flexing. The drums are made of kegs, with goatskin heads. They are played by hand."

The "New World character" is generally a more clearly defined rhythmic pulse. African drumming could almost be said to "float", as the accents change their point of stress within the larger framework of the song. The drumming of the Americas has been influenced by the marching music and the religious music of the white culture, and although much of the sound and the drum texture has remained clearly intact there is a more definite stress, around which the rest of the rhythm centers. It doesn't float - there isn't the sense of free movement that the African drumming has, despite its careful structuring. But it is almost incredible that there should be so clear a sense of the African roots in Bahaman drumming hundreds of years after any direct contact with the parent culture. There is the same grouping of rhythms into three levels - a regular rhythm of the saw scraper, the persistent off-beat patterns of the claves as the kind of metronomic beat that Professor Nketia described, a steadier rhythm on a heavy drum, and the steady shifting of the middle voiced drums. Some point of definition has become blurred, there is a less definable sense of melodic function, but this is clearly drumming with a direct relationship to the drum orchestra of West Africa.

Band 3. Ghana, Ewe - Atsiagbekor

Recorded at Anyako, Ghana, by Seth Kobla Ladzekpo, from Asch AFM 4222

Seth Kobla Ladzekpo has described the musical background of "Atsiagbekor" in his notes on the music of the Ewe tribe. "The Ewe speaking people live in the southern part of the Republic of Togoland and the southeastern corner of Ghana (in the Volta Region). Because of trade, marriage, agriculture, fishing and the present day westernization which is spreading in Africa like a wild fire set on a dried grass, the Ewe speaking people can be found almost all over the continent of Africa. But they are mostly centered around the coastal towns of West Africa. . .

The instruments most commonly used among the Ewe are gongs, drums and rattles. There are two kinds of gongs, the "gankogui" or double gong, which is played with a stick and keeps the tempo of the orchestra playing a constant pattern. The "atoke" is a

small boat-shaped gong that rests on one palm and is played with a nail; there is a high-pitched and a low-pitched atoke. The rattle is a large gourd with a loose net of beads covering it; it is called "axatse". The drums, covered on one end with antelope, sheep, or goat hide and made of wood, are usually four sizes from small to very large: "Kaganu", "Kidi", "Sogo" and "Atsimewu", the 4 1/2 foot high master drum. In addition there are talking drums and drums played on both ends. During the performance the dancer has a close relationship to the musicians, taking most of his cues from the drum."

He describes "Atsiagbekor" as it is performed in this example. "It was originally a war dance, but war is no longer associated with it now and it has become a social dance. The dance is led by a master drum which is very tall in size and played by a standing drummer. The dancers listen very attentively to the rhythmic patterns produced by the drummer. The music is very rhythmic, typically in the Atsiagbekor from a slow section precedes a fast (double time) one.

Instruments: 5 drums, 1 double gong, rattles ranging from 3-6, order of the drums: Wuga (master drum), Kroboto, Totozi, Kidi, Kaganu, Ganhogui (double gong), Axatse (rattle)."

This is faster, strongly rhythmic dance music. The pattern is more clearly related to the central beat, with a subtle shifting of the lighter drums around the steady pulsing of the master drum. The dancers accompany the music with handclapping, and there is a persistent, sharp striking of the beat on the metal gong in a pattern that is almost a



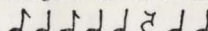
Band 4. United States - New York Street Band

Recorded in New York City by Tony Schwartz, from Folkways FE 4502 C/D

In his note Harold Courlander writes,

"This is a New York street band composed of boys in their early teens. Groups of this kind have become increasingly frequent in recent years. A heavy immigration from Puerto Rico has intensified the impact of West Indian music, and the more traditional Negro street bands that performed with tambourines, washtubs, and washboards have been submerged by Rumba, Congo and Mambo groups. The significant thing is that a preponderant number of these newer groups are composed not of Puerto Ricans or other West Indians, but of native Americans, many of whom come from rural areas in the South. The usual instruments are drums (bongos or congas), claves (hardwood sticks beaten together), marracas (gourd rattles), and sometimes a bottle or bit of iron for percussion."

Again, in this richly ornamented drum texture, there is the same almost unbelievable persistence of the African drum orchestra after so many generations in the Americas, and as Courlander points out, it is even more interesting that these musicians come from the American South, where these drum traditions were ruthlessly suppressed by the slave holders. In this example the influence has clearly come in through the West Indies, but there is some of this kind of drumming still persisting in many areas of the South. The New Orleans "Indian" groups still carry on this style for their Mardi Gras Music. In this New York recording there is a clear relationship - correspondence - between the use of the metal gong as a metronomic instrument here - keeping time - and in the example from Ghana, "Atsiagbekor," with its rhythm in the metal gong, the Ganhogui. It is an accented rhythm in the New York example,



but structurally its use is similar.

Band 5. Gambia, Wolof - Kendal

Recorded in Gambia by David Ames, from Folkways P462

From David Ames' introduction to the music of the Wolof, "The most striking characteristic of Wolof music is its intermingling of aboriginal, West African Negro styles with those of Muslim North Africa. Many other aspects of Wolof culture, too, reflect these two traditions. Their homeland, Senegambia, is close to the southern end of the Saharan caravan routes, and these have been the highways of merchants, religious proselytizers, and conquerors for centuries. Mutual borrowing between Islamic North Africa and Negro Africa can be traced back at least until the 11th century A.D. -- five centuries earlier than any African contact with European nations.

"The Wolof musical borrowings from the Mohammedans were selective. The elements the Wolof took over were re-shaped to fit their own cultural matrix. And some of their aboriginal musical styles were little affected by Mohammedan contact -- for example, most of the drumming . . ."

The Wolof people live in the northern slave area, between the Senegal and the Gambia rivers. This example of Wolof singing and drumming is a "Secular praise song sung by four female slaves

on the porch of a chief's home at the naming ceremony for his firstborn son. The young women provide their own rhythmic accompaniment by handclapping and by using a large over-turned gourd bowl, placed on a pillow, as a drum. One woman beats this drum with bare hands and another strikes it with a stick . . ." In this simple song the regular handclapping gives a more regular beat to the performance, although there is still the multi-texturing of rhythms, and the shift of accent between voices, hand-clapping and drum.

Band 6. Bahamas Islands - Everything The Monkey Do
Recorded at Fresh Creek Settlement, Andros Island,
the Bahamas, by Samuel Charters, from Folkways FS 3846

The black settlements on Andros Island were, at the time of this recording, among the most isolated communities of slave descendents in the West Indies. The radio and the phonograph were beginning to make strong inroads into the older culture, but there was still a strongly felt correspondence with the drumming and singing styles of West Africa. The instruments are guitar, drum - nail keg with a goatskin head, saw, and sticks. The western influence is most felt in the harmonic pattern in the guitar - which was not present in the music of the African slave areas. When string instruments were used in those African cultural areas they were almost invariably plucked in the same kind of rhythmic structuring that characterizes the drumming. This is the newer strumming of a chord instrument, and even though it is part of a more complex rhythmic unit it still makes a marked difference in the music. The song has some of the same kind of repetitive quality of the song from the Wolof (Band 5), but its stress points are simpler, and there is a marked rhythm that can be measured and counted in the European sense. The stick players were boys from the settlement, using sticks they found on the ground around the musicians, and there was considerable unevenness in their playing, despite the noisy excitement at the dance.

Band 7. Liberia, Gio - Song
Recorded by Packard L. Okie, in Liberia, from Folkways
FE 4465

Liberia is generally thought of as the area to which some 20,000 American slaves were returned to Africa in the years before the Civil War. It is also, however, the home of a large grouping of tribes who constitute the majority of Liberia's peoples. The home of the Gio is in the north central area, close to the border of Guinea. This song was recorded in Bromley, a river town not far upstream from the capitol city of Monrovia. The singers were laborers, performing an older song - in Packard L. Okie's note - "originally sung by porters as they carried a rich man's hammock, and told how money could give a man such power and possessions." The vocal structure is very complex, a lead voice and a second voice almost "conversing" with it. The background voices add a separate rhythmic element and there are two drums - slit bamboo gongs - often doubling the rhythm, but not in close conjunction with it.

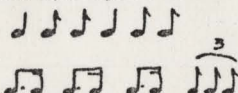
Band 8. United States - New Orleans Street Drumming
Recorded in New Orleans, Mardi Gras Day, 1957, by
Samuel Charters, from Folkways FA 2641

From the note by Samuel Charters,

"This is a typical performance by one of the dozens of similar singers that entertain on the streets on Mardi Gras day. The drummer and singer, who was too drunk to remember his last name, played with considerable skill on a collection of beer cans nailed to a chicken coop, playing with rungs from a kitchen chair. . . ."

It is in music like this that there seems to be still the close tonal linking to the music of Africa, despite the distance in time and area. The sound of the drums - the tin cans the musician was playing on his chicken coop - is very close to the kind of sound that the Gio laborers produced with their bamboo slit gongs. There is even a sense of the kind of disjunct rhythmic emphasis in the contrasts between the rhythms of the instrument and the singing. The rhythms used are not distinctive in themselves, a repetitive

developing into a



but their conjunction sets the rhythm into a more extended pattern of development. This street music is certainly a link between the rhythms of African drumming and the rhythms of New Orleans jazz drumming that grew out of it.

