NEGRO FOLK MUSIC OF ALABAMA

RECORDED BY HAROLD COURLANDER
IN THIS VOLUME: SPIRITUALS And OTHERS
VOLUME VII:
INTRODUCTION, NOTES AND TEXTS
BY HAROLD COURLANDER

These recordings were made in central and western Alabama in January and February, 1950. They are presented as study materials as well as music for good listening, and should contribute fresh documentation of what American Negro folk music really is.

The deformation that such music has undergone in the process of popularization at the hands of its friends and admirers is considerable. Spirituals, for example, in becoming art songs have lost much of the vital rhythmic and inspiring Negro singing style that have been incorporated into popular music have become, in many instances, caricature. The old folk style is felt even in many Negro churches which today prefer trained choirs which can "read songs from the book" to the old style of participatory singing.

These six albums do not attempt to cover the entire field of Negro folk music, but rather to present a number of facets of the musical life of a given area. Other recordings of American Negro folk music which contribute valuable study materials to the total picture have been gathered by John and Alan Lomax and others for the Library of Congress. And Frederick Ramsey, Jr., has documented certain aspects of Negro folk music of this general region in a series of recordings issued by Folkways Records in 1955.

The emphasis in these recordings from Alabama upon content and style rather than performance. Selections have been made with a view to documentation. "Performances" have been sacrificed for what seem to be more traditional folk styles. But the sheer music in many of these recordings is not easily excelled.

There are already so many writings on the subject of American Negro music that it would be superfluous to attempt to discuss the matter at length here. The controversy concerning African vs. European elements in the Negro music of the United States still goes on. It is hoped that these recordings will help to shed further light on the study of origins. While the important influence on Negro singing style is felt even in many Negro churches which today prefer trained choirs which can "read songs from the book" to the old style of participatory singing.

Handclapping as employed in church singing and children's ring games has a clear African precedent. Clapping in religious singing is common in West Africa and in the West Indies, and clapping in children's ring games is almost universally practiced in West Africa.

Responsive singing of the kind observed in American Negro work songs, ring games, and religious meetings is also frequently in the African pattern. The significance of the "helper" or "leader" and one or more "helpers" and the treatment in which the "helper"'s" lines sometimes overlap those of the leader, is African in conception. Many religious songs cannot be sung properly without this balance.

The rhythmic punctuation by the work gang's "hah hah!" (time the stems or hamm) or the preacher's "ah hah!" or "my friends" in the delivery of poetic-prose sermons, and the "ah-bhm!" or "murrum!" of the old field hands all derive from a style that is African rather than European.

The strong tradition for community singing of work songs is in itself African.

Older people in the South sometimes place a finger in one ear while singing, so as to better hear and thus control their own voices while participating in a group song, a practice that has been observed both in West and East Africa.

The counter-clockwise ring shout, notwithstanding all its proscriptions against "dancing", is a clear survival of the African circle dance. In a recording made as a ring shout some years ago by Alan Lomax in Texas for the Library of Congress, while the music is not African the general constellation of dancing, hand-clapping, singing, and shouting gives a rather sharp picture of the extent to which African motifs permeate the musical scene.

The conspicuous value placed upon use of the falsetto voice is also in the African tradition.

Among certain non-Baptist cults, such as the Church of God in Christ, the use of the tambourine and sometimes the guitar reflects a fusion of White revivalist and African practices.

The washtub and washboard, used by small secular musical groups, are adaptations of common West African musical devices, and some of the other musical ideas employed by the washtub bands appear to have African inspiration.

The humming style used in much Negro secular and religious singing is non-European. Frequently the last consonant of a word or phrase is changed to m or n for softening, producing a humming effect. Thus father is frequently heard as fathum, mother as mothurn, angel as angeen or angum, the re as then, whereas when, hammer as hammerum, ark as arm, etc. This alteration of final consonants is characteristic of the singing during the singing of "mooms", several of which are included in this collection. In ordinary speech this softening does not ordinarily take place, which points toward a clearly established musical principle or value in regard to the alteration. Many available recordings from West, Central and East Africa indicate similar attitudes towards word articulation in singing.

The persistence of songs of protest, retribution, gossip, and ridicule in the secular music of the Negro has been already amply noted by such observers as Melville J. Herskovits as evidence of the scope of West African cultural influence. U.S. Negro song literature, both secular and religious, shares this African inheritance with other New World cultures.

1. LC 102. "Run Old Jeremiah."

2. See notes for "Salty Dog" in Vol. 1 of this issue. Curt Sachs, George Schweinfurth, and others have noted the presence of the prototype of the "hub" in East Cameroons, the Congo, and Nigeria. A portable variant of the earth bow in Haiti, closely akin to the "hub" is described in Courlander, "Musical Instruments of Haiti", the Musical Quarterly, July, 1941. Also see Ethnic Folkways Library album P407, which contains an example of the Haitian instrument.


in Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, other West Indian islands, Surinam, Brazil and Venezuela. Looking only at one facet of U.S. Negro music, the Blues, one sees the extent and influence of the tradition. An overwhelming percentage of Blues songs is made up of songs of complaint (against an individual or the community), ridicule, gossip, or recrimination.

In religious traditions there also remain a number of disguised or disguised attitudes which are shared by other Negro communities in the West Indies, South America and West and Central Africa. Among these are to be mentioned such things as baptismal rites, which have a special non-European character, and ecstatic seizures. One perceives in the usual worshipers by the "spirit" certain unmistakable ties with West African concepts. While ecstatic seizures are universally known, the context of their appearance in U.S. Negro cult worship suggests a continuity of well-established tradition. From time to time this relationship with pre-Christian concept is projected in the words of songs such as "Lord I'm Waiting On You" (Vol. IV, Side II, Band 2).

