SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING REMEMBERED:

AFRICAN-AMERICAN PATTERNS OF ADAPTATION TO PLANTATION LIFE IN THE NEW WORLD

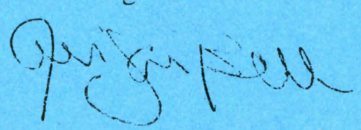
Alison Bell

May 7, 1991
Honors Thesis in Anthropology
Washington and Lee University

Advisors:

Dr. Elizabeth Scott
and
Dr. Holt Merchant

On my honor, I have neither given nor received
any unacknowledged information on this paper.



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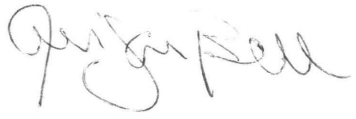

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I owe the idea for my title to Sam Smith, who
considered using this bridal rhyme
-- something old, something new,
something borrowed, something blue --
for a paper including analysis of the blue faceted beads
found at The Hermitage and other slave sites.
Instead, he named his article,
"Plantation Archaeology at The Hermitage:
Some Suggested Patterns,"
Tennessee Anthropologist, 2(Number 2, 1977): 152-63.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When Melville Herskovits first published The Myth of the Negro Past in 1941, he began what has become known as the "Herskovits-Frazier debate." The controversy Herskovits and E.F. Frazier precipitated was whether slaves brought to the United States retained anything of their African culture, or whether slavery had effectively obliterated their African heritage. Frazier argued the latter position:

> Probably never before in history has a people been so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as the Negroes who were brought to America. Other conquered races have continued to worship their household gods ... but American slavery destroyed household gods and dissolved the bonds of sympathy and affection between men of the same blood.... Old men and women might have brooded over memories of their African homeland, but they could not change the world about them. Through force of circumstances, they had to acquire a new language, adopt new habits of labor, and take over, however imperfectly, the folkways of the American environment.... Of the habits and customs as well as the hopes and fears that characterized the life of their forebears in Africa, nothing remains.[1]

Assertions such as Frazier's characterized what Herskovits called the "myth of the Negro past." Herskovits outlined this myth:

> Since the Negroes were brought from all parts of the African continent, spoke diverse languages, represented greatly differing bodies of custom, and, as a matter of policy, were distributed in the New World so as to lose tribal identity, no least common denominator could have possibly been worked out by them .... Even granting enough Negroes of a given tribe had the opportunity to live together ... the cultures of Africa were so savage and so low in the scale of human

> civilization that the apparent superiority of European custom as observed in the behavior of their masters would have caused and actually did cause them to give up such aboriginal traditions.... The Negro is thus a man without a past.[2]

Herskovits' work was a systematic destruction of this myth. He demonstrated first that "the region where slaving took its greatest toll was a relatively small part of Africa," and consisted mainly of the coastal belt of West Africa and the Congo.[3] This area, he argued, formed a major cultural belt in Africa, in which the tribes shared a fundamental world view expressed through a common language family, religious beliefs and customs.[4] It was therefore possible, according to Herskovits, for Africans brought to the United States to determine the "common denominators" of their similar cultures, and to preserve these elements despite the pressures of the plantation environment. Examining the slaves' culture, Herskovits identified "instance after instance" of "vestigial forms of African practice ... slightly modified" to accommodate the Anglo-American cultural superstructure.[5]

Herskovits is best known for his coining of the words "survivals" and "Africanisms" to describe elements of Old World cultures that slaves transplanted whole and unchanged to the southern United States, and he devoted much of The Myth of the Negro Past to identifying these relics. He said in the preface to the 1958 edition that the idea occurred late to him that when groups of varying origins interact, the product is not a "cultural mosaic," consisting of scraps of the old cultures, but rather a novel creation, quite different from the elements contributed by any of the different groups.[6] The question is not, he said, "what Africanisms were carried over in unadulterated form, but how ... cultural accommodation and cultural integration had been achieved."[7] Methods of integration could include, Herskovits explained,

new forms to which slaves "accorded a value that has a functioning role into which it can readily be fitted;" or "assimilated to a new one."[8] As an example of the latter syncretic process, Herskovits cited the African-American belief in African deities which they call by Catholic saints' names.[9]

Though Herskovits saw the slaves' experience in the United States as a process of reinterpreting elements of Anglo-American culture, much of his focus remained on the bits of African culture retained in the United States.[10] Unfortunately, many historians and plantation archaeologists have seized upon the latter concept of survivals and overlooked his argument for the process of acculturation. Even a book published in 1990, dedicated to the memory of Melville Herskovits, is called Africanisms in American Culture.[11] Though many researchers contributing to this book are aware of Herskovits' idea of reinterpretation, they often continue to search for survivals. Robert Hall argues, "The cultural transformation of African-Americans is best viewed as a dynamic process.... But the bulk of this essay describes African survivals."[12] Similarly, archaeologists excavated sites hoping to find artifacts of clear African origin or design, and dismissed the possibility of discovering indications of African-Americans reworking Anglo-American artifacts. In archaeology the search for remnants of the African past has been practically fruitless because few relics exist.[13]

Researchers have come to understand the improbability of finding African survivals -- or any artifacts strikingly different from those left by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Anglo-Americans -- in the archaeological record. As James Deetz

points out, the materials available to free blacks and slaves "were of necessity almost entirely Anglo-American."[14]

Deetz further argues, however, that the ways in which these materials "were put to use in functional combinations might have been more Afro-American" than Anglo-American, and that perhaps archaeologists should attempt to identify African-American patterns rather than survivals.[15] In his analysis of the excavation of the Parting Ways site, an eighteenth-century free black community in Massachusetts, Deetz describes an instance in which the occupants might have used the available Anglo-American materials to express an African orientation. He explains that the standard unit used in building Anglo-American houses is sixteen feet, while the standard unit in West Africa is twelve.[16] That the occupants of the Parting Ways site built their homes according to a twelve-foot standard "provides us with the first suggestion that an Afro-American mind-set was at work."[17] Deetz suggests here that the Parting Ways African-Americans accepted and used materials identical to those of Anglo-Americans, but arranged them according their own conceptions of space: they "constructed their houses differently, disposed of their trash differently, arranged their community differently" than did European-Americans.[18]

Deetz's observations provide a solid beginning for understanding the African experience in the United States as represented through archaeology. Mark Leone and Constance Crosby, however, say that to understand artifacts recovered from black sites, "reading in and learning about Afro-American culture" is critical.[19] This paper is one such attempt. In researching African-American culture, it becomes clear

that Deetz's approach to the Parting Ways site is appropriate for understanding freed black and slave life. Their experience was one of adapting extant Anglo-American artifacts, language and religion to their own African-influenced patterns.