Band 9. United States - New Orleans/Chicago Jazz Drumming
Recorded in New York by Frederic Ramsey Jr., from
Folkways FJ 2290

This remarkable drum solo by the New Orleans musician Baby Dodds was recorded in the 1940's as a document in the musical elements that were integral to the classic jazz style. Dodds had begun playing with improvised drum materials in New Orleans, and he had certainly heard much drumming like that of the street performer on Band 8. As in almost all African derived music in the Western Hemisphere there is a strongly defined basic pulse, but within this Dodds has retained many of the elements of the drum orchestra. There is the steadier rhythm in the heavy drum - the bass drum played with a foot pedal - there is the shifting of the beat and accent on the middle drums - snare drum and tom-tom - and considerable complexity in the use of the sides of the drums, metal cymbals, and a wood block with some of the sound of the familiar West Indian claves. The only missing element is the metronomic rhythm in a gong or scraper, but this early jazz drum style was still fettered by the European marching drum tradition. It was in the playing of the modern jazz drummers - with a style that came from the more basic blues music - that the metal "gong" - in this case the cymbal - returned to its role as the central pulse of the rhythm. Dodds' playing in this solo was not conceived as being that different from his basic ensemble style, although this example is considerably more florid than he would have played with a band, and it hasn't the complexity of the African drumming because of its conception in terms of the single steady beat - but for a performance by a single drummer it's remarkable in its tonal coloration and its rhythmic inventiveness.

Band 10. Ivory Coast, Baoule - Anouable Festival
Recorded in Ivory Coast by Donald Thurow, from
Folkways FE 4476

The Baoule peoples were driven into the area between the Bandema and the N'zi Rivers in the early eighteenth century, after unsuccessfully warring with the strong Ashanti kingdom of the Gold Coast to the east of where they now live. As with almost all other tribes from this area music plays a dominant role in the ceremonial life of the Baoule villages. Donald Thurow noted that "Music, song and dance are basic, not only to religious practice among the Baoule, but as a fundamental to recreation. A rhythmic beat and a vocal chorus are a part of every folk tale, and music without dancing is virtually non-existent. Although the music may be categorized as 'secular' and 'sacred', there is no sharp demarcation. All ceremonial music may also be used in a purely secular fashion. Except for one god who is exclusively adored by women and several who are possessed exclusively by men, any villager of any age may be a spectator to, or dance to the music, regardless of the occasion for which it is performed. . . . Percussion instruments are the most common among the Baoule. A variety of drums may be struck either by the hands or with sticks. Each type of drum bears a special name, while many are reserved only for certain dances. Metal instruments include the beiled anklets, (called *glegni*), a bell shaped instrument struck with a stick held in the opposite hand (the *cocowa*), and a variety of grooved and perforated metal objects which are usually stroked with a stick to give a wash-board-like sound."

The music of this example was performed at a festival of music and dance held yearly in the village of Sakasso. It is fast, brilliant drumming, with the middle drums in strong patterns that cross each back and forth, their rhythms moving against the regular pulse of the metal bell which is not directly tied to the drum rhythm moving around it. Unlike the jazz drum solo from New Orleans/Chicago, this is true polyrhythm, with the multi-leveled texturing that is the basis of the drum orchestra.

Band 11. United States - New York Contemporary Jazz Drumming
Recorded in New York by Moses Asch

There is still the centering around a single rhythmic pulse that was present in the drumming of Baby Dodds, but here the accenting is more complex, and the basic pulse has shifted to the metal cymbal, which brings it closer in tonal structure to the African style. It is virtuoso drumming, consciously stylized within the framework of the commercial jazz music, which has drawn on musical influences from a wide range of instrumental and vocal sources.

Side B Voices and Vocal Styles

Band 1. Liberia, Kpelle - Work Songs
From Folkways FE 4465

The Kpelle people live to the northwest of the Gio tribe heard on A7, and they are one of the dominant cultural groups of central Liberia. Six men are cutting bush to clear the land for rice planting. They are cutting with long knives, called the *cutlas*, and the sounds of the cutting can be heard as they sing. This is not a work song in the sense of a gang song used to coordinate work movements - like the pulling or

chopping songs of the American black prison gangs. As in the earlier example of music from the Liberian culture area there is a strong, strictly rhythmized chorus and more freely rhythmized vocal phrasing in the lead voices. It is mostly a song to pass the time as they're working. The vocal tone is very hard and dark. The song form is not responsive - that is, there is no leader and answering chorus as was common in American gang work song.

Band 2. Cameroons. Mixed Culture - Work Song

Recorded in the Cameroons by Robert and Pat Ritzenthaler, from Folkways FE 4372

Cameroon is to the south east of Nigeria, at the eastern end of the long concave crescent of African coastline formed by the Gulf of Guinea. This example was recorded in the highland area of the Bafut people. Robert Ritzenthaler wrote in his description of this song, "As the coffee-sifters work at the United Africa Corporation warehouse in Bamenda, they sing while they sift and bag the coffee beans. The rhythm is supplied by the coffee beans rattling in the sifting box as the coffee goes through it. . . In the background can be heard the thud of cow-hides as they are thrown from the weighing scales to a pile across the room. Since these men come from all over the Cameroons, some of the songs they sing have worked their way up from the coast."

Cameroon is to the east of the area which was drawn on most heavily for slaves, but the culture is not that different from other cultures to the west, and many of the characteristics of song and dance are similar. This example is unusual in its being of mixed tribal groups, but the responsive nature of the singing - a chanted chorus responding to the leader - could accommodate men of different areas and music. The responding chorus is in unison, beautifully phrased, again - as in Band 1 - not closely related to a work rhythm. The singing is with the throat fairly closed, the taken taut and hard.

Band 3. Jamaica - Work Song

Recorded in Jamaica by Edward Seaga, from Folkways FE 4453

Jamaica, despite its long isolation from Africa, and the mixing of Western European and East Indian elements in its culture, is still a rich source of dance and music which has close correspondences to the music of Africa. There are still survivals of African languages, and Edward Seaga, who recorded this example submitted a sample list of forty-eight words which the Kumina followers - a religious cult - said were of Congo origin to the Institute of African and Oriental Studies in London. Forty-one of the forty-eight were identified as Congo, many of them basic vocabulary words. He described the recording of this example. "These songs are rapidly fading from Jamaican life. This recording was actually taken while the foundation of a house was under construction next to the writer's home. A diesel powered drill had been used to bore and crack obstructing rocks, but at a certain portion of the ground the rock formation proved too soft to be cracked by this machine, and consequently, laborers with pick axes were utilized. The operator of the diesel drill then initiated the singing and soon after the writer made his way across his fence with recording equipment and two bottles of rum. . . The leader poured the first drink of rum partly over his machine and partly on the ground. He described this as the 'usual practice' and could give no other reason. Some of the other singers poured a little in the center of their heads and/or over their axes before drinking. Pouring it on the head is said to be good for health."

The rhythm is more closely related to the work than in the previous examples from Africa, but there is the use of repetitive lower voices in a strictly rhythmized phrase, and middle voices in a freer "talk" rhythm. In some of the melodic phrases there is a suggestion of English sources, and the melody is more clearly defined within a European scale framework, but in the texture, and in the sound of the voices, there is a clear African background.

Band 4. Mali. Dogon - Men's Wedding Song

Recorded in Mali by Betty and W. Gurnee Dyer, from Folkways FE 4338

The area of the Dogon, inland on the Niger River, is far enough from the ocean that it was not stripped by the slavers, but there was considerable movement through the country, and the music is closely related to the styles of the northern slave territories. The influences come from both Muslim sources to the north, and coastal African to the south. This recording was done at Timbuktu, which W. Gurnee Dyer describes as "the fabled, legendary city of Timbuktu which flourished over 600 years ago and on whose caravan trails passed much of the riches of the African kingdoms. Later this city was to become a center of learning famous throughout the Islamic world. Through the years, conquered and looted, Timbuktu became (except for a few surviving monuments of its past) just another unremarkable assortment of mud houses which is its condition today."

It is this northern culture area which is of considerable interest in its background of vocal music which seems to be related to some of the oldest musical sources in the slave areas of North America, not only the Dogon people, but the Taureg people even further to the north east. This example has the same kind of high voice accenting as the example in Band 3. The form of the song is responsive, in a heavy voiced unison chorale. The northern influence can be heard in the melismatic embellishment in the phrasing - the wavering on pitch tones that is so characteristic in Arabic music.

Band 5. United States - Go Down Old Hannah

Recorded in Texas by Peter Seeger and John Lomax Jr. from Folkways FW 6389

It is in music like this that the two elements in Afro-American music, the African and the Anglo-European, can be heard clearly. The form is responsive, but it is the responsive style of while psalm singing - the leader giving the line of the song and the congregation following with their repetition of the line. There is considerable use of European harmony, both in the structure of the song, and in the vocal parts themselves. There is a strong movement to the subdominant on the word "Hannah", then a clear resolution and the harmonic root chord, even though the melody at that point uses some melismatic development. But the sound of the voices, the tone of the singing is African, the sound produced at the back of the throat and using considerable chest resonance.

Band 6. Cameroons. Bafut and United States - Wives' Song and Alabama Children's Song

Example from Cameroon recorded by Robert and Pat Ritzenthaler, from Folkways FE 4372, example from Alabama recorded in Alabama by Harold Courlander, from Folkways FW 6336

The Bafut are a small tribe living in the highlands of Cameroon, and this first example is sung by the wives of the Fon, or divine king of the tribe. In these two examples, one from Africa and the other from the United States, can be heard many of the points of correspondence and - just as much - the points of difference between the two styles. The vocal sound is very similar, and there is the same structuring of voices over handclapping, both are responsive - but in the Alabama children's song there is always the suggestion of European harmonic structure that is not present in the African women's song.

Band 7. Ghana. Akan - Akonodev

Recorded in Ghana by Ivan Annan, from Folkways FW 8859

From Ivan Annan's note on the Akonodev cult music.