Throughout West Africa, and among Negro communities in the West Indies and South America, one notes a widespread use of the repeated first or first couplet of a song. This tradition is deeply rooted in the secular singing, whether it is in religious or secular surroundings. Many spirituals begin in this fashion, as do many Blues and work-songs.

People still alive in the South a decade or two ago have provided valuable documentation of the persistence of African musical and religious motifs well into the 19th Century. Some of this testimony is found in the book Drums and Shadows, compiled by the Georgia Writers' Project and published in 1940. One informant on St. Simons Island declared:

"We used to have big times for the harvest, and the first thing what growed we take to the church as everybody could have a piece of it. We pray over it and shout. When we have a dance, we used to shout in a ring. We ain't had it you what you call a proper dance today."

The celebration referred to will be readily recognized as the yam harvest rites practiced over a large part of West Africa, and still found today in Haiti, Jamaica, and other West Indian islands. Drumming and dancing is clearly indicated to be of African pattern.

Another informant in the same region stated:

"When we were young we used to have big friends and dance and shout to (the) drum. Sometimes we have rattles made out of dry gourd and we rattle them and make good music."

The drum and the gourd-rattle referred to are, of course, the nucleus of African instrumentation. On the Island of Darien a woman described the traditional drum in a way that leaves no doubt of its West African ancestry:

"You kill a 'coon and you skin it and you tack the skin up side of the house to dry and you stretch the skin over the end ... . You take a drum and you skin it and you tack the skin up side of the house to dry and you stretch the skin over the end . . . . You take a drum and you skin it and you tack the skin up side of the house to dry and you stretch the skin over the end . . . ." (p. 174)

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An informant on Darien described the drums coming in three different styles into which they are found in Dahomey and Haiti today. (p. 155)

Nor was the metal percussion instrument forgotten. Metal plates were beaten, along with drums and rattles, apparently in the style of the West African iron bell.
Documentation of this sort must be well considered in evaluating the various elements in Negro religious and secular music as we now hear it.

One interesting field of study, as yet relatively unexplored, is the persistence of old terminology in Negro music, as evidence of its prevalence in the West Indies and elsewhere as well as in the United States. One form of U.S. Negro religious singing is referred to as "a moan", or sometimes as a "groan". Moaning or groaning does not imply pain or grief in the usual sense; it is a kind of instinctive music that, if it be partly a reaction, is in itself a deep expression of some feeling. Sometimes, people will interlard with humming and spontaneous melodic variation and improvisation the song "When You Feel Like Moaning" (Vol. IV, Side I, Band 1) states:

"When you feel like moanin', It ain't nothin' but love... When you feel like groanin', It ain't nothin' but love...."

One example of the "moan" or "groan" is found in Vol. IV, Side II, Band 1. "It's Getting Late In the Evening". Another is the prayer by Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward in Vol. II, Side II, Band 4.

Of some significance is the fact that the term "groaning" is used also among some West Indian cults for the religious activity of differing kind, but related directly to supposition.

The term "jumping", so commonplace in our Jazz lingo, is found among the so-called Pocomania cults of Jamaica to describe "laboring in the Spirit". Another Jazz term, "mamma-beat", used in reference to a hard left-hand beat on a drum, has explicit connections with drumming in the West Indies and West Africa. In Haiti, Cuba, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Trinidad, for example, certain drums that take the hard stick beats are called "mama". The same terminology is heard in Dahomey and Nigeria.

Other terms associated with Negro religious and secular music may yet be found to derive out of that old tradition, rather than being spontaneous inventions.

The discussion of surviving non-European traits in American Negro singing is not intended to create the impression that this music is "African", however. A number of the songs that may be heard in Negro communities are delivered in an English style of some antiquity, and appear to be completely outside the realm of what is sometimes called "Afro-American" music. Some "Negro music" in Louisiana is basically French in character, and is colored by regional tradition, the phonograph and radio, as is the case with folk music anywhere.

The notation of African astavism is intended only to point out the complicated and composite nature of American Negro music.

In the end it has to be recognized that regardless of the sources of inheritance, in general the American Negro has produced over the years a music that is clearly his own. It is familiar to all of us, yet easily distinguishable from other musical trends in America. It is familiar to us, yet easily distinguishable from other musical trends in America.

Many spirituals can be sung fast time or slow time... referred to as common meter and long meter. An example of common meter is to be found in "Move Members Move", Vol. II.

The pieces included in these six albums were selected from among several hundred recorded during a field trip sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation. Reproduction of the albums as the accompanying text was made during the course of a Guggenheim Fellowship. Special thanks are due to Ruby Purvis, Mrs. Pratt Tartt of Livingston, Alabama, Thomas M. Campbell of Tuskegee, and S.W. Boynton of Selma, whose knowledge of the countryside and its people contributed immensely to the value of the field trip.

The song texts which appear in this article have been transcribed as closely as possible to conventional English, and wherever practical the suggestion of "dialect" has been avoided. It is felt that the colloquial aspects of Negro songs and speech have been overemphasized in many documents. In actual fact, close listening tends to blur the seeming distinction between the dialect of the area and so-called standard English. Certain regions have no more logic in phonetic spelling of Negro speech of Alabama than in phonetic spelling of White speech of the region -- or, for that matter, of any other region. In the following transcriptions, missing vowel or consonant sounds occasionally have been indicated by apostrophes.