Recent writers have emphasized the importance of considering the African-American experience as a process rather than as a series of retentions. George Brandon reviews researchers' changing approaches from Herskovits' time to the present:

> In the study of the contributions of Africa to the cultures and societies of the New World (and the United States in particular), it has been common to speak in terms of African survivals or retentions rather than of adaptation to account for the persisting cultural distinctiveness of African-American culture. But to speak of Africanisms solely in terms of survivals is, in a literal sense, to speak of them as a kind of superstition, for superstitions are isolated traits or cultural forms left "standing over" after their original institutional supports and the whole system of ideas and values that gave them coherence have collapsed around them.

True survival demands plasticity, not petrification.[20]

Lawrence W. Levine similarly explains that to look for survivals is to misinterpret culture because culture is a process, the "product of interaction between past and present" in which any group, but especially eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African-Americans, had to remain creative and flexible in order to weather adversity.[21] Levine argues that elements of African culture have entered and become part of American culture not as vestigial "quaint reminders" of exotic cultures, but as "dynamic, living, creative parts of life in the United States."[22] Summarizing both the history and study of the African experience in America, Levine concludes, "The question ... is not one of survivals, but of transformations."[23]

This African approach to adapting and surviving in the United States consists of transforming aspects of European-American culture, from language to religion to work to music. A survey of these well-documented realms of African-American life reveals time and again the same process: slaves took elements of Anglo-American culture and reworked them to fit an African-American structure. They put English words into West African sentence structures, reinterpreted the Christian God in an African understanding and transformed Protestant hymns and psalms into forms derived from African sources.

Scholars who investigate African-American music, religion and language concur that the African method of accommodation to plantation life was, in essence, syncretic. Allan Kulikoff, for instance, explains that slaves "did not follow white norms" if they had a choice, "but combined African memories with fragments of white culture."[24] He asserts that the "social institutions they [the slaves] developed were neither imposed by Europeans nor directly taken from African communities but were a unique combination of elements borrowed from European enslavers and from various African societies."[25] The slaves "simultaneously borrowed from whites and drew on the values and beliefs their ancestors brought from West Africa to form a culture not only significantly different from that of Anglo-Americans but also different from the culture of any West African group."[26]

Charles Joyner in his study of All Saints Parish, South Carolina, emphasizes that it was impossible for slaves simply to retain African ideas, and focuses on the pervasiveness of African syncretism of old ideals and new situations. He explains, for

instance, that the slaves insisted on working as a group even though their masters attempted to assign and enforce an individualized task system. That they were able to retain an African "communal work ethos" was less significant to Joyner than their "syncretic achievement" of adapting "a basic African work orientation to a vastly different labor system."[27]

Joyner here identifies an intensely communal ethic as being characteristic of what many scholars have identified as an African way of thinking. In describing the fundamental differences between Anglo- and African-Americans, researchers repeatedly identify a comprehensive but intangible property that Africans brought to the New World. Brandon calls it an African "world view, or aesthetic valuation;"[28] John Lovell terms it "a social consciousness;"[29] and Levine considers it "a fundamental outlook,"[30] or "ways of thinking and acting."[31] Joyner explains that the slaves viewed life in the United States "through an African lens."[32]

This belief in a common African understanding of life is the scholars' best defense against arguments like Frazier's that, because the slaves possessed no "monolithic" culture, they could have created nothing distinctively African in America. Robert Park's comment provides an example of Frazier's position:

> The Negro when he landed in the United States left behind him almost everything but his dark complexion and his tropical temperament. ... Coming from all parts of Africa and having no common language and common tradition, the memories of Africa which they brought with them were soon lost.[33]

The consensus now, however, a product mainly of Herskovits' work, is that Africans "did not have cultural amnesia the moment they stepped off the slavers."[34] Though

they arrived in the United States with a multitude of languages, beliefs and traditions, slaves were captured mainly from the Kongo-Angola region of West Africa.[35] Researchers argue convincingly that within this area, the separate groups shared a fundamental cultural pattern. Joyner puts it well: "Underlying the various African cultures were shared cognitive or 'grammatical' orientations -- mental rules governing appropriate behavior -- which affected the slaves' adoption, adaptation, and application of Christianity" and plantation life as a whole.[36] Joyner echoes Deetz in considering "the process of linguistic change [as] a model for explaining other aspects of culture change. What might be called the 'creolization of culture' involves the unconscious 'grammatical' principles of culture -- the 'deep structure' that governs specific cultural patterns."[37] According to Levine, what Redfield identifies as a general method of understanding cultural processes applies especially well to African adaptation to plantation life. Redfield argues that people with "diverse language, religion, customs and institutions may still share an emphasis on certain virtues and ideals, certain manners of independence and hospitality, general ways of looking upon the world, which give them a similar life style."[38]

In treating the differences between Anglo- and African-American cultures, it is difficult to avoid such ambiguous phrases as "life style," but several specific attributes of the former do contrast to the latter. The first characteristic of African-American culture that many commentators have noted as different from Anglo-American patterns is the slaves' pervasive sense of community. Deetz finds in the archaeological record of Parting Ways evidence of a "more corporate spirit" among

the site's black occupants than "Anglo-Americans might show in similar circumstances," because the four black occupants placed their houses very close to each other, in the center of the ninety-four acres available to them.[39] Joyner similarly identifies All Saints slaves' insistence on a communal work ethic and their preference for group singing and praying, as noted by many other students of African-American music and religion.

A second characteristic of African-American life that scholars frequently mention is the activity of black individuals in group contexts. This activity manifests itself in African-American religion, story-telling and music. In music, for example, there are few solos, and everyone present takes an active role in the performance. This collective activity fosters constant, spontaneous creation and re-creation of hymns, work songs, and sermons.

The final difference many scholars have noted between African- and European-American cultures is that the former has a holistic view of the universe, while the latter tends to view the world more compartmentally.[40] This distinction becomes evident in African-American music, religion and superstition.*[1] The slaves drew no firm boundaries between the secular and religious realms, for instance, among songs appropriate for work, pleasure, or praise. Beverly Robinson points out that the "enslaved Africans had a world view encompassing the balance of nature and did not separate mind and body."[41]

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[1]*For purposes of comparison in the context of this paper, "superstition" will encompass any beliefs pertaining to the supernatural that fall outside the doctrines of Christianity, while "religion" denotes official Christian dogma.

Other distinctions between African- and Anglo-American culture exist, but these three are most significant for this paper because they have the greatest probability of being present in the archaeological record. Preferences for a communal approach to existence should be evident in African-American sites, as Deetz demonstrated at Parting Ways.[42] The African-American tendency toward individual activity in group situations, allowing spontaneous creation and re-creation of bits of existing songs, for instance, should be a pattern represented in the material record as well. Finally, the African-American holistic view of the universe should be apparent in the archaeological remains. Archaeologists should be aware, for instance, that the slaves might not have segregated for different domestic purposes the space allotted to them as rigidly as Anglo-Americans did.