"Adowa music plays a very important part in Akan society or for that matter the whole of Ghana excluding the northern part, who have a combination of Islamic influence and indigenous musical patterns. Akonodev is a highly respected religious cult among the Akan speaking people, not only for the legends associated with it, but the many mysterious deeds that have been associated with it. The customs and traditions of the Akan speaking people have spread out so far that only a small section of the entire population have not been influenced by Adowa music. This music is either associated with funeral rites or other memorable moments, and even durbars, where the great deeds of ancestors are included in the lyrics of the chants. The music is performed mostly by old women whose age and philosophical attitude contribute to the betterment of the society and its youth, maintaining the dignity and devotion these older people pass from one generation to the other. The great mystery of Akonodev cannot be exposed because other religious sects have expressed similar communication with it in their environments, and the music also expresses such defiant attitudes in the hands of over a dozen women, playing various indigenous instruments like the bamboo joints in three different tones at different rhythmic or time signatures, various sizes of gourds with beads strung around them (Shekere) with only one male drummer punctuating as the changes are made by the movements of the dancer."

In this music - from the area of the great drum orchestras - can be heard the full complexity of the multi-rhythmized West African drumming. In this example the handclapping provides the regular pulse, and there is also an accented rhythm in a high gong. The richness of this musical fabric is then set as the background of highly stylized unison choral singing, and the complete sound is remarkably textured in its fusion of voice and percussion.

Band 8. Jamaica. Kumina - Country Song

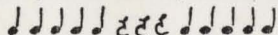
From Folkways FE 4453, recorded in Jamaica by Edward Seaga

The Kumina cult is one of the most important non-Christian

cults in Jamaica and is said by its followers to be of African origin. From Edward Seaga's introduction to their music, "The main instruments used in Kumina are two types of drums: the Kbandu (Congo mbandu), and the "Playing Cast". The former has a lower tone which is achieved either by making this drum a bit larger than the Playing Cast or by 'heeling' it during play, that is, resting the heel against the drum-head. These drums are made from small kegs or certain varieties of wood, primarily coconut. They are headed on one side only and always by goat-skin. The skin is attached to the drum by nails driven through a band which goes around the drum-head.

Both the Kbandu and Playing Cast are almost always less than one foot in diameter and two feet in length. The drummer sits astride the drum and plays it with the palms of his hands. The Kbandu keeps a steady beat while the Playing Cast adopts the particular rhythm used to charm a specific spirit, since all spirits are not charmed by the same rhythm. . ."

This song is in the country language - "Congo" - and could not be translated. In texture it has marked similarities to the music of the Akan in Band 7, but, as is usually the case with Afro-American music, it is less complex, and there is a strongly defined rhythmic pulse. The rhythm can be counted as



with a solo voice, in the pauses in the drum rhythm, singing a short phrase that sounds like the word "Kumina."

Band 9. Cameroons. Ba'ut - Mansa
from Folkways FE 4372

This is a funeral song from near the southern end of the slave crescent. Solo song is part of the musical cultures of the entire area, but it is not nearly as strong a part of the music as the community singing and dancing. It is being sung to a woman who has lost her husband, the text, in part, "Now that you have lost your husband, what are you going to do?" The accompaniment is a five string harp lyre. The solos songs of the southern slave areas seem to have almost no correspondence with solo singing of the southern United States, except in the kind of sound in the voice. The string of the harp are plucked, and there is no harmony in the European sense of the term. The Song's identity comes from the repetitive phrase in the voice. The accent of the accompaniment is not on a point of rhythmic stress that corresponds to the vocal rhythm. Like almost all

African music from these areas the sound seems to "float". The voice is dry, a higher sound than much of the communal singing - even in this simple context close to the polyrhythms of the instrumental or vocal music of this tribe. It is the text that is paramount, and the voice almost chants in its concern with the words.

Band 10. Senegal. Wolof - Samba Gilajapi
From Folkways FE 4462

This is solo song from the northern edge of the slave crescent, from an area and tribe that may have been one of the most important of the sources of slaves for the early period of slave importation into the United States. As Paul Oliver wrote in Savannah Syncopators, "... Professor David Dalby . . notes that 'Senegambia, the nearest part of the Atlantic coast to North America, was a major source of slaves for the former English colonies, and many of these slaves were therefore conversant with the two main languages of Senegambia: Wolof and Mandingo'. The Wolof he notes 'were frequently employed as interpreters and mariners during early European voyages along the African coast. As a result the Wolof names of several African foodstuffs were taken into European languages, including 'banana' and 'yam.' . . . Dr. Dalby's extensive researchers have revealed a remarkable incidence of Wolof survivals in terms and usages, including a significantly high number in jazz usage: too high for mere coincidence. . ."

The Wolof, or one of the closely related tribes from the area, may also have contributed their form of the one truly African instrument to be found in North America, the banjo. In describing the instrument used on this recording David Ames wrote, "The five-stringed instrument, the halam, has an oval-shaped resonator, hollowed out of wood and covered with hide, from which issues a neck as on a guitar, over which horsehair strings are stretched to a bridge on the resonator. The neck is a rounded stick, to which the strings are attached by leather things and the halam is tuned by raising or lowering the leather thongs on the neck. The strings are plucked by the finger nail of the thumb, forefinger, and the middle finger of the right hand, and gewel keep their finger-nails long for this purpose. Occasionally all the fingers are used to strike the resonator as in flamenco guitar-playing. The two longest strings are stopped with the fingers of the left hand without the aid of frets. The three shorter strings are not stopped but are left 'open' and are plucked in a constant pitch." The gewel are the professional performers in the Wolof culture - corresponding to the griots of the Hausa areas of northern

Nigeria. They have sometimes been considered as possible predecessors of the American blues singers, but their role as vocal historians and commentators on tribal lore and custom would seem most closely to correspond to the Scandinavian tribal skald or Irish bard. But their instrument - in some form or another - has survived in the United States as the membrane headed plucked stringed banjo of the early plantation period, and some of this music, as is clear from examples on Side C, has survived in the music of the Kentucky and Virginia mountains.

In this example a gewel tells a folk story, accompanying himself on the halam. It is very conversational in tone - most of it in a kind of half-sung chant. The arabic influence is very clearly marked in the nasal vocal sound, and the wailing quality in the sung sections. There is also almost a harmonic sound in some of the cadences and embellishments. The instrument is clearly accompanying a voice, without an independent role of its own, and it is tuned to an open chord. There is a pungent sound to the tone of the hide and the strings, and in the slight harmonic change in the strumming under the vocal there is almost a basic triad in the three open shorter strings.

Band 11. United States - Blues. Wasting My Time
Recorded in St. Louis by Samuel Charters, from un-issued material in the author's collection.

This is a blues song, as in the previous example, performed by a single male singer accompanying himself on a stringed instrument. The differences are clearly evident - the blues performance more regularly pulsed and with clear bar line and harmonic patterns. Although it is a unique song form, with strong affinities to African vocal style and rhythm, it is most generally defined by its European characteristics, the number of bars in the verse - often 12, though there are many variations - and the use of a consistent I-IV-V harmonic pattern in one of a number of patterns. This is a widely used narrative verse form - the singer is J.D. Short, from Mississippi, but at the time of this recording living in St. Louis - with a tonic harmony under the first line of the refrain, "Just wasting my time." The resolution - to I then V and I - is also in the European style. The voice - heavy, resonant - has the sound of the coastal accents of the central slave areas, and there are intonations and rhythmic subtleties that are clearly outside the European tradition, but it is a hybrid form in which African elements are subordinated to European.

Side C - SOME OTHER INSTRUMENTS

The Banjo

Band 1. Senegal. Wolof - Tara
From Folkways FE 4372

This is a performance by two gewel - professional musicians - from the Wolof people, playing a traditional song on two halam. It could almost be considered a fusion of the Arabic and the African cultures, as can much of this music from the northern area of the slave coast. It is, however, a fusion that goes back before the period of the American slave trade, and some of this music in somewhat this form probably came into the slave areas in the 17th and 18th century. It is a finger picked style, with a kind of harmonic movement back and forth between a subdominant and a tonic chord. The two instruments sometimes both accent the rhythm, then shift away from it, often crossing in a pattern than can be roughly notated as,



Band 2. Mail. Taureg - Minstrels
From FE 4338

In this recording - of two musicians at Timbuktu - there is some of the same intricacy of pattern, and shifting accent, although it is performed by a different tribal group. Like the Wolof the Taureg have had extensive contact with the Arabs, and their music is this same fusion of African rhythm and Arabic vocal and harmonic style. A steady pulse is felt as a stress point at the beginning of each twelve unit phrase, but by the end of the phrase the stress has shifted away. There is also a melodic shaping that suggests a repeated harmonic pattern through the performance.

Band 3. United States - Kentucky Banjo Instrumental
Recorded in Kentucky by John Cohen, from Folkways
FA 2317

From John Cohen's notes on the banjo selections he recorded in this area of eastern Kentucky, almost all of it within twenty miles of the town of Hazard.

"Most of the banjo players on this record know each other and have played together at various times. They generally use a two finger style of picking - alternating between thumb and forefinger. Generally the thumb picks out the melody. The first and fifth strings serve for rhythmic punctuations and syncopations - or act as drones - repeating the same notes over and over. There appears to be a long tradition here of tunes which were played for dances and banjo contests in earlier years. Ask any local banjo player to play 'Hook and Line' - it is generally the first piece he learned. A great variety of banjo tunings are used - often there is a special tuning for a specific tune. Generally there is something extremely percussive in the style used here . . ."

The sound of the Kentucky five-string banjo may be one of the most unusual correspondences between the music of Africa and the music of the Americas - for the performers are white, and often thought of as the most important source of traditional Anglo-American song and instrumental music in the United States. But no one has as yet studied their banjo music for its possible link to Africa. The songs sung with banjo accompaniment are often English, or usually folk songs associated with the United States or England. But what about the banjo playing itself? There is nothing in the English or American white musical background even vaguely like mountain banjo playing, which was even considerably different from the "proper" banjo techniques taught in music schools in the 19th Century. The only answer is that the tradition is black - and that it is from Africa. It is now generally agreed that the instrument itself is African - descended from the stringed instruments of the northern or the savannah slave areas. As was pointed out by Curt Schis years ago a similar instrument from Senegal was called the bania, so the name itself has an African background.