VOL. V, SPIRITUALS

Several examples of the singing of Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward are to be found in Vol. I and II of this series. Vol. V is devoted exclusively to spirituals voiced by these two singers. Dock Reed, a farmer of Livingston County, was approximately sixty years old when these recordings were made. He is deeply religious, and never sings secular or "sinful" songs. Because of his fine voice he is often called upon to lead songs or prayers in church or in the homes of his neighbors. His style of singing is simple and direct, and the sound of his voice has a particular quality that is sometimes used to quote his words. Dock Reed was recorded some years ago by John Love and the Library of Congress, as was Vera Hall Ward, his cousin, who accompanies him in most of these songs. She was born on a farm near the town of Livingston, and in recent years has been a house worker and nursemaid in Tuscaloosa, where these recordings were made.

SIDE I, Band I: I'M GOING HOME ON THE MORNING TRAIN. Sung by Dock Reed.

I'm going home on the morning train,
I'm going home on the morning train,
If you don't see me you will hear me sing,
All of my sins been taken away, taken away.
Just about the time I thought oh Lord,
Ah just about the time I thought oh Lord,
Don't you want to go,
All of my sins been taken away, taken away.

SIDE I, Band 2: MY GOD AIN'T NO LYING MAN. Sung by Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward.

My God ain't no lying man,
Oh my God ain't no lying man,
Oh Jesus, Lord have mercy,
My God do just what he say.

My God promised me a home,
On my God promised me a home, 
Oh Jesus, Lord have mercy,
My God promised me a home, 
Oh Jesus, Lord have mercy,

SIDE I, Band 3: WHERE THE SUN WILL NEVER GO DOWN. Sung by Dock Reed.

The sun will never go down, go down,
The sun will never go down, go down,
The flowers are bloomin' forevermore,
Then the sun will never go down, go down,
Don't you feel like shouting sometimes,
sometimes,
Don't you feel like shouting sometimes,
sometimes,
The flowers are bloomin' forevermore.
Then the sun will never go down.

SIDE I, Band 4: TROUBLED LORD I'M TROUBLED. Sung by Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward.

Troubled, Lord, I'm troubled,
I'm troubled all about my soul,
I won't be troubled no more.
I'm wondering, Lord, I'm wondering,
I'm wondering about my soul,
Oh Lord
Sooner than my feet strike Zion
I won't be troubled any more.
I wonder where my mother,
I wonder where she's at,
She's somewhere sitting in the kingdom
And she won't be troubled no more.
I'm grieving, Lord, I'm grieving,
I'm grieving about my soul,
Sooner than my feet strike Zion
I won't be grieving any more.

SIDE I, Band 5: LOOK HOW THEY DONE MY LORD. Sung by Vera Hall Ward and Dock Reed.

Look how they done my Lord,
Done my Lord, done my Lord,
Look how they done my Lord,
He never said a mumblin' word,
Not a word, not a word did he say.
Well they whapp’d him up Calvary,
Calvary, Calvary,
Calvary, Calvary,
The flowers are bloomin' forevermore,
He never said a mumblin' word,
Not a word, not a word did he say.
Well they planted him a thorny crown,
Thorny crown, thorny crown, thorny crown,
They planted him a thorny crown.
He never said a mumblin' word,
Not a word, not a word did he say.
Well they placed it on his head,
On his head, on his head,
They placed it on his head,
He never said a mumblin' word,
Not a word, not a word did he say.
Well they speared him in the side,
Ah you lie sick and raise the dead,
Oh Jesus, Lord have mercy,
You lie sick and raise the dead.

SIDE I, Band 6: WHEN YOU WERE MINE. Sung by Dock Reed.

When you were mine,
When you were mine,
When you were mine,
When you were mine.
When you were mine,
When you were mine,

SIDE I, Band 7: I'M GOING HOME. Sung by Dock Reed.

I'm going home, I'm going home,
I'm going home, I'm going home,
I'm going home, I'm going home,
I'm going home, I'm going home,
I'm going home, I'm going home,
I'm going home, I'm going home,
I'm going home, I'm going home,
I'm going home, I'm going home,

SIDE I, Band 8: GETTING LATE IN THE EVENING. Sung by Dock Reed.

Getting late in the evening,
Getting late in the evening,
Getting late in the evening,
Getting late in the evening,
Getting late in the evening,
Getting late in the evening,
Getting late in the evening,
Getting late in the evening,
Getting late in the evening,
Getting late in the evening,

SIDE I, Band 9: I'M SORRY YOU LEFT ME. Sung by Dock Reed.

I'm sorry you left me,
I'm sorry you left me,
I'm sorry you left me,
I'm sorry you left me,
I'm sorry you left me,
I'm sorry you left me,
I'm sorry you left me,
I'm sorry you left me,
I'm sorry you left me,
He never said a mumblin' word,
Not a word, not a word did he say.

SIDE I, Band 6: JOB JOB. Sung by Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward. Another version of Job Job is found in Vol. IV, Side II, Band 3.

Ab Job Job, uh-hunh,
Ah what you reckon, uh-hunh,
Ah your oxen dead, uh-hunh,
Ah Job Job uh-hunh,
Ah what you reckon, uh-hunh,
Ah your daughter dead, uh-hunh,
Just listen that Job, uh-hunh,
What Job said, uh-hunh,
Ah blessed be, uh-hunh,

In the name of the Lord, uh-hunh,
The Lord he gave it, uh-hunh,
And the Lord take away, uh-hunh,
Then blessed be, uh-hunh,
The name of the Lord, uh-hunh.