The ultimate value of archaeology rests on the assumption that the material record is an inevitable reflection of past cultures' mental and spiritual lives. The material record should indicate the ways in which people responded to their environment. If not, archaeology is, as many have charged, just an expensive method of finding interesting objects. Much of the documentary evidence available on the non-material aspects of African-American adaptation to plantation life demonstrates that the slaves' acculturation process was one of appropriating elements of Anglo-American culture into West African structures. Because the Africans' creolization was "material, psychological, and spiritual,"[43] there is no reason to assume that the pattern manifest in religion, language, music and oral tradition does not continue in the African-American material record.

To understand how archaeologists might recognize this pattern in the distributions of artifacts on African-American sites, it is first necessary to synthesize the work of researchers who have identified such a process in African-American music, language, religion and oral tradition. Second, it is essential to consider ways in which this pattern is apparent in extant material culture, from basketry and agricultural technology to architecture. Finally, a review of the major archaeological reports on African-American sites is necessary to determine if the process of slaves transforming Anglo-American artifacts can be identified.

CHAPTER 2: NON-MATERIAL CULTURE

The syncretic process of African-American acculturation to plantation life appears in many aspects of their culture that scholars have studied. In language, religion and music, the pattern consistently appears: African-Americans reshaped elements of Anglo-American culture to fit an Old World system of understanding and belief.

Language

Scholars generally agree that a pidgin English necessarily characterized the early stages of Anglo-African contact. A pidgin is a secondary language that has no native speakers but develops spontaneously as a means of communication among speakers of various languages, usually for the purpose of conducting trade.[44] Pidginization is the combination and simplification of two or more languages, reducing the languages' "redundant trappings"[45] to the absolute minimum required for mutual understanding. A pidgin becomes a creole language when people use it as a native tongue,[46] a development that requires the passage of time and the considerable expansion of the pidgin.

Enslaved Africans had to develop a pidgin merely to survive in the American plantation system. In seeking a linguistic "middle ground" between their native languages and English, the Africans were "acquiring an instrument for their survival, and the limited English vocabulary and the few sentences needed for the task of staying alive were extremely useful in dealing with whites."[47] Molefi Asante is not

alone in believing that the first English element slaves learned in the United States was vocabulary. William Stewart, for instance, argues that the pidgin "of the uneducated Negroes and the English dialects of both the educated and uneducated whites" must have been "close enough to each other," at least in vocabulary, "to allow the speakers of each to communicate."[48]

Both Stewart and Asante, however, agree that the slaves did not learn English vocabulary and grammar simultaneously; their acquisition of the former preceded that of the latter. Asante, for instance, explains that even while the earliest Africans were learning English words in America, their "mastery of English morphology and syntax lay in the future."[49] Dunn states that captured Africans brought to the United States extracted "some lexical items" from English but that "the predominant grammatical structure of the pidgin, plus some phonological features, were contributed by the African languages."[50] Herskovits, too, makes this critical point:

> Since grammar and idiom are the last aspects of a new language to be learned, the Negroes who reached the New World acquired as much of the vocabulary of their masters as they initially needed or was taught to them, pronounced these words as best as they were able, but organized them into their aboriginal speech patterns.[51]

Joyner, similarly, explains the initial stages of the African-American acquisition of English as acts of survival, with some mastery over English vocabulary being the priority and the retention of African linguistic structures being the norm:

> Two overwhelming needs -- to comprehend the masters and to comprehend one another -- had profound and complex, and sometimes contradictory, effects on the linguistic response of the Africans. ... While the social dominance of the masters served as a strong incentive

> to learn English, the numerical dominance of the blacks facilitated their retention of African patterns of speech.[52]

In his analysis of the Gullah language of the Sea Islands in South Carolina, Joyner concludes that most of the vocabulary in Gullah is "British, but no British parallels ... [exist] for many of the grammatical patterns of Gullah."[53]

Scholars agree overwhelmingly that the slaves adopted English words into an African syntactical structure, as a final survey will indicate. Paul Christopherson, for instance, describes the African pidgin as "a language consisting mostly of English words, but with a grammatical structure all its own,"[54] and Ivan Van Sertima explains, "Since it is true that the main vocabulary of American blacks is non-African, the crucial African element to watch is not vocabulary at all, but a grammatical base, a syntactical structure."[55] Loretto Todd, finally, argues that "all the English-derived pidgins and creoles of West Africa ... and [of] the southern parts of the United States [are] related ... lexically through English" but syntactically through West African models.[56]

This pattern persisted as the pidgin became a creole language, the only difference being that Africans began using it as their native tongue rather than as a secondary language. Asante suggests that Africans in the United States consciously "sustained and embellished" the more subtle "linguistic and communicative artifacts" of their culture because Anglo-Americans would have attempted to stamp out their preservation of any more conspicuous elements.[57] Forced to adopt English words and phrases, the slaves may have purposefully preserved African linguistic structures. The universal non-academic method of language acquisition in which the "vocabulary

[of the new language] is the first accepted, [and the] morphology [of the old language] the last abandoned"[58] might have provided an opportunity for the Africans to maintain cultural continuity with their homeland and to create an identity among themselves distinct from that of their white masters.

No antebellum observer denied the existence of a distinctive African-American strain of English. On the contrary, contemporary accounts abound with complaints not only of the slaves "butchering" the English language, but also of their influencing the language of the whites around them. Several passages in the letters and diaries of prominent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelers attest to the influence of African-Americans on Anglo-American speech. The geologist Sir Charles Lyell, for instance, complained, "Unfortunately, the whites ... often learn from the Negroes to speak broken English,"[59] and Charles Dickens declared, "all the women who have been bred in the slave states speak more or less like Negroes, from having been constantly in their childhood with black nurses."[60] Similarly, Thomas Ashe records his encounter with a German immigrant to the United States who "had lived long enough in Virginia to pick up some Negro-English."[61] The most famous, but also the most telling, excerpt of this type comes from A.J. Harrison, writing from Lexington, Virginia:

> It must be confessed, to the shame of the white population in the South, that they perpetuate many of these [black] pronunciations in common with their Negro dependents; and that, in many places, if one happened to be talking to a native with one's eyes shut, it would be impossible to say whether a Negro or a white person were responding.[62]

Harrison suggests that African-Americans might have affected Southern English not only in syntax, but also in dialect, a proposition many scholars have only grudgingly admitted.[63] Other scholars, however, have gladly conceded that African-Americans influenced white speech. L.W. Payne, for instance, writing in 1908, concluded that

> the ordinary Southerner would scoff at ... [the notion] that it is the Negro dialect ... that has largely modified his own speech. ... I am convinced that the speech of the white people, the dialect I have spoken all my life ... is more colored by the language of the Negroes than by any other single influence.[64]

Joyner asserts that "creolization was not limited to one race" in the Sea Islands, partly because planters often "learned to talk like their slaves rather than expecting their slaves to talk like them."[65] Most scholars agree that the process of acculturation "has not been just one way.... If ... the speech of American Negroes has been strongly influenced by the speech of whites ... the speech of many whites has been influenced in some ways by the speech of blacks."[66] Both Dunn and Joyner consider the "linguistic confrontation between white and black dialects"[67] a "reciprocal influence."[68]

Some Anglo-Americans, however, even in the present century, have vehemently refused to admit that the distinctiveness of African-American speech could be the result of anything except the slaves' ineptitude at learning proper English. These people insist that slavery successfully obliterated any vestige of African culture on American soil, leaving African-Americans veritable tabulae rasae.[69] They argue that African assimilation to American plantation life was

"rapid and ... complete."[70] They attempt to explain any linguistic differences between Anglo- and African-Americans "which cannot be explained in terms of the spread of European patterns as spontaneous innovations"[71] or relics from Middle English rather than as surviving African cultural elements. Even the noted literary theorist Cleanth Brooks argued that the "characteristic Negro forms" of American speech "turn out to be survivals of earlier native English forms"[72] rather than survivals of African linguistic forms.