As to the playing style itself - listening to the examples from these older Kentucky traditions it seems very clear that under the superimposed harmonic elements and the European song style the banjo playing has many of the elements of the haram playing, or the playing of other related instruments from West Africa, such as the kora or the bania. The strings are plucked, rather than strummed; there is affixed pitch drone string, and as John Cohen noted, "Generally there is something extremely percussive in the style. . .". It is, now, a mixture of many elements, but the African characteristics remain strongly present in these older styles. In this example there is harmonic movement - the chords change - but the harmonies are almost overwhelmed in the complexities of the inner voiced rhythms, and the scale itself is not purely diatonic. For some sections the rhythm is marked with a single stress, but between the melodic sections there are sections of almost pure rhythmic shifting.

Since there seems to be a definite correspondence in the music itself the last two questions are, 1. Does the music of the plucked string instruments come from areas where slaves were taken to North America, and 2. Did the whites learn the music from blacks? The answer to the first question is, yes, there were many slaves brought from this northern area, and even more significantly they were brought earlier than slaves from areas to the south, and many of them were concentrated in the then dominant slave areas in Virginia and neighboring states.

Also, because of their more Arabic features and quick intelligence they were favored as house servants. And the answer to the second question is, also, yes. Until the guitar replaced the banjo as the dominant accompaniment instrument for black music in the United States - which took place not too long before the development of the commercial recording industry - the banjo and the black musician were considered to be synonymous. The first minstrel companies - the first instance of young whites forming small musical groups to imitate blacks - included a performer imitating black banjo playing, and it was a feature of the minstrel theatre for nearly a century. More directly, many of the older banjo players in Kentucky or Virginia today remember that they learned their music from a black banjo player.

In its truest sense these Kentucky musicians could be said to be carrying on the older tradition of singing and instrumental music in the area where they made their homes. They have, simply, preserved everything - even the black music that was part of this past. Along with English ballads, Irish reels, Scottish lullabies, Americal colonial courting songs, and the sentimental songs of the minstrel stage - they have also kept alive a music from Africa which has - now - almost completely been lost by the black man in America.

Band 4. United States - Virginia Banjo Instrumental
Recorded in Virginia by Eric H. Davidson, from Folkways
FA 2363

The performer in this example, Wase Ward, learned this piece from his brother, but as Eric Davidson noted, "Wade suspects this tune to have been of local Negro origin, but has never heard it played except by his brother." This is less complex than the previous example, with a kind of jig rhythm repeating over and over in the piece, with its

The melody is not purely diatonic, and there is an interesting shift in rhythm pattern from first 8 then 7 beat melodic units. The melody is a simple phrase that repeats over and over, like the kind of melodic phrases that are characteristic of this style of music in Africa.

Band 5. United States - Kentucky Banjo with Voice
From Folkways FA 2317

Again the inner rhythms are very pronounced, and though there is a strong pulse there is continual shifting in vocal stress points. There is almost a drumming sound to the performance at many points. The singer is an older man, Roscoe Holcomb, from Daisy, Kentucky, and John Cohen, who discovered and recorded Holcomb, has found that he had some familiarity with the blues styles of the 1920's.

Band 6. Liberia, Kpelle - Instrumental
From Folkways FE 4465

From Packard Okie's note on the example, "This is a solo performance. The singer plucks the strings with his right hand, while tapping with a ring on the finger of his left hand. The harp has seven wire strings. Each is attached to a separate strip of bamboo, which is springy enough to give tension to the string. The other ends of the bamboo strips are attached to a gourd for resonance. A rattle made of small pieces of tin, a watch chain, and other ornaments, slopes off the neck of the instrument."

This is not an instrument of the banjo family, but it is a plucked string instrument, with some of the same characteristics in repetitive inner rhythms, and the percussive sound of the plucking. The voice is more conversational, without the nasal melismatic ornament of the northern areas - which were more influenced by arabic music.

THE HARP

Band 7. Liberia, Bassa - Belly Harp
From Folkways FE 4465

Until the entrance of the voice this has somewhat the sound of Kentucky mountain clogging. Packard Okie, who recorded this example, did much work with the different tribal groups in Liberia. This performance is by a Bassa musician, his tribe one of the subgroups in the Kru language group. "Jeffly, a partially blind Bassa man, working near Gbanga, Central Province, assisted by another Bassa man, Bo. Jeffly sang and played the harp; Bo assisted in the singing, and beat lightly on a chair with sticks.

"The harp has a triangular frame made of sticks. Small pieces of tin on a nail at one corner give a rattle effect. Half a gourd lashed tightly to another corner gives the resonance. The gourd is held against the stomach, and occasionally taken away during the playing, making a 'wa' sound. There are six strings made of thin vine, tied through holes at one end, and tied around the stick at the other."

There is the dry, hard drumming sound in the thin strings, the repetitive plucking, the stringed instruments of the West African coastal areas showing their strong affinity to the music of the drums.

Band 8. Ivory Coast, Baoule - Diourou
From Folkways FE 4476

This is another of the many kinds of African lyre harps. This is an instrument called, in Donald Thurow's note, diourou. "The five strings of this instrument are stretched across an eight inch wooden arch which is attached to a section of gourd which serves as a sounding board. This instrument is now rather rare among the Baoule, and is used only for the musician's own amusement or as an adjunct to courting." This is a simple melody, two sequential phrases following each other in flowing repetitions without a break, the two phrases a semi-tone apart.

Band 9. Mexico - Vera Cruz-style Harp
Recorded in Sonora, Mexico by Samuel Charters, from
Folkways FW 6957

Although the performer is a Yaqui Indian he is playing a wooden harp from Vera Cruz - on Mexico's east coast - in a style considered indigenous to the area. During the Mexican government's attempts to disperse the Yaquis during the 1930's he was taken to Vera Cruz, and learned the music there. This part of Mexico had a large black population and the music has a strong African influence. Here there is a definite harmonic pattern, but the melody is two repetitive phrases, with some of the feeling of Example 8. The two phrases again follow each other in a flowing pattern, but the interval between them is here a whole tone apart. The instrument was a hand made folk version of the standing European harp, but it was tuned away from a European scale.

THE XYLOPHONE

Band 10. Liberia, Mandingo - Balafon

The xylophone is another instrument, like the banjo, which seems to have a direct connection to its West African counterparts. Packard Okie describes the Mandingo balafon as having, "... 17 strips of wood between 11 and 16 inches long, between one inch and an inch and five eighths wide and less than an inch thick. The ends and middle are thinned from the bottom in varying amounts for tuning and toning. The range is, roughly, from C up two and a third octaves to E flat. Under each strip is a spherical gourd between 2½ and 5 inches in diameter. The whole instrument is lashed together with native string on a flexible bamboo frame three feet long. The player puts his instrument on the ground in front of him and uses two sticks with rubber heads." In this example the voice chants against the rhythms of two balafons, the phrases repeating behind the simple melody.

Band 11. Ivory Coast - Bacule
From Folkways FE 4476

In this example a melodic unit is expressed in a dry, hard tone over and over again, and there is the same semitone alteration in the simple sequences. From Donald Thurow's note, "Xylophone music has come to the Baoule from the north. The Baoule xylophone is a crude affair of six graduated bars of very hard wood laid across two pieces of split banana trunk. They are struck by hard wooden sticks. The instrument is used principally to amuse oneself while resting from arduous field work. ..."

Band 12. Mexico - Marimba
From Folkways FW 6815

This is the fully developed xylophone, played by several musicians, the music completely European in structure. The sound, however, is the same as the African instruments from which it is derived, and the playing technique is also similar.

THE MUSICAL BOW

Band 13. Liberia, Bassa - Musical Bow

The bow is played by many tribal groups throughout the world, and it would be difficult to say that African bow music influenced American bow music. It could have been another element passed on to the Indians from slaves, or escaped slaves, but it is more likely that American Indians were playing the bow at an earlier period. In this example the African inflected speech patterns make it possible for the performer to tell a story as he plays.

From Packard Okie's note, "The player is Jon Wieh, from the deep interior of the Bassa area, near the Mano tribe. He recorded this song while working at Bromley on the St. Paul River, saving money to get a gun for his father and a wife for himself. The instrument is a piece of rattan vine on a bowed stick. The player's left hand held one end of the instrument and a short stick which varied the pitch as he pressed it against the vine. His right hand struck the vine with another stick. His mouth surrounded one end of the string, varying the resonance, coloring the tone, and making the instrument "talk."

Side D Some Examples

Band 1. United States - Gospel Song - I Have Two Wings
From RBF 5, compiled by Samuel Charters

In each of these examples can be heard some aspect of the African musical background, as well as the intermingling with the European music that shaped and changed slave music. In

this example there is a strong use of some of the most basic rhythmic devices. The music has the strong emphasis on the off beats and the marked bar line of the typical revival song, but there is the responsive singing, the rhythmic handclapping, the unison chorale, and the same sound of the voices. The stress is more definite - there is little polyrhythmic texturing - but the phrase length is irregular and the guitar is being used as another element in the rhythm.

This performance is by the Two Winged Temple, a small religious group in New Orleans, led by Rev. Utah Smith.

Band 2. United States - Blues Song - Saddlehorse Blues
Recorded in St. Louis by Samuel Charters, unissued material.