Ah Rock Mt. Zion,
Rock Mt. Zion in that morning.
Oh swing low chariot,
Swing low chariot,
Swing low chariot in that morning.
Oh the son of man, uh-hunh,
Oh the son of man, uh-hunh,
Oh he prayed to God, uh-hunh,
To stop the sun, uh-hunh,
Oh the sun stopped steady, uh-hunh,
Right on the line, uh-hunh,
And the battle was firing, uh-hunh,
And seven times, uh-hunh,
Oh want to go to heaven,
Oh want to go to heaven,
Oh want to go to heaven in the morning.
Oh mourn on Mary,
Mourn on Mary,
Oh mourn on Mary in the morning
Oh weep on Martha,
Weep on Martha,
Oh weep on Martha in the morning.

SIDE I, Band 7: WHAT MONTH WAS JESUS BORN IN. Sung by Vera Hall Ward.

What month was Jesus born in?
Last month in the year.

What month was Jesus born in?
Last month in the year.

Oh Lord, you got January, February, March, oh Lord,
You got April, May, and June Lord,
You got the July, August, September, October, and November,
You got twenty-fifth day of December,
It's the last month in the year.

He was born in an ox-stall manger,
Last month in the year.
He was born in an ox-stall manger,
Last month in the year.

Oh Lord you got January, February, March, oh Lord,
You got April, May, and June Lord,

You got the July, August, September, October, and November

You got twenty-fifth day of December,
It's the last month in the year.

I'm talking about Mary's baby,
Last month in the year.
I'm talking about Mary's baby,
Last month in the year.

Oh Lord you got January, February, March, oh Lord,
You got April, May, and June Lord,
You got the July, August, September, October, and November,
You got twenty-fifth day of December
It's the last month in the year.

SIDE I, Band 8: SOMEBODY'S TALKING ABOUT JESUS. Sung by Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward.

Everywhere I go my Lord,
Everywhere I go,
Someday's talking about Jesus.

I went down the hill,
Then all the day,
Somebody talking about Jesus.
Well sing it then,
Everywhere I go,
Everywhere I go my Lord,
Everywhere I go,
Somebody's talking about Jesus.
Well my knees been acquainted with the hillside clay,
Somebody's talking about Jesus.
And my head's been wet with the midnight dew,
Somebody's talking about Jesus.


Oh death is awful,
Oh death is awful,
Oh death is awful,
Spare me over another year.

If I was a flower in my bloom,
Make that cut me down so soon,
Oh death is awful,
Mmm death is awful,
Mmm death is awful,
Spare me over another year.

Oh what is this that I can't see,
Well call that the angel over me,
Oh death is awful,
Ahh death is awful,
Oh death is awful,
Spare me over another year.

This is the way that death begins,
You stretch your limbs and close your eyes,
Oh death is awful,
Mmm death is awful,
Mmm death, just spare me over another year.

SIDE II, Band 2: I'M CLIMBING UP THE HILLS OF MT. ZION. Sung by Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward.

Praying at the hills of Mt. Zion,
Mourning at the hills of Mt. Zion,
Weeping at the hills of Mt. Zion,
Singing at the hills of Mt. Zion,
Good Lord I'm climbing up them hills of Mt. Zion
On Lord with the glory in my soul.

Preaching at the hills of Mt. Zion,
Crying at the hills of Mt. Zion,
Toiling at the hills of Mt. Zion,
Good Lord I'm climbing up them hills of Mt. Zion
On Lord with the glory in my soul.

Shouting at the hills of Mt. Zion,
Groaning at the hills of Mt. Zion,
Climbing at the hills of Mt. Zion,
On Lord I'm climbing up them hills of Mt. Zion
With the glory in my soul.

SIDE II, Band 3: LOW DOWN THE CHARIOT AND LET ME RIDE. Sung by Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward.

Let me ride, let me ride,
Oh let me ride, let me ride,
Oh let me ride, let me ride,
Oh low down the chariot and let me ride.

I'm humble to ride, oh let me ride,
I'm humble to ride, oh let me ride,
I'm humble to ride, let me ride,
Oh low down the chariot and let me ride.

Got a right to ride, oh let me ride,
Got a right to ride, let me ride,
Got a right to ride, let me ride,
Oh low down the chariot and let me ride.

SIDE II, Band 5: EVERYBODY TALKIN' ABOUT HEAVEN AIN'T GOIN' THERE. Sung by Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward.

Ah you got shoes, I got shoes,
All of God's children got shoes.
And when I get to Heaven goin' try on my shoes,
I'm goin' to shout all over God's Heaven.
Everybody talkin' about Heaven ain't goin' there, Heaven, Heaven, I'm goin' to shout all over God's Heaven.

Well you got a robe, I got a robe. All of God's children got a robe. And when I get to Heaven goin' try on my robe, Goin' to shout all over God's Heaven. Oh Heaven, Heaven, etc.

Well you got a crown, I got a crown. All of God's children got a crown. And when I get to Heaven goin' try on my crown, Goin' to shout all over God's Heaven. Oh Heaven, Heaven, etc.

Well you got a harp, I got a harp. All of God's children got a harp. Ah when I get to Heaven goin' to play on my harp, I'm goin' to shout all over God's Heaven. Oh Heaven, Heaven, etc.

SIDE II, Band 6: NOAH, NOAH. Sung by Vera Hall Ward

Noah*, Noah, who built this ark? Noah, Noah, who built this ark? Now who built this ark?

Noah, Noah, built this ark. Built this ark out of hickory bark, Oh Lord, who built this ark?

Noah, Noah, who built this ark? Who built this ark?

Noah, Noah, built this ark. Built this ark without hammers or nails, Oh Lord, who built this ark?