As Asante points out, however, "No displaced people have ever completely lost the forms of their previous culture. The specific artifacts may differ from those of a prior time, but the essential elements giving rise to those artifacts are ... retained."[73] Asante alludes to the general pattern of African assimilation into the plantation system, and the adoption of new elements into a retained African structure. This method of acculturation characterizes African adaptation to the plantation system and is especially apparent in the African approach to learning English.

The retention of African linguistic structures was possible even though the slaves came to the United States speaking a wide variety of languages. Africa is one of, if not the, most linguistically diverse continents in the world,[74] and Dunn argues that slave-traders and owners probably exploited this circumstance by intentionally separating captive Africans who spoke the same language:

> Africa was not a wild Babel of mutually exclusive languages. Using rigorous linguistic methodology, African languages can be classified and grouped into four major families.... Of particular significance is the fact that the Blacks who were brought to the

> Americas during the slave trade era spoke almost exclusively the languages of only a subfamily within one of the families. The linguistic diversity so apparently lacking in pattern or structural framework was, in reality, a subfamily of languages woven together in a fabric of structural similarities.[75]

Confronting a hostile, foreign environment in North America, Africans speaking different languages must have found among themselves, by trial and error, the common denominator of their languages,[76] a commonality that existed mainly in syntax. Joyner believes that despite the "mutual unintelligibility" of the languages that Africans spoke coming to the United States, "there were several similar linguistic patterns that African languages shared,"[77] and the patterns "most familiar to the largest number of Africans had the best chance of surviving in the new pidgin."[78]

Many scholars postulate that these African structural "common denominators" survived the pidgin and creole stages and are still apparent in the language of the United States in the late twentieth century. Asante, for instance, explains that "black English" contains "structural remnants of certain African languages even though the vocabulary is overwhelmingly English."[79] Todd agrees[80] and Dillard concludes, "Although Black English has changed greatly ... it retains structural similarities to the earlier" pidgin and creole stages.[81]

There are ten basic differences between standard English and the African-American pidgins and creoles. Their roots are evident in syntactical differences between English and many West African languages, especially the languages of the Niger-Congo subfamily[82] which include Wolof, Fulani, Malinke, Ewe, Yoruba, Igbo, Akan, and Twi.[83] These major differences relate to the use of passive voice, the

method of negation, the designation of habitual/completed versus past/present tense, verbs used serially and as connectives, the use of a zero copula, and the treatment of prepositions, possessives and pronouns. An examination of each of these linguistic elements should demonstrate both African-American linguistic continuity with the Old World and the presence of pidgin/creole structures in modern black English.

Van Sertima explains that Ewe, Yoruba, Twi, Fante and Ga do not distinguish between the active and passive voice, and gives examples of African-Americans expressing thoughts in active voice which would normally be passive in English. He quotes Alice Wine as saying, "Deh sweeten dat in de bank an' potato, deh sweeten dat in de bank an' de hog, dey cyo' it," which he translates into standard English as, "Potatoes are sweetened in the barrel banks and the hog's meat is also stored and cured there."[84] Joyner discusses the same technique in his study of the Gullah language, and gives the example of the standard English passive infinitive construction, "Why do you want to be buried at Wachesaw?" which a Gullah speaker would render active, saying, "How come you wanter bury Watsaw?"[85]

Joyner also mentions the Gullah practice of multiple negation for emphasis. He cites, "don't never" and "never couldn't" as in the sentence, "She say she never couldn't refuse when the old people ask for a drink."[86] Van Sertima says this use arises out of the presence of several negatable elements in verbal complexes in African languages, though he does not specify which languages these are.[87] His examples of African-American multiple negation include "Dat aint no business for me," and "I doan write nobody no letter."[88]

Another significant element apparent in both black English and many West African languages including Efik and Ewe is the distinction between habitual and completed actions versus past and present actions. Dillard summarizes this difference between African-American pidgin/creoles and Standard English:

> A speaker of Standard English must mark tense but can choose to indicate or ignore the on-going or static quality of an action. Black English gives the speaker an option with regard to tense, but its rules demand that he commit himself as to whether the action was continuous or momentary.[89]

Asante explains that Efik and Ewe "differentiate between a customary aspect (habitual) ... and aspect of completion."[90] Turner observes that in Mandinka, "the actual time when an action takes place is of less importance than the nature of the action as regards the completeness or incompleteness."[91] Ewe, Efik, Twi and Igbo all indicate past, present and future tenses by context rather than verbal inflection, but indicate the habitual/completed action by inflection of the verbs.[92] Joyner finds such patterns prominent in the Gullah of the Sea Islands and points out that Gullah speakers "rarely distinguished between present and past tenses," but sometimes used the word "been" as a "past tense marker."[93] He cites "I been on the loom" to indicate an action in the past tense and "I on the loom" to indicate present tense.[94] The omission of the verb "am" in the latter sentence provides an example of the African-American pidgin/creole use of the zero copula, the deletion of an equating verb (is, are) and creation of a verbal adjective construction. Joyner illustrates the Gullah use of the zero copula in the sentence, "I glad for freedom till I fool," ("I was so glad for freedom that I appeared foolish.")[95] Here, the speaker

omits the verb "was" and transforms the noun "fool" into an adjectival form. In this regard, "Gullah retains the verbal adjective construction of ... Ewe, Fante, Kikongo, and Yoruba, but contrasts strongly with [standard] English."[96]

Joyner also provides examples of the Sea Islanders' discrimination between habitual and completed actions. Habitual actions, he says, have "duh" and "be" as their markers: "You orter be carry money," (all the time), and "You can't rest ... w'en hag duh ride yuh," ("You can't rest ... when a hag is riding you [i.e., when you have nightmares]").[97] Stewart finds these same patterns in black English, in which "be" indicates on-going action and "is," an optional addition, signifies present tense.[98] Stewart's examples include "He busy" and "He is busy" as alternative and equally valid expressions of a present tense statement, while "He be busy" (all the time) indicates habitual action.[99] According to Asante, black English preserves these pidgin/creole and West African linguistic rules by the use of the words "don/done" for completed action ("He done gone for good,") "de" for habitual action ("He de go all the time,") and "bin/been" as a past tense marker ("He been going yesterday.")[100]