This example of the American country blues was recorded by the singer George Montgomery, known as "Daddy Hotcakes." Although the blues style seems to have little relationship to African music there is some of the sense of conversational vocal tone and irregular rhythmic phrasing in the voice. Montgomery was a spontaneous performer - making up each song as he went along, which accounts for some of the freedom. At times the voice and the guitar were intertwined as melodic units - with a beautiful use of the entire range of blues effects - at other times the guitar played a simple chorded accompaniment. The modern blues seems to be one of the anomalies of black music - it is the most characteristically black style in the United States, but it seems to have little clear correspondence to any musical forms yet found in Africa. Elements of the blues can be found in some African music - Paul Oliver has found similarities in the playing techniques of the griots - professional musicians in the northern areas - and the blues musicians, but the two styles, taken as a complete music - voice and instrument - are markedly different.

Band 3. Bahamas Islands - Dance Song - When A Man Marries His Troubles Just Begin
Recorded on Andros Island, the Bahamas, by Samuel Charters, from Folkways FS 3846

This has a little of the texturing of drum and melodic line that is also found in Africa's modern dance music, the "high-life" music of the cities. The two melodic instruments - trumpets played by sponge fishermen who play only for festivals - cross in quasi-harmonies that lead to a shifting of the beat while there is an inventive and busy drummer playing a nail keg drum. The regular rhythm of the African drum orchestra is here carried by the mandolin, played by the singer, but there are no claves. Like "high-life" music it is almost a kind of jazz, with its elements of improvisation and structuring of the performance.

Band 4. United States - New Orleans Brass Band - Just A Little While To Stay Here
Recorded in New Orleans by Samuel Charters, from Folkways FA 2641

With groups like the Eureka Brass Band - at the time of this recording the most important of the traditional brass bands still playing in New Orleans - the music is almost a complete hybrid. The general form of the playing is the village brass band style from France, where different instrumental groups alternate playing the melody, but the basic snare drumming is closer to English marching band techniques. But there are still subtle changes - the sudden bursts of more complex rhythm from the bass drummer - the shifts of stress in the trumpets and saxophones - the entire multi-layering of the melody. All of this gives the music a uniqueness that ties it - in part - to a distantly glimpsed African heritage.

Band 5. United States - Gospel Group - He's a Friend of Mine
From RBF 5

Here the singing style itself - the sound of the voice - the use of melismatic embellishment - is the element most directly relating back to the past. But there are still persistent rhythmic subtleties, despite the literalness of the harmonies - still the richer texturing of the voices, which seems to be reminiscent of the complex interweaving of rhythms in the drum orchestra.

Band 6. United States - Jazz At The Philharmonic - Blues, Part 3 from Asch AA 3/4

In this jazz performance from the 1940's the strongest element is the texturing, from the basic lower pulse of the bass drum and the bass, the shifting accents in the piano, and the repetitive sequencing of the guitar. On one level African concepts have been expanded and developed - in melody and instrumental voicings - and on others the concepts have been drastically simplified. The harmonic form forces a uniform phrase on the music and the single basic pulse limits the range of rhythmic shifting. But there is a sound - a sense of something different - the feeling that there is a different past - the voices of a different people, that is the legacy of African survivals in American music today.

SOME EARLY DOCUMENTS - 1.

In 1960 and 1961, working with archive materials in the Scottish Library in Edinburgh, the British Museum, and the New York Public Library, Ann Charters found considerable material relating to early African music, as well as black music in the southern states. There is a wealth of material still to be uncovered in these sources, and as more work is done with early documents it will be possible to construct a much clearer picture of the interrelationships between African and Afro-American music. The travelers along the slave coast were not musicians, but they were generally careful observers, and their descriptions of instruments are often detailed and clear. By comparing different descriptions of the same instrument it is possible to get some idea of its form, as well as differences in methods of construction among neighboring tribes. It isn't possible to get any more than the vaguest sense of the music played from the descriptions, but the vague glimpse does show that many of the styles and instruments have survived to the present, though there have undoubtedly been many changes in musical forms and idioms in the centuries that have passed. Despite the difficulties that these travelers accounts present they are the only contemporary descriptions we have of African music at the height of the slave trade, so any study of African music in the Americas has to begin here.

These descriptions of music in the slave areas in the 17th and 18th Centuries - the period of the most active slave commerce - are taken from some of the following sources:

Jean Baptiste Labat, Nouvelle Relation del Afrique Occidentale, Paris, 1728.

Cpt. Richard Jobson, Voyage for the Discovery of the River Gambia and the Golden Trade of Tombuto, in the year 1620 and 1621, London, 1623.

Francis Moore, Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa, London, 1738.

Sieur Villault, Escuyer, Sieur de Belford, Abstract of a Voyage to the Coast of Africa and Guinea in 1666. London, 1670.

Cpt. Thomas Phillips, Abstract of a Voyage along the Coast of Guinea to Whidah, the Isle of St. Thomas, and thence to Barbadoes in 1693, London, 1697.

Godfrey Loyer, Voyage to Issini on the Gold Coast in 1701. Paris, 1714.

John Atkins, A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil and the West Indies in the 'Swallow' and 'Weymouth' Men Of War, 1721. London, 1735.

Chevalier des Marchais, A Voyage to Guinea and the Adjacent Islands, in 1725. Amsterdam, 1731.

Sieur Le Maire, Voyage to the Canary Isles, Cape de Verde, Sanaga, and Gambia, in 1682. London, 1696.

Translations are from Green's Collection of Voyages, London, 1745.

From Labat's description of what is now called Sierra Leone, a meeting with Arab traders:

"Several men armed quickly arrived, some on camels, others on horseback, preceded by a trumpet and a drum . . . During the dinner their female Guiriot, or Musician, sung and played on an instrument made of a Kalabash, covered with red Parchment and fitted with twelve Strings, some of Silver and some of Wire, the sound of which was not unlike a Harp. This Guiriot was young, handsome, and her head adorned with many trinkets of Gold, Silver, Coral, and Amber. . ."

The word Guiriot would seem to be an earlier spelling of the word Griot, used to describe these musicians today. From Loyer's account of the Guinea Coast in 1701:

". . . During the Combat the Drums, Trumpets, and other Instruments in their way continually sound; which joined to the Cries of the Negroes, make a Noise louder than Thunder. Their drums are made of a Piece of Wood, hollowed at one End only, and covered with the Ear of an Elephant, tightly bound over the Mouth. Their sticks are two Pieces of Wood shaped like a Hammer, covered with Goat's Skin, which give a dull, hoarse Sound.

"Their Trumpets are made of Elephants Teeth, hollowed almost to the End, at the Side of which they bore a small Hole, by which the Trumpeter, who is generally a Boy of twelve or fifteen, blows.

These Trumpets give a clear Sound, but without varying the Tone, like Cowherds Horns. To this . . . they add an Instrument as remarkable for the Simplicity of its Construction, as it is hard to be described. It is of Iron, shaped like two small concave Fire-Shovels, about a Foot long, soldered together, and which form a kind of oval Belly. A Boy holds this instrument by the small end, and with a Stick of half a foot long strikes on it according to the Cadence of the Drums and Trumpets, who are always near the General, while the Fight lasts . . ."

From Labat, "Their drums are hollow trunks of trees, covered at one end with a Sheep or Goat-skin well stretched. Sometimes they beat it with their fingers only, but oftener with two sticks of different thickness and round heads. They are made of a hard, heavy wood, or Pine, or Ebony. They have Drums of different diameters and Lengths, to give different tones. There are some of five feet long and twenty or thirty inches in diameter. (All give a dead, stunning sound). This is their favorite instrument, and a constant companion in all their Feasts."

"The Mandingo drums," according to Moore, "are about a yard long, and about a foot or twenty inches diameter at Top, but less at the Bottom; made out of a solid piece of wood, and covered only at the widest end with a kid's skin. They beat upon them only with one stick and their left hand." Jobson says, "They make use of a little drum, which being held under the left Arm, is played with the fingers of that Hand, and with a crooked stick managed by his right."

The most common of the three instruments which Jobson saw among the Gambia Negroes was made with a great Gourd for a Belly, at the Bottom of a long neck without Frets, having six strings and Pins to wind them into Tune. This was the only instrument played on with their fingers. This instrument was often accompanied with the little drum above described. From Le Maire, "On the coast they have another sort, fit for the Chamber of a sick person. It is a kind of lute, made of a piece of hollow wood covered with leather, with two or three hair strings, and adorned with iron plates and rings, like a Tombour de Basque."

There are many descriptions of the instrument known in Europe and America as the xylophone, generally with a name close to Balafo, its present name in many parts of West Africa. Moore was welcomed with some music on this instrument, which at about one hundred yards distance sounded something like an organ. "It is composed of about twenty pipes of very hard wood, finely polished; gradually diminishing both in length and breadth, and tied together with thongs of very fine, thin leather. These thongs are twisted about small round wands and put between every pipe to make a small space. Underneath the pipes are fastened twelve or fourteen calabashes of different sizes, which have the same effect as organ-pipes."

Two voyagers to the Guinea Coast, Artus and Villaut, Villaut's account titled, Voyage to the Coast of Africa and Guinea in 1666, both mention instruments like a guitar, or gittern. This could be one of the type of halam from the north, but it is probably a derivation of the Portuguese small guitar which was found in many areas of the coast, in its African form called ranke, or a related word. A third traveler, Barbot, speaks of Basons, drums, blowing horns, snappers, such as boys use instead of castanets, and the six-stringed instrument, which he calls a Gittern. Villault took notice only of three instruments, a kind of drum or tabor, a cane with several holes in it, like a flute, and the six stringed instrument, according to him, something like a Guitarr.

Of the role of the musician in the society there seems to be considerable agreement, although there are differences in the name. "Those who play on the instruments are persons of a very singular character, and seem to be their poets as well as musicians, not unlike the Bards among the Irish and the ancient Britons. All the French authors, who describe the countries of the Jalofs and Fulis, call them Guiriots, but Jobson gives them the name of Juddies, which he interprets fiddlers. Perhaps the former is the Jalof and Fuli name, the latter, the Mandingo."