Noah, Noah, who built this ark? Now who built this ark? Called old Noah foolish man, Building this ark on this dry land, Oh Lord, who built this ark?

Noah, Noah, who built this ark? Now who built this ark? Noah, No'.

SIDE II, Band 7: PLUMB THE LINE. Sung by Dock Reed and Vera Hall Ward

Oh Lord, plumb the line, Oh Lord, plumb the line, Oh Lord, plumb the line, (.....) in my Jesus, plumb the line.

'Taint no liar, plumb the line, (3) (.....) in my Jesus, plumb the line.

Help me, Lord, plumb the line, (3) (.....) in my Jesus, plumb the line.

Help me, ........., plumb the line, (3) (.....) in my Jesus, plumb the line.

'Taint no gambler, plumb the line, (3) (.....) in my Jesus, plumb the line.

'Taint no pretender, plumb the line, (3) (.....) in my Jesus, plumb the line.

Oh Lord, plumb the line, (3) (.....) in my Jesus, plumb the line.

SIDE II, Band 8: TRAVELLING SHOES. Sung by Vera Hall Ward.

Death went out to the sinner's house, Come and go with me Sinner cried out, I'm not ready to go, I ain't got no travelin' shoes. Got no travelin' shoes, got no travelin' shoes. Sinner cried out, I'm not ready to go, I ain't got no travelin' shoes.

Death went down to the gambler's house, Called him come and go with me. The gambler cried out, I'm not ready to go, I ain't got no travelin' shoes. Got no travelin' shoes... etc.

* Pronounced Nora throughout.
** Pronounced arm throughout.

DEATH WENT DOWN TO PREACHER'S HOUSE.
Called him, come and go with me.
The preacher cried out, I'm ready to go,
I got my travelin' shoes, got my travelin' shoes. The preacher cried out, I'm ready to go, I've got my travelin' shoes.

VOL. VI. RING GAME SONGS AND OTHERS
SIDE A -- RING GAMES, LINE GAMES
AND PLAY PARTY SONGS

Three examples of game songs are included in Vol. I of this series. Vol. III, Side I, is devoted exclusively to children's songs of this type. For detailed descriptions of the action accompanying the songs, I am indebted to Ruby Pickens Tarl.

As noted previously, games and songs of the kind represented here are gradually disappearing in southern United States. Rural schools, as well as urban, are stressing "modern" forms of play. Soft ball and basketball are more to be seen in the school yards than the old-fashioned games, and group singing of the "organized" and "directed" type is emphasized. Nevertheless, the traditional game songs hang on with a tough tenacity, and they continue to be heard even in urban centers such as Chicago, New York and other cities which have been centers for migrations from the South. One apparent reason for the survival of these songs and games is that they belong to the children's world rather than to the adult. While adults find them outmoded, children do not, and they are passed on from children to children, outside the framework of changing adult cultural values.

Inasmuch as these songs and games are not "taught" but simply "acquired", there are considerable variations in the way they are sung and played. Words differ from place to place, and many of the words appear as nonsense syllables whose precise meanings are not known to the children. Nevertheless, there is a basic continuity of traditional form. Most of the games are played either in a ring or a line. In the ring games, the children stand in a circle, often holding hands, with the leader either outside or inside the circle performing some action. In the line games, two lines of players are formed, with the leader between them or at the head of one. Both ring and line games usually have a formalized ending; a sequence of actions is carried through until all the children have participated. A game of the play-party type, on the other hand, may continue indefinitely. Handclapping is a component part of all these forms.

SIDE I, Band 1: MARY MACK. Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Alabama

Oh Mary Mack, Mack, Mack, All dressed in black, black, black, With silver buttons, buttons, buttons, Up and down her back, back, back.

And I love coffee, coffee, coffee, And I love tea, tea, tea, And the boys love me, me, me.

I went to the river, river, river, And I couldn't get across, across, 'cross, And I paid five dollars, dollars, dollars, For the old grey horse, horse, horse.

And the horse wouldn't pull, pull, pull, I swapped him for a bull, bull, bull, And the bull wouldn't pull, pull, pull, I swapped him for a dollar, dollar, dollar.

And the dollar wouldn't spend, spend, spend, I put it in the grass, grass, grass, And the grass wouldn't grow, grow, grow, I got my hoe, hoe, hoe.

And the hoe wouldn't chop, chop, chop, I took it to the shop, shop, shop, And the shop made money, money, money, Like the bees made honey, honey, honey.

See that yonder, yonder, yonder, In the jay-bird town, town, town, Where the women gotta work, work, work, Till the sun goes down, down, down.

Well, I eat my meat, meat, meat, And I gnaw my bone, bone, bone, Well, good-bye honey, honey, honey, I'm going on home.

Directions: The children usually stand in lines facing each other. They all sing and clap their partner's hands.

SIDE I, Band 2: BOB A NEEDLE (BOBBIN NEEDLE). Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Alabama.

Well oh bob a needle, Bob a needle, And oh bob a needle.

Bob a needle, is arunning, Bob a needle, ain't arunning, Bob a needle, is arunning, Bob a needle, ain't arunning.

And oh bob a needle, Bob a needle, And oh bob a needle, bob a needle You got bob a.

Bob a needle, is arunning, You got bob a, Bob a needle, is arunning.

And oh bob a needle, Bob a needle, And oh bob a needle, bob a needle You got bob a.

Bob a needle, ain't arunning, Bob a needle, is arunning, Bob a needle, ain't arunning, Bob a needle, is arunning.
And oh bob a needle, Bob a needle, And oh bob a needle, bob a needle, You got bob a.