The African-American use of serial verbs and verbs as connectives is also a derivative of West African languages. Joyner gives an example of the latter in "He tell me say she alive," where "say" serves the Standard English purpose of "that."[101] He cites this construction as the rule in Ibo and Twi.[102] Twi and other West African languages require serial verbs to describe actions for which Standard English prescribes only one. For instance, the standard English "He gave me the money" would be "He take money give me" in Twi and the African-American pidgins and

creoles. Another example is the standard English "He cut the meat" which West African languages would render "He took knife cut meat."[103] Dillard finds this "verb stacking" preserved in the familiar phrases, "I'll take a look-see," "Long time no see," and "No can do."[104]

As a language, Gullah also formed plurals and indicated possession differently than did English.[105] Characteristically of African-American pidgins/creoles and some West African languages, it also had different rules than standard English for the use of prepositions and pronouns. Joyner indicates that the Sea Islanders marked possession by juxtaposition rather than word forms, producing phrases like "he people" rather than "his people."[106] Van Sertima explains that this indication of possession by juxtaposition typifies Ibo, Ewe and Yoruba.[107] Joyner provides examples, too, of the African-American pidgin/creole reduction of the number of prepositions used. The word "to" suffices in Gullah for the Standard English "to", "at" and "on," as in the sentence "He stop to the island" instead of the standard English "on the island."[108]

Another grammatical simplification of Standard English apparent in African-American pidgins and creoles is that of pronouns. A pidgin speaker "may not make distinctions which are important in English but which do not occur in his mother tongue."[109] An important case is the use of "e" and "em" as all-purpose objective pronouns.[110] Herskovits points out that Ewe, Yoruba, Suriname and Gullah all make no distinction between masculine, feminine and neuter pronouns,[111] rendering such statements as "Sam he [her] husband name," and "See 'em [him] one

time."[112] Another version of this includes such constructions as "The old hen, he mighty keerful," and, "Him's a gal!"[113]

Though pidgin/creole speakers do not make the gender distinctions that standard English requires, Gullah and most West African languages distinguish between second-person singular and plural as English does not.[114] Joyner cites the Gullah pronoun for the second person plural as "yinnah or unna."[115] Despite this African-American creation of a second-person plural, no one apparently is ready to ascribe the origin of the southern American "y'all" to African influence.

This analysis should indicate that the slaves were far from being linguistic "blank slates." The African-American English they developed attests to their retention of African linguistic structures under the surface of standard English vocabulary.[116] Such continuity appears not only in the retention of many African linguistic structures, but also in fragmentary lexical evidence. Dillard says that in the southern United States, African-Americans continued the African practice of naming children according to the circumstances under which they were born.[117] The two most common circumstances are the day of the week on which the child was born[118] and the order of birth in the family.[119] The former practice renders such names as "Friday" or the West African equivalent "Cuffy,"[120] and the latter practice produces such names as "Sambo," which is the Hausa name for the second son in a family.[121] Joyner's analysis of Gullah naming practices includes economic ("Hardtimes") and seasonal factors ("June," and "Summer") as appropriate circumstances after which to name children.[122] Finally, there is the African-

American and West African tradition of bestowing "gift names" upon people later in life according to their accomplishments or characters, a practice resulting in such names as "Iceberg Slim,"[123] "Barbecue Bob," and "Blind Lemon Jefferson," as well as the contraction of "William Henry Joseph Bonaparte Bertholoff Smith" to "Willie the Lion Smith."[124]

Scanty but persuasive evidence also suggests that some West African lexical elements have survived into modern English. Angela Gilliam is not alone in believing the English "okay" to have stemmed from the Malenke word "oken," meaning, "that's it."[125] The okra plant and its name are West African in origin,[126] and "goober," "jazz," "banjo," "chigger," "juke" (as in "jukebox"), and "bozo" are probably of African derivation.[127] Similarly, the Southernism "tote" (carry) is almost certainly African in origin. The English-based Krio of Sierra Leone uses "tot" in an identical meaning.[128] Finally, Dillard suggests that the American phrase "by an' by" derives from "bimeby" which is a "future adverbial of almost universal spread in pidgin English."[129]

These specific African linguistic artifacts survive in American-English vocabulary and attest that African-Americans have constituted a potent linguistic force in North America for the last three centuries, especially on the antebellum plantations. The slaves were active, dynamic people who consistently took the language available to them and reshaped it into ancestral West African grammatical structures. They did not accept the language in the standard English which the planters attempted to force on them, but rather transformed the language to such an

extent that southern Anglo-Americans found themselves the recipients of a new language. This pattern of African-American selective acceptance of the Anglo-American norms, and of their reworking parts of the dominant culture to fit a West African structure, appears consistently in studies of the slaves' overall adaptation to the New World.

Religion

The theme of African-Americans' selective acceptance and reworking Anglo-American cultural artifacts into Old World patterns is as true of religion as of language. Scholars concur that African-American religion was essentially syncretic, and they emphasize the slaves' activity in arranging elements of Christianity into an African religious tradition. Paul Radin's famous observation effectively summarizes the slaves' reaction to Christianity: "The antebellum Negro was not converted to God. He converted God to himself."[130]

Scholars repeatedly make this point. Margaret Creel, for instance, explains that the Gullahs "converted Christianity to their African world view,"[131] and Joyner elaborates on this theory:

> They did not so much adapt to Christianity (at least not the selective Christianity evangelized to them by their masters) as adapt Christianity to themselves. ... It was not God the judge of behavior ... but a God more like African deities: God the transcendent spirit. They worshipped this new Christian deity in traditional African ways, and they made European religious forms serve African religious functions.[132]

African-Americans did not accept Anglo-American Christianity whole-heartedly, but rather they selected elements of white culture and transformed them into an African-derived structure. The "new slave religion" represented a "convergence of African and European religious orientations"[133] in which African-Americans "superimposed Christianity upon the beliefs, values, and ceremonies learned from African forebears and from each other."[134] Creel explains that "features of Africanity" including "an African world view, and African theory of being, and some African customs ... sometimes superseded, sometimes coexisted with the Christian influence."[135]

The African-American concept of death provides an example of the slaves' selective acceptance of Christianity and their simultaneous retention of African ideas, as well as their transformation of elements of the former to accommodate the latter. Creel explains that for Gullahs and Africans, death was "a journey into the spirit world, not a break with life or earthly things."[136] The cemetery was not "a final resting place; it was a door ... between two worlds."[137] African retentions concerning death include the Gullah insistence on burying the deceased with their heads to the west and facing east,[138] and the custom among the Igbo and African-Americans of holding a second memorial service several months after the burial.[139] This second ceremony "helped the spirits ... to rest comfortably with the ancestors."[140]