The traveler Barbot says the Guiriot, in the language of the Negroes toward the Sanaga, signifies Buffoon, and they they are a sort of syncophant. "The Kings and great men in the country keep each of them two, three, or more of these Guiriots to divert them, and entertain Foreigners on occasion."

From Barbot. "The guiriots have the sole privilege of carrying the Olamba, or great long Drum-Royal, made of a fine goat-skin, before the king, when he goes to War. This the guiriot hangs about his neck and beats with small sticks, or with hands . . . at other times, to divert their Masters, they have Timbrel after the Morisco Fashion, made like flat ball-baskets, tied athwart with several small strings, which they touch with one hand, or grasp with their fingers and beat upon it with the other . . . This drum is called Iolambe."

From LeMaire, again on the Guiriots. "The Negroes are transported with the Elogies of the Guiriots and largely rec-

ompense them. . . When they miss of their expected fees they fall a railing, and publish in the Villages as many base things as they invent against the person, contradicting whatever they had said good of them; which is looked upon to be the greatest Affront imaginable."

From Jobson. "The fiddlers (guiriots) are reckoned rich, and their wives have more crystal, blue stones, and beads about them than the king's wives . . . and it is remarkable that after all this fondness of the people for music, and yet the Musician is held in great contempt and is denied their common Rite of Burial, instead of which the Corps is set upright in a hollow tree, and left there to rot. The reason they give for this treatment is, that these cantators have a familiar converse with their Devil, Ho-re." "Labat agrees almost in everything with Jobson: He says that the greater part of the Negroes, especially the politer sort, look upon the musicians as infamous, although, being necessary Tools for their Pleasure, they do not shew it while living: But as soon as they are dead, this contempt appears, since they do not suffer their wives or children to put the corps into the ground . . . the Drummers relations are forced to stick the carcass up in some hollow Tree, there to remain till it be devoured by the wolves, or some other ravenous beasts."

(From Green's Collection)

SOME EARLY DOCUMENTS - 2.

In the 19th Century, when there were still large numbers of African born slaves in the American south, there was considerable interest in black music. Again, as in the period of African exploration, almost all of the work of collecting and describing was done by non-musicians, usually travelers or magazine writers. Some of the work done, however, is of considerable historical value. One of the best known of these articles is George Washington Cable's "The Dance In Place Congo," describing a dance in an open square in New Orleans before the Civil War. From his careful description of the instruments it is clear that at this point the link with Africa was very close. Even more remarkable is his familiarity with the tribes of the slave coast, and his ability to identify tribal characteristics among the dancers. Of all the things the black man and the black woman has lost in America the loss of a tribal background is perhaps the most tragic, since in Africa the tribe is the source of a man's identity. Cable's article is one of the most detailed from the period, and with his other long article, "Creole Slave Songs," both published in Century Magazine in 1886, gives us perhaps the best insight into the strength of the African culture still surviving in the South at this time.

Jeannette Robinson Murphy's article "The Survival of Africa Music in America," printed in Appleton's Popular Science Monthly, September, 1899, is less well known, but it was certainly the result of years of observation and some understanding of what she was hearing. Her sympathy for the religious aspect of some of the music limited her view, but there is a strong interest in all of it, and she was one of the few people at this time to try to discuss the problem with a native African, a man from the Mende tribe of Sierra Leone. In other articles and travelers' descriptions there is usually not much detail, but sometimes a paragraph or a short section will catch some spirit of the music. This selection is not intended to be complete, but only to give some feeling of what the music of the African in America sounded like at this point when it was beginning to take on new styles and new forms in a hostile new world.

Slavery On Louisiana Sugar Plantations

V. Alton Moody

from Journal of the Louisiana Historical Society, 1924

Negro balls in general were spectacles worth beholding. Those of Louisiana Negroes when their customs were more primitive and when superstition was more powerful were strange and weird. Dancing to the music of a drum made of cowhide stretched over the end of a barrel, they circled and swung each other in the spectacular dances until they were almost frenzied. When one set was exhausted others took their places and the dance went on. In dancing the "carabine" the man took his "danseuse" by the hand and whirled her rapidly and almost interminable while she waved her red handkerchief on high and sang over and over again some strange French couplet. In dancing the less graceful but more strange "pile chactas" the order was reversed. The woman scarcely moved her feet as she danced while the man was turning around her, kneeling, making grotesque faces and writhing and twisting like a serpent. When the object of his affections had become sufficiently enchanted she became excited and sang and waved her gaudy handkerchief over her jubilant companion. She concluded by obligingly drying the perspiration from the face of her "danseur" and, finally, from the faces of the musicians. . . .

(The custom of making a gala occasion out of the last sugar cane to be cut in a field). . . When the hands reached the last rows left standing, the foreman, "commandeur", chose the tallest cane, and the best laborer, "le meilleur couteau", came to the cane chosen, which was the only one left in the field uncut. Then the whole gang congregated around the spot, with the overseer and the foreman, and the latter, taking a blue ribbon, tied it to the cane, and, brandishing the knife in the air, sang to the cane as if it were a person, and danced around it several times before cutting it. When this was done, all the laborers, men, women and children, mounted in the empty carts, carrying the last cane in triumph, waving colored handkerchiefs in the air, and singing as loud as they could. The procession went to the house of the master, who gave a drink to every Negro, and the day ended with a ball, amid general rejoicing.

(It is interesting to note a more detailed description of part of the cane cutting ceremony in a family travel book in the British Museum.)

Journal Of A Tour In America, 1824-1825

Hon. E. Stanley

Privately printed, 1930

In Louisiana Cane Fields

. . . We happened to arrive on the very day when M. Labranche's harvest closed, and just came in for a Negro fete, upon the principal of our harvest homes. The last load of cane arrived while we were in the sugar house, escorted by as curious a procession as I ever saw. The cart was drawn by oxen, covered with flags and ribbons, surrounded by a group chiefly of women and boys, singing, dancing and laughing - and accompanied by a band of music . . . The principal instruments were two imitations of drums, formed out of an old barrel with a oxhide stretched over it, and beaten with the hand; a horse's jaw with the teeth in, scraped or beaten with a stick: a cane split and notched, against which another stick was rattled: a gourd with a stick run through it; and another gourd partly filled with seeds and pebbles. With this music they proceeded to a building connected with the works, where all the hands not immediately occupied attended, either as spectators or performers. A man and girl then advanced to dance a Congo dance, which appeared to excite great applause and amusement. . . From the sugar house the merry party adjourned to the front of the house, where on the square lawn they had put up a high pole, with a popinjay figure of a bird on the top. Here they ranged themselves into two lines, their band playing all the time, when an old merry looking Negro, a native Guinea man, came out with a crooked stick which he carried in imitation of a gun, to perform a species of pantomime. Keeping all the while the most perfect time, he shouldered his gun, presented it at the bird, took it down, examined the priming, went down on his knee, took aim, crept cautiously first to one side then to the other, approached, retired, went round, trying all points, at last took aim, pulled - the gun missed fire - he took it down, examined it, hammered the flint, took aim again, fired, and was knocked backwards by the recoil - a denouement which seemed to afford infinite amusement. He then returned, and made a speech, in what language I know not, in a sort of recitative, several others occasionally joining in a chorus. . . . (The pantomime was possibly a survival of the kind of ridicule dances of West Africa - and the person ridiculed was probably a white hunter, struggling with his unwieldy gun.)

NY: Putnam's Sons, 1904

Frederick Law Olmsted - A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854

p. 19-20 (in S. Carolina) "Returning to the railroad, I found a comfortable, warm passenger-car, and, wrapped in my blanket, went to sleep. At midnight I was awakened by loud laughter, and, looking out, saw that the loading gang of Negroes had made a fire, and were enjoying a right merry repast. Suddenly, one raised such a sound as I never heard before; a long, loud, musical shout, rising, and falling, and breaking into falsetto, his voice ringing through the woods in the clear, frosty night air, like a bugle-call. As he finished, the melody was caught up by another, and then, another, and then, by several in chorus. . . . After a few minutes I could hear one urging the rest to come to work again, and soon he stepped towards the cotton bales, saying, 'Come, brederen, come; let's go at it; come now, echo! roll away! eecho-eecho-weeicho-ii' -- and the rest taking it up as before, in a few moments they all had their shoulders to a bale of cotton, and were rolling it up the embankment."

From An Ex-Southerner In South Carolina Atlantic July 1870

"I had occasion to go a long journey in a row-boat with a crew of six Negro boatmen. Our course lay through the in-

tricate channels which lead from Bull River to Beaufort. For the first hour the stroke oar was sullen, and the rest of the crew chattered. There was an evident embarrassment on account of the presence of a strange white man. Seeing this, I feigned sleep, not a difficult task under the influence of the warm sun and monotonous clank of the oars in the row-locks. At length, after a moments pause, which showed a spontaneous impulse, one of the men began a sort of religious chant in a high-pitched voice, which the others joined in a sort of continuous accompaniment of four or five words, ending with a cry mournful enough to have been the expression of great pain. I have forgotten the words of the song; it was something about going to Jesus, I believe, but every time my thoughts go back to the Sea Islands, I see the intense, rapt faces of my crew, their eyes rolling, their heads swaying, their whole bodies swinging to the time of the music, until the boat, which before had only crawled against the tide, swept along by the successive leaps which their strong arms gave to the oars." The singers found "their way back to the spiritual Africa through their song."... Later "I heard the responsive cry which came from some solitary black paddling slowly along with the tide...."

from "The Dance In Place Congo,"
by George Washington Cable
Century Magazine, 1886

The drums were very long, hollowed, often from a single piece of wood, open at one end and having a sheep or goat skin stretched across the other. One was large, the other much smaller. The tight skin heads were not held up to be struck; the drums were laid along on the turb and the drummers bestrode them, and beat them on the head madly with fingers, fists, and feet, -- with slow vehemence on the great drum, and fiercely and rapidly on the small one. Sometimes an extra performer sat on the ground behind the larger drum, at its open end, and "beat upon the wooden sides of it with two sticks." The smaller drum was often made from a joint or two of very large bamboo, in the West Indies where such could be got, and this is said to be the origin of its name; for it was called the Bamboula.