Directions: "Bob a Needle" (or "Bobbin Needle") is a hiding and finding ring game. The children form a ring with one child on the inside and the leader outside. The leader walks around and places any small object, which is the needle, in the hands of one of the children in the ring. Those in the ring keep their hands behind them and pass the "needle" from one to another; the child in the center attempts to find the "needle." While he may touch all hands, he cannot look behind anyone in the ring. The "needle" is passed when the leader sings "Bob a needle ain't a running" and stops on "Bob a needle, ain't a running." When the center child thinks he has found the "needle," he says "You got bob a!" If he is correct, the child holding the "needle" goes to the center and the lively game continues.

SIDE 1, Band 3: WATCH THAT LADY.
Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Ala.
I been all around my last time, last time, last time, I been all around my last time, Young lady, hold the key.
Just watch that lady how she hold that key, Just watch that lady how she hold that key, Young lady, hold the key.
Been all around my last time, last time, last time, I been all around my last time, Young lady, hold the key.
Just watch that lady how she hold that key, Just watch that lady how she hold that key, Young lady, hold the key.

Directions: This is played as a ring game with one child in the center of the circle pretending to "hold that key." All of the children sing. The one in the center makes various motions, such as combing her hair, kneeling, standing on one foot, or shaking her body, and those in the circle try to imitate her.

In this recording the children clap their hands. Other groups playing the same game sometimes hold their hands on their hips instead of clapping. Forms of this game are found in the West Indian islands of Jamaica, Trinidad and Martinique. In Haiti the game is known as "Theatre." 

SIDE 1, Band 4: OLD LADY SALLY WANTS TO JUMP.
Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Alabama.
Old lady Sally want to jump-ty jump, Jump-ty jump, jump-ty jump. Old lady Sally want to jump-ty jump, And old lady Sally want to bow.
Throw that hook in the middle of the pond, Catch that girl with the red dress on. Go on, gal, ain't you shame? Shamed of what?
Wearing your dress in the latest style.
Many fishes in the brook, Papa caught 'em with a hook. Mamma fried 'em in a pan, Baby eat 'em like a man.
Preacher in the pulpit, Preaching like a man, Trying to get to Heaven on a 'lectric fan.
Do your best, papa, daddy do your best.

RING GAME: WATCH THAT LADY.

Directions: The children stand in two lines facing one another. They all sing. Both rows jump back and forth, each child with his feet together. On the first line, "Old lady Sally want to bow!" The lines jump forward and each child bows to the one opposite him. This is all sung and acted out very rapidly. Ordinarily, as in the recording, the children clap their hands. In June, however, after a day of chopping cotton, jumping back and forth is quite enough.

Old Lady Sally is an old woman who is still trying to get a man. She goes "jump-ty jump!" to appear young and wear a red dress in the latest style to catch one of the "many fishes in the brook." The children think that she should be ashamed of herself for not behaving as an old woman should.

The phrase "trying to get to Heaven on borrowed land" is an often heard one and is found in many Negro folk songs. These children use the variant "trying to get to Heaven on an electric fan." 

SIDE 1, Band 5: LOOP DE LOO (LOOHEE LOO)
Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Ala.
Here we go loop de loo, Here we go loop de loo, Here we go loop de loo, All on a Saturday night.
I put my right hand in, I take my right hand out, I give my right hand a shake, shake, shake, And turn my body about.

(Chorus)
I put my right foot in, I take my right foot out, I give my right foot a shake, shake, shake, And turn my body about.

(Chorus)
I put my big head in, I take my big head out, I give my big head a shake, shake, shake, And turn my body about.

(Chorus)
I put my big self in, I take my big self out, I give my big self a shake, shake, shake, And turn my body about.

Directions: The children form a circle, join hands and skip to the left as they sing the chorus. They stop as they sing "All on a Saturday night" and make appropriate gestures for each verse. For the first one all right hands are put in the circle, then drawn out, followed by three tremendous shakes. Each child turns himself about and the chorus follows.

This game represents the Saturday night bath. In this section of Alabama a small tin tub, also used for washing clothes, is used for bathing. All parts of the body go in, including "my big self," when the children step in and then out of the circle on the last verse. This game is one of the old favorites.

SIDE 1, Band 6: GREEN GREEN ROCKY ROAD.
ROAD: Recorded at Lilly's Chapel School, York, Alabama.
Green, green, rocky road, Some lady's green, rocky road Tell me who you love? Rocky road, Tell me who you love? Rocky road.
Caller: Minnie Town
Dear Miss Minnie (name of child within circle) your name's been called,
Come take a sat beside the wall.
Give her a kiss and let her go,
She'll never sit in that chair no more.

(Another version of this song, not recorded, is as follows:)
Green field, rocky road, Move up green rocky road, Some lady's green, rocky road, To marry me, rocky road, Call him now, rocky road, Don't take time, rocky road, Yes or no, rocky road.

Directions: The children form a circle with the leader in the center. The group sings "Green, green" and the leader answers, "Rocky road," skipping around the ring. As the chorus is sung the leader decides which person to choose. As he picks one, the group sings the first line of the verse, naming the child selected. The leader brings his choice to the center and kisses her at the line, "Give her a kiss and let her go." The first leader takes a place in
the last one.

Originally, a chair probably stood in the center of the ring and the child selected becomes the new leader, picking another child at the appropriate time. Clapping of hands throughout the song provides the rhythmic background.

The song continues until all have been chosen to be leader. At the concluding verse and line of "Stop right still and study yourself, see that fool where she got left," all eyes are turned toward the child who has been left with no partner. Each child tries to be chosen early in the game to avoid the embarrassment of being the last one.