Creel identifies as an additional African-American religious retention concerning death the belief that, because little separation exists between this world and the next, punishment for moral offences should not be reserved for judgement

day. In West African cultures, moral laws stemmed from religious standards, and "ancestral patriarchs, matriarchs, diviners, the living dead, and other spirits were daily guardians of human behavior. Punishments ... were not the province of a future world judge but were dealt with on earth." African-Americans retained this Old World belief and did not accept the Christian concept of a future tribunal.[141] Simultaneously, however, the slaves accepted a feature of the Christian idea of death in place of their traditional African beliefs. One of the most appealing aspects of Christianity to slaves was the Christian expectation of a better life after death. They accepted this component of Christianity, therefore, and rejected the African conceptualization of the afterlife in which an individual's status on earth persisted in the afterlife.[142]

Anglo-American preachers taught the slaves "a highly selective form of Christianity" emphasizing obedience,[143] but the slaves were discriminating in their acceptance of this religion. They "disregarded that portion of their religious instruction that strenuously emphasized a judgement day when 'every theft or falsehood' would be brought to light and held against them."[144] They rejected the idea of a God like Jehovah who must be feared.[145] Their religious songs reflect this selectivity, in that they "are almost devoid of feelings of depravity or unworthiness" which is characteristic of Anglo-American Christianity.[146] Similarly, the God in African-American songs was "neither remote nor abstract," as was the Anglo-American Christian God, but rather "as intimate, personal and immediate as the gods of Africa had been."[147] The slaves' familiarity with their God reveals

itself in lyrics such as "Good news, member ... I heard-e from Heaven today."[148]

The most outstanding example of the slaves' willingness to accept some aspects of European-American religion and reject others is in their preference for the Old Testament. African-American spirituals abound with Old Testament imagery such as David's defeat of Goliath and God's calling Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery.[149] The Old Testament provided the slaves with "analogies to their own situation in the enslavement and persecution of the Israelites" which the New Testament did not offer.[150] The "most persistent image the slave songs contain is ... the chosen people."[151]

Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson commanded a black regiment in the Civil War. After listening for several months to their hymns, he concluded that their Bible was constructed primarily of the books of Moses in the Old Testament, and of Revelations in the New: "all that lay between, even in the life of Jesus, they hardly ever cared to read or hear."[152]

In preaching to the slaves, whites concentrated on only the Biblical passages that commanded obedience, and that practice was as responsible as the Old Testament stories themselves for the African-American adoption of the latter. Levine cites Howard Thurman's recollection of his mother's refusal to read the Pauline letters because they were the favorites of antebellum Anglo-American preachers who told them, "Slaves, be obedient to your masters." She said, "I vowed to myself that if freedom ever came and I learned to read, I would never read that part of the

Bible."[153] Levine explains that her "experience and reaction were typical. Slaves simply refused to be uncritical recipients of a religion defined and controlled by white interpreters."[154]

Even when African-Americans did incorporate the New Testament into their songs and religious ceremonies, they transformed it to fit their conception of religion. Levine explains:

> It was not ... the Jesus of the New Testament of whom the slaves sang, but frequently a Jesus transformed into an Old Testament warrior whose victories were temporal as well as spiritual: "Mass Jesus" who engaged in personal combat with the Devil; "King Jesus" seated on a milk-white horse with sword and shield in hand.... This transformation of Jesus is symptomatic of the slaves' selectivity in choosing those parts of the Bible which were to serve as the basis of their religious consciousness.[155]

This transformation becomes evident in the words of religious songs as well. African-Americans adopted melodies in which Anglo-Americans sang of Jesus: "O when shall I see Jesus/And reign with Him above," and, while retaining the melody, sang of the Hebrew people: "O my Lord delever'd Daniel,/O why not deliver me too?"[156]

The slaves' selective acceptance and reshaping of Christian elements in an African tradition is also evident in the retention and modification of the ring shout. The "shout," a direct retention from African ritual, consisted of "a series of body motions" the slaves performed as a part of their worship.[157] West Africans had conducted the shout to the accompaniment of drums, but slave owners prohibited

drums on plantations. The slaves, therefore, improvised the drum's rhythmical beat with clapping and foot-stomping.[158]

The significance of the ring shout lies not only in its survival in the antebellum South, but as Joyner points out, in its transformation. Its metamorphosis, however, goes beyond the substitute of hand-clapping for drumming. African-Americans made this practice part of their Christian worship. The ring shout became a re-enactment of "Joshua's army marching around the walls of Jericho, the children of Israel following Moses out of Egypt."[159]

A final example of the ways in which African-Americans appropriated and reshaped elements of Anglo-American Christianity occurs in James Weldon Johnson's sermon on the creation.[160] Johnson clearly bases this sermon on the Genesis version, mentioning God's creation of light, the seas, vegetation, and animal and human life. He lavishly embellishes the plot, however: "And God stepped out on space,/ And He looked around and said:/ I'm lonely --/ I'll make me a world."[161] The darkness God sees is "Blacker than a hundred midnights/ Down in a cypress swamp," and He creates the seas by spitting them out.[162] A final detail from Johnson's adaptation of the Anglo-American Genesis story is that, in making "man," God "like a mammy bending over her baby,/ Kneeled down in the dust,/ Toiling over a lump of clay."[163]

A second sermon also demonstrates the African-American method of transforming traditional Christianity. This sermon, an adaptation of Ezekiel 37:1-3, is significant because it illustrates three fundamental facets of African-American

religion: the emphasis on communal worship, the animation expected of worshippers, and the lack of separation between the secular and sacred realms. The text of these chapters was, from the King James version of the Bible:

> The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest.[164]

The African-American preacher, Carl J. Anderson adapts this passage:

> Yeah, it's a sad thing
> Yeah, to go to church and find Christians all dry
> Yeah, and when the Lord said,
> Yes sir, when the Lord said make a joyful noise
> Am I right about it?
> Make it unto the Lord all ye lambs
> And right now the world is making a joyful noise
> The nightclubs are dancing by the tune of the band
> Yeah, the blues and rock and roll singers
> Yeah, those who set around are clapping their hands
> And they're saying to their favorite singer 'Come on!'
> You understand me
> And I think that you shouldn't mind me crying about Jesus
> Yeah, I want to make a noise about the Lord Jesus Christ
> I'm so glad
> That I'm able to make a noise.[165]

One striking aspect of this sermon is the frequent interjections directed toward the audience in lines such as "Am I right about it?" and "You understand me." These comments connect the speaker and congregation, and keep the two constantly in touch. Scholars frequently comment on the communal nature of African-American services. Asante, for instance, describes the audience's regular interjections directed

toward the pulpit: "Amen" or "Pray on."[166] The ring shout reflects this "compellingly communal ethos"[167] of African-American religious services. It allowed the worshippers to move and face each other rather than sitting in lined pews, staring at people's backs.[168] The slaves' determination to view spirituality as a means of maintaining communal harmony[169] reflects an African religious structure they retained on the plantations. African-Americans selectively accepted Christianity but syncretized it with their ancestral view that the spiritual was essentially social.[170]