In stolen hours of night or the basking-hour of noon the black man contrived to fashion these rude instruments and others. The drummers, I say, bestrode the drums; the other musicians sat about them in an arc, cross-legged on the ground. One important instrument was a gourd partly filled with pebbles or grains of corn, flourished violently at the end of a stout staff with one hand and beaten upon the palm of the other. Other performers rang triangles, and others twanged from Jew's-harps an astonishing amount of sound. Another instrument was the jawbone of some ox, horse, or mule, and a key rattled rhythmically along its weather-beaten teeth. At times the drums were reinforced by one or more empty barrels or casks beaten on the head with the shank-bones of cattle.

A queer thing that went with these when the affair was pretentious -- full dress; as it were -- at least it was so in the West Indies, whence Congo Plains drew all inspirations -- was the Marimba brett, a union of reed and string principles. A single strand of wire ran lengthwise of a bit of wooden board, sometimes a shallow box of thin wood, some eight inches long by four or five in width, across which, under the wire, were several joints of reed about a quarter of an inch in diameter and of graduated lengths. The performer, sitting cross-legged, held the board in both hands and plucked the ends of the reeds with his thumb-nails. The result was called -- music.

But the grand instrument at last, the first violin, as one might say, was the banjo. It had but four strings, not six; beware of the dictionary. It is not the "favorite musical instrument of the Negroes of the Southern States of America." Uncle Remus says truly that that is the fiddle; but for the true African dance, a dance not so much of legs and feet as of the upper half of the body, a sensual, devilish thing tolerated only by Latin-American masters, there was wanted the dark inspiration of African drums and the banjo's thrump and strum.

And then there was that long-drawn human cry of tremendous volume, richness, and resound, to which no instrument within their reach could make the faintest approach:

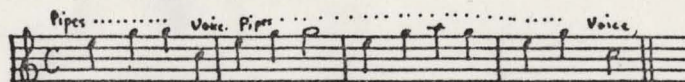
"Eh' pou la belle Layotte ma mourri nocent,
Qui nocent ma mourri!"

all the instruments silent while it rises and swells with mighty energy and dies away distantly, "Yea-a-a-a-a!" -- then the crash of savage drums, horns, and rattles --

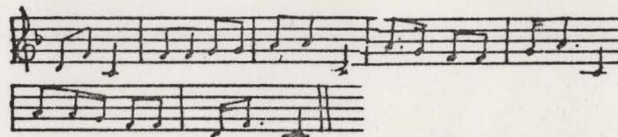
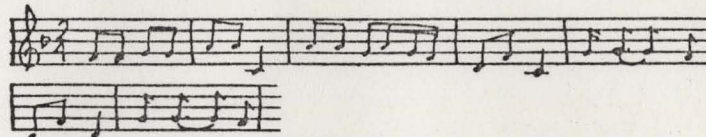
"For the fair Layotte I must crazy die!
Yes, crazy I must die!"

To all this there was sometimes added a Pan's-pipe of but three reeds, made from single joints of the common brake cane, and called by English-speaking Negroes "the quills." One may

even at this day hear the black lad, sauntering home at sunset behind a few cows that he has found near the edge of the cane-brake whence he has also cut his three quills, blowing and hooting, over and over, --



But to show how far the art of playing the "quills" could be carried, if we are not going too much aside, see this "quill tune" given me by Mr. Krehbiel, musical critic of the "New York Tribune," and got by him from a gentleman who heard it in Alabama.



Such was a full band. All the values of contrast that discord can furnish must have been present, with whatever there is of ecstasy in maddening repetition, for of this the African can never have too much.

And yet there was entertaining variety. Where? In the dance! There was constant, exhilarating novelty -- endless invention -- in the turning, bowing, arm-swinging, posturing and leaping of the dancers. Moreover, the music of Congo Plains was not tamed to mere monotone. Monotone became subordinate to many striking qualities. The strain was wild. Its contact with French taste gave it often great tenderness of sentiment. It grew in fervor, and rose and sank, and rose again, with the play of emotion in the singers and dancers.

The Gathering

It was a weird one. The Negro of colonial Louisiana was a most grotesque figure. He was nearly naked. Often his neck and arms, thighs, shanks, and splay feet were shrunken, tough, sinewy like a monkey's. Sometimes it was scant diet and cruel labor that had made them so. Even the requirement of law was only that he should have not less than a barrel of corn -- nothing else, -- a month, nor get more than thirty lashes to the twenty-four hours. The whole world was crueler those times than now; we must not judge them by our own.

Often the slave's attire was only a cotton shirt, or a pair of pantaloons hanging in indecent tatters to his naked waist. The bondswoman was well clad who had on as much as a coarse chemise and petticoat. To add a lignon -- a Madras handkerchief twisted into a turban -- was high gentility, and the number of kerchiefs beyond that one was the measure of absolute wealth. Some were rich in lignons, especially those who served within the house, and pleased the mistress, or even the master -- there were Hagars in those days. However, Congo Plains did not gather the house-servants so much as the "field-hands."

These came in troops. See them; wilder than gypsies; wilder than the Moors and Arabs whose strong blood and features one sees at a glance in so many of them; gangs -- as they were called -- gangs and gangs of them, from this and that and yonder direction; tall, well-knit Senegalese from Cape Verde, black as ebony, with intelligent, kindly eyes and long, straight, shapely noses; Mandingoes, from the Gambia River, lighter of color, of cruder form, and a cunning that shows in the countenance; whose enslavement seems specially a shame, their nation the "merchants of Africa," dwelling in towns, industrious, thrifty, skilled in commerce and husbandry, and expert in the working of metals, even to silver and gold; and Foulahs, playfully misnamed "Poulards," -- fat chickens, -- of goodly stature, and with a perceptible rose tint in the cheeks; and Sosos, famous warriors, dexterous with the African target; and in contrast to these, with small ears, thick eyebrows, bright eyes, flat, upturned noses, shining skin, wide mouths and white teeth, the Negroes of Guinea, true and unmixed, from the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast, and the Cape of Palms -- not from the Grain Coast; the English had that trade. See them come! Popoes, Cotocolies, Fidas, Scooes, Agwas, short, copper-colored Mines -- what favor the slavers did make! -- and from interior Africa others equally proud and warlike; fierce Nagoes and Fonds; tawny Awassas; Iboes, so light-colored that one could not tell them from mulattoes but for their national tattooing; and the half-civilized and quick-witted but ferocious Arada, the original Voudou worshipper. And how many more! For here come, also men and women from all that great Congo coast, --

Angola, Malimbe, Ambrice, etc. -- small, good-natured, sprightly "boys," and gay garulous "gals," thick-lipped but not tattooed; chattering, chaffering, singing, and guffawing as they come: these are they for whom the dance and the place are named, the most numerous sort of Negro in the colonies, the Congoes and Franco-Congoes, and though serpent worshippers, yet the gentlest and kindest natures that came from Africa. Such was the company.

Among these bossals -- that is, native Africans -- there was, of course, an ever-growing number of Negroes who proudly called themselves Creole Negroes, that, born in America; (This broader use of the term is very common. The Creole "dialect" is the broken English of the Creoles, while the Creole patois is the corrupt French, not of the Creoles, but rather of the former slave race in the country of the Creoles. So of Creole Negroes and Creole dances and songs.) And at the present time there is only here and there an old native African to be met with, vain of his singularity and trembling on his staff.

THE SURVIVAL OF AFRICAN MUSIC IN AMERICA

Jeannette Robinson Murphy
Appleton's Popular Science Monthly, 1899

Fifty years from now, when every vestige of slavery has disappeared, and even its existence has become a fading memory, America, and probably Europe, will suddenly awake to the sad fact that we have irrevocably lost a veritable mine of wealth through our failure to appreciate and study from a musician's standpoint the beautiful African music, whose rich stores will then have gone forever from our grasp.

During my childhood my observations were centered upon a few very old negroes who came directly from Africa, and upon many others whose parents were African born, and I early came to the conclusion, based upon Negro authority, that the greater part of their music, their methods, their scale, their type of thought, their dancing, their patting of feet, their clapping of hands, their gramaces and pantomime, and their gross superstitions came straight from Africa.

Some of their later songs, it is true, we must technically call "modified African," but how far the original African song elements have been altered (and usually not for the better) by contact with American life is a question of fact, and can only be settled by a careful comparison of the songs as sung among the natives of Africa and the changed forms in which their modified ones are found today in the South. It must be determined in each case, and cannot be settled by any general theory or formula.

This question of the classification of African music has given rise to more or less discussion. It seems hardly just to call the genuine Negro songs "the folk songs of America." We are a conglomerate people, and no one race can claim a monopoly in this matter. English, Scotch, German, French, Italians, and others have brought their own music and their own folklore, and in each case it must be considered distinctly belonging to the nationality that imported it. Why should not the same be true of the genuine Negro music? The stock is African, the ideas are African, the patting and dancing are all African. The veneer of civilization and religious fervor and Bible truth is entirely superficial. The African is under it all, and those who study him and his weird music at short range have no difficulty in recalling the savage conditions that gave it birth.

Were I to begin now the study of all the intonations and tortuous quavers of this beautiful music, I fear I should be able to do little toward imitating it; for it was only possible to catch the spirit of it and the reason of it all while my voice had the flexibility of childhood, and the influences of slavery were still potent factors in the daily life of the Negroes. I followed these old ex-slaves, who have passed away, in their tasks, listened to their crooning in their cabins, in the fields, and especially in their meeting houses, and again and again they assured me the tunes they sang came from Africa.