SIDE I, Band 7: ROSIE DARLING ROSIE. Recorded at Brown's Chapel School, Livingston, Alabama.

(Chorus)
Rosie, darling Rosie, Ha, ha, Rosie.
Rosie, darling Rosie, Ha, ha, Rosie.
Rosie, darling Rosie, Ha, ha, Rosie.

Dire ctions: The children form two lines facing one another. The leader sings all of the song, while the others clap their hands and answer back the refrain of "Shoo shoo." When the leader calls the "second name" and says "Fly way 'cross yonder and look this way," the child crosses to the opposite line and faces the one which he has left. The next child called is from the second line so that both lines stay their original size. The game continues until every child's name has been called. The children love to hear their names called out before the other players.

Directions: Unlike most variants of "Gold-Eyed Needle," this last one is played as a ring game. The children make a circle about the leader. At the line, "Oh little girl!," the leader points to one child who flies across the center, exchanging places with the one to whom the leader has pointed on the "You, too, little girl." line.


Take your partner down the line, I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line, I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line, I must see, I must see.
Take your partner down the line, I must see, I must see.

Directions: The children face each other in two lines. The leader sings the lines "Take your partner" and "Swing your partner"; the other children sing the refrain and clap their hands. Beginning with the head couple, each pair goes down between the rows, swinging their partners on directions sung by the leader.

SIDE I, Band 9: BLUEBIRD BLUEBIRD. Recorded at Pilgrim Church School, Livingston, Alabama.

Bluebird, bluebird, Fly in the window.
Bluebird, bluebird, Fly in the window.
Bluebird, bluebird, Fly in the window.

Directions: This game is played by two concentric circles, usually formed by boys and girls facing each other, with the leader on the outside. The children in the circles clap their hands for rhythm and sing the chorus and refrain of "Ha, ha, Rosie." The leader sings the other lines and, at "Grab your partner and follow me," skips to the circles and chooses a partner of the opposite sex. The couple skips around the circles. The leader is replaced by the one whom he has chosen; he takes a place in the circle.

The song continues until all have been chosen to be leader. The concluding verse and line of "Stop right still and study yourself, see that fool where she got left," all eyes are turned toward the child who has been left with no partner. Each child tries to be chosen early in the game to avoid the embarrassment of being the last one.

SIDE I, Band 10: MAY GO 'ROUND THE NEEDLE (MY GOLD-EYED NEEDLE). Recorded at East York School, East York, Ala.

May go 'round the needle, Shoo shoo.
My silver thimble, Shoo, shoo.
Hey Dolores (each child's name in turn) Shoo, shoo.
Fly way 'cross yonder, Shoo, shoo.

This same verse is repeated over and over with a different child's name each time. The words "May go 'round the needle" appear to be a corruption of "my gold-eyed needle," as it is sometimes sung by other children. A variant heard by Ruby Pickens Tartt goes:

My gold eyed needle, Surely do;
My silver thimble, Surely do;
Hey Sally May Surely do;
Fly way 'cross yonder, Surely do;
An' look this way, Surely do.

Directions: The children form two lines facing one another. The leader sings all of the song, while the others clap their hands and answer back the refrain of "Shoo shoo." When the leader calls the "second name" and says "Fly way 'cross yonder and look this way," the child crosses to the opposite line and faces the one which he has left. The next child called is from the second line so that both lines stay their original size. The game continues until every child's name has been called. The children love to hear their names called out before the other players.

Another unrecorded version of "My Gold-Eyed Needle" observed by Ruby Pickens Tartt goes like this:

Young speckled lady, Surely do;
Just from the country, Surely do;
With a gold-eyed needle, Surely do;
And a silver thimble, Surely do;

Oh little girl, Surely do;
Fly way 'cross yonder, Surely do;
You, too, little girl, Surely do;
You fly, you, Surely do.

Directions: Unlike most variants of "Gold-Eyed Needle," this last one is played as a ring game. The children make a circle about the leader. At the line, "Oh little girl!", the leader points to one child who flies across the center, exchanging places with the one to whom the leader has pointed on the "You, too, little girl." line.
SIDE B -- PLAY SONGS, WORK SONGS, CHAIN GANG SONGS AND OTHERS

SIDE II, Band 1: SESSION WITH CELINA LEWIS. Recorded in Livingston, Alabama at the home of Celina Lewis. The singer was an old woman when these songs were recorded. She had the reputation of having been a fine and spirited singer when she was young.

Peep squirrel,
Yaddle daddle deedle dum. [2]
Catch that squirrel.
Yaddle daddle deedle dum. [2]
Run squirrel.
Yaddle daddle deedle dum. [4]
Yaddle daddle deedle dum.

Now, that's enough of that...

SIDEB, Band 2: WATER ON THE WHEEL. Sung by Annie Grace Horn Dodson of Sumter County, Alabama. This is a "water boy" song, of which there are many in Negro folk music. Such songs originated, usually, in the open air--in the fields and sometimes among prisoners gangs. Many "water boy" songs are local and personal in character, often little more than field cries or hollers (examples of which are found in Vol. I of this series). The example heard here is one which the singer remembered from her childhood.

Oh Kushie Dye Yo, I wish I had never seen you, I wish you'd never been born.

How you like that? ... How'd you like "If I Had My Way... I'd Tear the Buildin' Down"? Now that sounds right, because if I had my way, I'd tear something down...

If I had-a my way, (I don't know much of it)
If I had-a my way,
I'd tear the buildin' down.