A second aspect of the sermon based on Ezekiel is its reference to the activity in African-American religious services: "Yeah, it's a sad thing ... to go to church and find Christians all dry ... I'm so glad/ I'm able to make a noise." Antebellum whites frequently complained about the slaves' insistence on being active during services. Anglo-American ministers tried unsuccessfully to force African-Americans to sit quietly. They insisted that "The public worship of God should be conducted with reverence and stillness on the part of the congregation."[171] As the sermon indicates, however, immobility was incompatible with African religious practice. Slaves characteristically selected Biblical passages appropriate to their ancestral concepts of worship, as an ex-slave's testimony indicates: "We used to hide behind some bricks and hold church ourselves.... The Catholic preachers ... wouldn't let us shout, and the Lawd done say you gotta shout if you want to be saved. That's in the Bible."[172] The reference in the sermon based on Ezekiel to dry Christians probably reflects African-Americans' opinion of Anglo-American church services in

which inert Christians, like the Catholic preachers, refused to shout and stamp. The slaves inherited from their African ancestors the belief that religious services should be "informal and spontaneous," not confined to formal meetings or methods.[173]

The final aspect of African-American religion in the sermon on the "dry bones" is its tendency to blend the secular and the sacred. Anderson describes people in nightclubs, singing and listening to blues and rock and roll, as the people who are making "a noise about the Lord." There is no antagonism between the church service and night club life, as there would be in many Anglo-American sermons. In this sermon Anderson obviously refers to twentieth-century activities, but the unification of the secular and the sacred characterized antebellum African-American music as well. For the slaves and their African forebears, "religion was a process of total immersion. Spiritual concerns could not be set apart from secular or communal ones,"[174] nor should they be. They did not draw a clear line between the sacred and the secular.[175]

This integration of secular and sacred also involves a synthesis of mind, body and spirit. African-Americans would not "be still" in religious services because they saw no dichotomy between spiritual reverence and bodily celebration. The ring shout, a "religious-musical-dance-drama," reflects this integration.[176] Joyner locates a difference between Anglo- and African-American culture in the "African cognitive grammar underlying the slaves religion" which did "not make a distinction between the sacred and secular worlds."[177] In the slaves' belief, there was no separate sacred or secular place or event because religion permeated all experience

"from the naming of children to beliefs regarding when to plant and how to hunt and fish."[178]

For slaves, religion could extend to such activities as hunting and fishing. They rejected the dichotomy between Christianity and superstition, defined here as any belief outside prescribed Christian dogma. Levine points out that

> in the cultures from which the slaves came, phenomena and activities that we might be tempted to dismiss as "superstitions" were legitimate and important modes of comprehending and operating within a universe conceived of in sacred terms. To distinguish between these is a meaningless exercise.... The slaves' religion was multifaceted and extremely eclectic in the African tradition.[179]

The pattern apparent in language and Christianity also appears in the slaves' superstitions or folk beliefs. African-Americans did not simply abandon their Old World beliefs when they landed in North America, but rather they syncretized old convictions and new Christian doctrine. As Levine points out, "there were few tensions" between Christianity and African beliefs as the slaves perceived them. The "various components of their religion complemented and reinforced each other."[180] Some slaves, for example, considered Satan a "conjurer," and believed that Moses turned his rod into a snake by using magic.[181] Another example is the comment of an ex-slave: "We all knowed about the Word and the Unseen Son of God and we didn't put no stock in conjure. 'Course we had luck charms and good and bad signs, but everybody got dem things."[182] The lack of antagonism between Christian and African beliefs is strikingly clear in the slaves' practice of using "their magical folk beliefs to protect the privacy ... of their religious worship."[183] Similarly, African-Americans protected themselves from spirits by placing a Bible at the cabin door or

by reading the Bible backwards three times to avoid being conjured.[184] The slaves' belief in spirits demonstrates their syncretism of Christianity and superstition: spirits destined for hell (a Christian concept) did not actually go there until judgement day. Since they had no resting place, these "on-easy speerits" roamed the earth and tormented the living.[185]

The slaves, then, "would have had some difficulty disentangling the web that bound their formal creed and their folk religion into an intelligible whole."[186] They perceived no dichotomy between superstition and Christianity, nor among mind, body and spirit, nor between the secular and the sacred. This integration, which was alien to the Anglo-American tradition, was firmly established among the slaves because it was part of a "deep-rooted African cognitive orientation."[187]

Just as the slaves brought no single language to the United States, so African-Americans in the antebellum South shared no single religion, but rather retained diverse African beliefs. Just as they found the common denominators of their diverse languages, so they found a "theological affinity" that "transcended differences in rites and practices, and reflected a common bond."[188]

This common bond, their shared "deepest ancestral values,"[189] constituted the religious structure into which slaves inserted the parts of Christianity they selectively accepted. Antebellum African-Americans reshaped the Christianity that the Anglo-Americans attempted to force on them. They retained their fundamental values and defended the importance of communal experience, the active participation

and improvisation of the individual in the group, and the integration of the secular and the sacred.

Music

Analysis of eighteenth-and nineteenth-century African-American music reveals many of the patterns apparent in slave language and religion. Essentially, African-American music is the product of the slaves' transformation of the Anglo-American musical tradition to conform to African ideals. Slaves selectively adopted English lyrics and hymns, and incorporated them into African musical patterns, reminiscent of the way in which they arranged English words into African sentence structures. This reworking of elements of Anglo-American music allowed slaves to express the same distinctively African values apparent in African-American Christianity: the blurring of secular and sacred realms, the importance of community and the active participation of individuals in group activities.

The most noticeable feature of African-American music is its intimate association with religion. This relationship is partly a function of the available resources because spirituals provide most documentation of the slaves' religion, but the association of slave song and religion is also a reflection of the African heritage. Just as eighteenth-century African-Americans drew no distinct boundaries between sacred places and times, nor between Christianity and superstition, neither did they relegate certain songs to church and others to work. They composed very few exclusively secular songs. Slaves habitually transformed the words of hymns to

express their sentiments during labor,[190] and many spirituals were as appropriate for work as for church: "Breddren don' get weary,/ Fo' de work is most done," (Brethren don't get weary,/ For the work is almost done,) and, "E' got e' ca'go raidy,/ Fo' to wait upon de Lord," (He's got the cargo ready,/ For to wait upon the Lord).[191] Slaves frequently incorporated Biblical images into songs they sang in the fields. Joyner illustrates this process: "Joshua was the son of Nun/ He never stop till the work was done."[192] Songs such as "Don't Get Weary, We're Almost Done" reflect the same union of work and worship.[193]

This fluid transition from the secular to the sacred realm is evident even within single songs. Levine gives the example of the African-American legend "Long John" who eluded the bloodhounds and escaped. Slaves sang about him and made him a part of their culture: "It's a long John,/ He's a long gone,/ Like a turkey through the corn,/ Through the long corn."[194] The song then takes a sudden turn and transforms Long John into the Biblical John the Evangelist:

> Well, my John said ...
> "If a man die,
> He will live again."
> Well they crucified Jesus
> And they nailed him to a cross;
> Sister Mary cried,
> "My child is lost!"[195]

Then just as abruptly, the song returns to Long John's escape: "Says-uh: 'Come on, gal,/ And-uh shut that do,'/ Says, 'The dogs is comin'/ And I've got to go.'"[196] The ease with which slaves passed from the temporal to the religious reflects the unity with which they perceived these two realms.