Possibly I have an unusual predilection for this imported African music, but to me some of the strange, weird, untamable, barbaric melodies have a rude beauty and a charm beside which, as Cowper says --

"Italian trills are tame."

It is indeed hard to account for the strange misconceptions which prevail as to what really constitutes genuine African music. The "coon songs" which are so generally sung are base imitations. The white man does not live who can write a genuine Negro song. At home there used to be a rare old singer, an old Kentucky mammy, whom everybody loved. She once said: "Us ole heads use ter make 'em up on de spurn of de moment, arter we wrassle wid de Sperit and come thoo. But the tunes were brung from Africa by our granddaddies. Dey was jus 'miliar songs. Dese days dey calls 'em ballots, but in de ole days dey call 'em spirituals, case de Holy Spittit done revealed 'em to 'em. Some say Moss Jesus taught 'em, and I's seed 'em start in meetin'. We'd all be at the 'prayer house' de Lord's Day, and de white preacher he'd splain de word and read whar Ezekial done say --

"Dry bones gwine ter lib ergin"

And honey, de Lord would come a-shinin' thoo dem pages and revive dis ole nigger's heart, and I'd jump up dar and den and holler and shout and sing and pat, and dey would all cotch de words and I'd sing it to some old shout song I'd heard 'em sing from Africa, and dey'd all take it up and keep at it, and keep a-addin' to it, and den it would be a spiritual. Dese spirituals am de best moanin' music in de world, case dey is de whole Bible sung out and out. Notes is good enough for you people, but us likes a mixtery. Dese houn heads ain't wuth killin', fur dey don't keer bout de Bible nor de old hymns. Dey's completely spiled wid too much white blood in 'em, and de big organ and de eddication has done took all de Holy Spirit out en 'em, till dey ain't no better wid der dances and cuttin' up dan de white folks."

The Negro usually sang religious music at his work. He was often turned out of church for crossing his feet or singing a "fiddle sing," which is a secular song, but he could steal all the chickens he wanted and never fall from grace. One of the most persistent fancies that the old slaves cherished was that they were the oppressed Israelites, that the Southerners were the cruel Egyptians, and the Canaan was freedom. Bondage was of course their slavery. They believed that some day the Red Sea would come in a sea of blood, which was verified in the civil war. In many of their songs they appropriate Bible prophecies and ideas to themselves. The song given is a characteristic one, illustrating many peculiarities; and if it did not come from Africa, where did it come from? . . .

In regard to one song, at least, I have irrefragable proof of its African origin. Mrs. Jefferson Davis tells me her old nurse was a full-blooded African named Aunt Dinah. She would lovingly put her little charge to sleep with the doggerel "Fadding, Gidding."

Aunt Dinah would also sing it pleadingly when begging for a present. She would begin the supplication with hands clinched tight, and open them quickly at the last line. She declared that she always sang it in this exact manner in her old African home whenever she was asking a favor, but she was never able to tell the meaning of any part of it except the last line, the African of which she had forgotten, but which meant that all black races are born with wide-open palms ready and waiting for other peoples to pour rich gifts into them. This she translated in her apt, crude way: "Eber sence I born, ry hand stand sc!"

After a diligent search for a real live African, I have found an educated convert to Christianity, who has been absent only two years from the wilds of the west coast of Africa. In broken English he sang for me several songs sung by the savages of the native Mendi tribe. The tunes sounded much like songs I know, but I could not take them down during this interview. All the songs I sang he said seemed very familiar -- in certain portions especially so.

I was especially interested in the description he gave of a peculiar ceremony common among the wildest Bushmen and the Yolloff tribe. My informant grew up and played with them a great deal when a child. He says the death of a young boy they consider an affront to the living -- an affront which they never forgive.

It is singular that among some of our Indian tribes a similar notion prevails. The friends meet around the corpse and exclaim, while they chant and sing and dance, in a high-pitched voice: "Why did you die? Were you too proud to stay with us? You thought yourself too good to stay with us. To what do you leave all your things? We don't want them! Take them with you if you are so stuck up; we'll bury them with you!"

They work themselves into a perfect fury, and one gets a whip and flogs the corpse until it is horribly mutilated. Then the few who have really been friends to the child in their crude way draw near and begin to sing:

"Anasa yi.
Anasa papa,"

which this native African assured me meant, as nearly as he could translate it --

"Find out how mother is.
Find out how papa is."

The curious identity of the name for father in this African dialect and our own he could not explain.

Even while the relatives were thus speaking kindly to the departed child, others would come up with whips, and with blows spitefully exclaim: "Tell my father's sister I am happy. Speak to her for me." This they said, mocking the relatives for sending messages.

What better proof is required of the origin of the peculiar custom of the Negroes in our own Southland of sending communications by the dead? He also gave me new stories of Brother Conch,

He says he has heard a savage tribe often sing to the beat of a peculiar drum, as they started to pillage and destroy a neighboring tribe, these words, which he could not translate:

"Zo, whine, whine,
Zo, bottom balleh.
Zo, whine, whine,
Zo, bottom balleh."

Some of the tribes are followers of Mohammed. After they have broken their fast, they sing this hymn to their God:

"Li li, e li li,
Moo moo doorroo, soo moo li."

I then sang for him a part of "Gawd bless dem Yankees, dey'll set me free," and when I came to the humming, which we all know is the marked peculiarity of the Negro singing, he stopped me and said, "Whenever you hum that way it means 'Hush!' and among the tribes I have known it always comes in baby songs." He then sang this one, which a heathen woman used to sing to his little sister "Amber":

"Amber in a wa,
Kenn yah fennyah ma,
Amber in a bamboo carri,
Amber eeka walloo.
Um, um, um."

A rough translation of this means: "Amber, be quiet and I'll give you something. I'm not going to flog you. You are quiet, so I thank you. Hush, hush, hush!"

DONE FOUND DAT NEW HIDIN' PLACE

1. Who dat... yon-der dressed in white?...
Must be de chil-lun ob de Is-rael-ite...
Done found dat new hid-in' place!
Who dat... yon-der dressed in red?
Must be de chil-lun dat a Mos-es led!...
Done found dat new hid-in' place!
(Refrain) Come a-long -
Done found dat new hid-in' place!
Ise so gla-ad in done found dat new hid-in' place!

2. Who dat... yon-der dressed in black?
Must be de nig-gers a-turn-in' back!
Done found dat new hid-in' place!
God don't talk like a nat-er-al man ----
Talk so a sin-ner can a-un-der-stand --
Done found dat new hid-in' place

(Refrain)

3. Jes on-ly see lee-tle ba-by to-day...
An-gel done drug her thoo de twelve pearly gates
Done found dat new hid-in' place!
Pur-ti-est ting what eb-ber I done...
Was to git religion when I was young --
Done found dat new hid-in' place!

(Refrain)

4. When I was down in E-gypt's land...
 Heard a mighty talkin' 'bout de promised land --
 Done found dat new hid-in' place!
 And when we get on Ca-naan's shore...
 We'll shout and sing for-eb-ber more --
 Done found dat new hid-in' place!

(Refrain)

MARY AND MARTHY HAD A CHAIN

1. Ma-ry and Marthy had a ch-ain
Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
An' a ev'-ry link was a Je-sus Na-ame!
Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
When I comes ter die...
(in) I want ter be... read -y;
When I comes ter die...
Gwine ter walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
2. I tell you bredderin, fur a fac' --
Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!
If you ebber leabs de debbil you musn't turn back!
Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!

(Refrain)

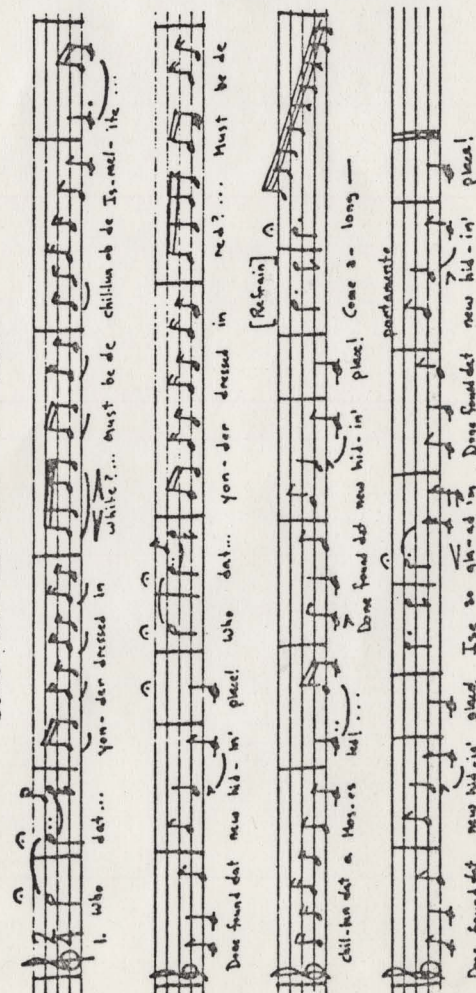
3. Some says Pe-ter and some says Paul --
Walk Jerus'lem jis like Job!
But dey ain't but one God saves us all --
Walk Jeru-s'lem jis like Job!

(Refrain)

—this kind of singing and conventional church song. Also of interest is the second verse of "New hidin' place." It has a specific Christian meaning, but it could also have been from an older version of the song and the lines about 'hidin' place' could have been an oblique reference to an escape route.

These songs are interesting examples of the occasional attempts to notate Afro-American music in the 19th Century. They are musically almost incoherent, but there has been an obvious attempt to write down some of the differences between

Done Found Dat New Hidin' Place



Mary and Martha Had a Chain