Now I got-a my way, Now I got-a my way, Lord, I'm goin' to tear the buildin' down...

I told you I didn't know much of it.


Go preach
My gospel
Thus saith The Lord
Bid the earth
My grace
Receive.
You shall be saved that trust my word, 
And be condemned who don't believe. 
You shall 
Be saved 
That trust 
My every word 
Condemned 
Who don't 
Believe in me. 
I'll make your great commission known, 
And you shall prove my gospel true.  
Etc.

SIDE II, Band 4: CAPTAIN HOLLER HURRY. Sung by Willie Turner near Livingston, Ala. 
This is what is sometimes referred to as a "chain gang" song -- a work song sung by state prisoners as they work on the road or some other construction project. The songs sung by work gangs have a readily recognizable tempo and character of their own. Subject matter is varied, ranging from ballad-like songs to simple topical comments. "Chain gang" songs fall within the broad tradition of work songs. Wherever and whenever southern Negro men work together in groups, music incentives are strong. As indicated in the notes for Vol. I of this series, however, the changing economic scene in Alabama has left few situations for this kind of singing, which is to be found mainly in the prison camps and on the railroad gang. This song, which the singer learned in a prison camp in Mississippi, is a wry comment on the hurry of the gang foreseeman.

The Captain holler hurry, 
Goin' to take my time. 
Say Captain holler hurry, 
Goin' to take my time. 
Say he makin' money 
And I'm tryin' to make time. 
Say he can lose his job 
But I can't lose mine. 

I ain't got long to tarry, 
Just stop by here. 
Boys, if you got long 
You better move along. 
Say Captain Igler hurry, 
I'm goin' to take my time. 
Say the Captain holler hurry, 
I'm goin' to take my time. 
Say he makin' money, 
And I'm tryin' to make time.


John Henry went up on the mountain, 
And he looked down and heaved a sigh, 
Said the mountain was so big and wide, 
John Henry was so small, 
Until he fell on his knees and he cried and he cried, 
Said he fell on his knees and he cried. 
He said Captain, Captain, you don't know, 
But the last hammer that I had. 
Before I let this steel* carry me down, 
Says I'll die with this hammer in my hand, 
Says I'll die with my hammer** in my hand. 
Girl, who goin' to shoe your pretty little feet? 
Darlin', who goin' to glove your hand? 
Sugar, who goin' kiss your sweet little lips? 
Darlin', who goin' to be your man? 
Darlin', who goin' to be your man? 
Say Papa goin' to shoe my pretty little feet, 
Say Mother goin' to glove my hand, 
Say Sister goin' to kiss my sweet little lips, 
John Henry, I don't need no man, 
John Henry, I don't need no man. 
John Henry had a little baby, 
You could hold him in the pat of your hand. 
Before that baby was six months old 
He drive steel like a natural man, hah! 
He drive steel like a natural man.

* Sung "steel" but probably it originally was "steam". 
** Pronounced "hammun".

SIDE II, Band 6: I'M GOING TO HAVE A TALK WITH THE CHIEF OF POLICE. Sung by Peelee Hatchee (Emanuel Jones), a railroad worker living near Livingston, Ala. This is a kind of railroad work blues.

I'm goin' uptown have a talk with the chief police, 
How my good girl in trouble and I cannot see no peace. 
Don't I love you baby, and I just can't take your place. 
Don't I love you baby, and I tell you what I do. 
I hope some day, baby, come to love me too, 
And I hope some day, baby, come to love me too. 
I went to the river and I looked up it and down, 
Thought I'd see my good girl when she walkin' cross the town. 
I tell my baby why she come back home, 
And I had no loves, babe, since you been gone. 
I tell my woman, tell her Lord for me, 
Lord she can't quit me and it ain't no use of tryin'. 
But my baby caught the train and I swore 
(........) 
Singin' to her that she can't quit me, Lord it ain't no use of tryin'. 
Oh I tear uptown in the mornin' have a talk with the chief police, 
'Cause Irena in trouble and I cannot see no peace.

SIDE II, Band 7: MEET ME IN THE BOTTOMS. Sung by Davie Lee at Marian, Mississippi.

Meet me in the bottom with my boots and shoes, 
Who Lordy mamma, great God a'mighty, 
Meet me in the bottom, with my boots and shoes, 
Got to leave this town now, 
Got no time to lose. 
The woman I love she got to bring my boots and shoes, 
Who Lordy mamma, great God a'mighty. 
The woman I love, with my boots and shoes, 
Say the woman I loved by, see her every day. 
The woman I love, she got long black curly hair. 
Who Lordy mamma, great God a'mighty. 
The woman I love got long black curly hair. 
Say the woman I hate, I see her every day. 
Meet me in the bottom with my boots and shoes, 
Who Lordy mamma, great God a'mighty. 
Meet me in the bottom with my boots and shoes. 
Got to leave this town now, 
Got no time to lose. 

SIDE II, Band 8: WHEN THE ROLE IS "CALLED IN HEAVEN. Sung by Joe Brown.

Harrison Ross and Willie John Strong near Livingston, Alabama. An example of the organized, rehearsed group singing which has become popular in relatively recent years. Singing of this kind is heard nowadays in many churches as well as in purely secular settings.

SIDE II, Band 9: I MOANED AND I MOANED. Sung by Joe Brown, Harrison Ross and Willie John Strong, as above. Another example of rehearsed singing in the new style.

SIDE II, Band 10: I'M STANDING IN A SAFETY ZONE. Sung by Rosie N. Winston at Brown's Chapel, Ala. This is an example of the composed song for religious settings, the so-called gospel song.

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