Similarly, the slaves reserved no time specifically for singing. Music was an integral part of work, rest and play for both Africans and African-Americans.[197] Slaves regularly performed the entire range of their daily tasks while singing, with an intensity and style that attracted the attention of the Anglo-Americans around them.[198] As one anonymous observer noted in Dwight's Journal of Music, "The Negro is a natural musician ... . They go singing in their daily labors. The maid sings about the house, and the laborer sings in the field."[199]

The pervasiveness of music in the slaves' daily routines indicates not only their integration of elements Anglo-Americans segregated (music and work), but also suggests a more communal ethic than that of Anglo-Americans. Though many Anglo-American planters believed that assigning specific tasks to individual slaves would encourage productivity, slaves managed to impose a group consciousness on individual tasks by working to the rhythm of songs.[200] Their successful integration of communal songs and the individualistic task system enabled slaves to continue the cooperative work patterns prevalent in West Africa.[201]

This association of song with work was indispensable for some tasks, such as felling trees, that required coordination among workers. As one African-American in Texas explained in the mid-nineteen sixties,

> When you're working with that diamond [axe] you got eight or twelve men on a tree with axes and all of them swinging in union, in rhythm. They got to have rhythm and everybody got to know what they're doing. So generally, when a good group works together, maybe seven or eight or ten, they work together all the time. And they keep singing together. So it's just regular harmony.[202]

Even in less dangerous tasks when coordination was not essential, slaves sang in unison while they labored.[203] Slaves husking corn or picking cotton might sing together "Oh, next winter gonna be so cold,/ Fire can't warm you be so cold." They reversed this image during winter labor: "Oh nex' summer be so hot/ Fan can't cool you."[204] The slaves used song to sympathize with each other and to acknowledge their collective situation, reinforcing in effect their African-derived communal ethic.

As was true of song in religious services, African-Americans expected each individual to participate actively in secular songs, and just as church services were conversations between preacher and congregation, so songs were rarely solos. In music, the audience participated in the song, unlike Anglo-American practice which involved an active performer and a passive audience.[205] The call-and-response form of songs incorporated everyone present into the musical experience. In African-American work songs the leader might sing, "I need some water," or "My heart is aching," and the working group would respond, "Lordy now, wo,/ I need some water, wo Lord," or, "Lordy now, wo,/ My heart is aching, wo Lord."[206] This call-and-response pattern was also the dominant structure of the spirituals, which allowed slaves to preserve their individuality yet blend with the common identity.[207] Individual expression took the form not only of actual singing but also of periodic exclamations during the songs ("Sing on," or, "Tell em' about it!") as well as tapping, clapping and dancing.[208]

The activity of individuals in group situations promoted spontaneity and improvisation in African-American musical events. Visitors to the antebellum South

frequently remarked on the slaves' extemporaneous approach to song. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, for instance, was fascinated by the way his soldiers remade and reworked songs.[209] He observed that "identical or slightly varied stanzas appear in song after song; identical tunes are made to accommodate completely different sets of lyrics; the same song appears in different collections in widely varied forms."[210] An unidentified traveller through the South in 1845 commented similarly: "You may ... hear the same tune a hundred times, but seldom the same words accompanying it."[211] These observations reflect the freedom the slaves felt to adapt, re-create and improvise songs. Just as African-Americans refused to accept English and Christianity in their entirety, they rejected strict memorization of Anglo-American songs. They reshaped the lyrics to express an African-American mental structure, an essentially syncretic approach. The English musician Henry Russell noticed in 1830 that the slaves in Vicksburg, Mississippi, would take "a fine old psalm tune," and by suddenly and spontaneously accelerating the tempo, transform it "into a kind of negro melody."[212] They fashioned Protestant psalms and hymns into new compositions by altering the structure, text, melody and rhythm. They wove "shouts, moans, groans, and cries into the melody," and produced intricate musical structures by adding syncopated foot-stamped or hand-clapped patterns.[213] The alterations they made always increased the activity and sense of community among the singers. They transformed the original verses of a hymn, for instance, into a call-and-response or repetitive chorus, because these forms both promoted individual participation and inclusion within the group, and also encouraged improvisation.[214]

In African cultures making music depends on the active involvement of all present. It is primarily a participatory communal event that serves to unite those present into a cohesive group.[215] The slaves' insistence on individual participation in both religious and work songs represents a direct African musical survival. With its antiphony,

pervasiveness of daily life, improvisational character and strong association to bodily movement, African-American music remained much closer to the musical tradition of West Africa than to the musical style of Europe.[216]

Retention, however, is not as significant as the way in which slaves syncretized their inherited musical tradition with elements of Anglo-American music. Often the slaves retained African music and accepted English lyrics. R. Nathaniel Dett argues that preserved "feelings, beliefs, and habits of vast antiquity" appear in the slaves' music, because, though the words may change, "music cannot lie. ... The things that are at its base ... are unconscious, unvolitional human products."[217]

The slaves' practice of retaining African melody and adding modified Anglo-American lyrics parallels the manner in which they accepted English vocabulary but used it in West African grammatical structures. Similarly, African-Americans' integration of elements of Christianity into an Old World religious understanding parallels their reworking of Anglo-American music into their ancestral tradition. African-Americans were able to recreate and interpret music "out of an African frame of reference"[218] because, as with language and religion, the slaves brought to the United States a common West African musical tradition.[219]

This tradition endowed the slaves with a common core of "Africanness" which consisted not only of performing specific activities, but more importantly of the way in which they performed these activities.[220] In music, this "way of doing something" meant that the slaves did not just sing in church, nor did they just sing Protestant hymns, but rather they lived, worked and worshipped to songs of their own syncretic creation. These songs were neither imitations of white song nor were they entirely original productions.[221] Rather, they were the product of an African-American synthesis of old and new traditions.

Like language, no one engaged in the debate over origins of African-American music denies that slaves possessed their own distinctive music.[222] Also like language, few whites in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries were willing to credit the African-American community with influencing Anglo-American music.[223] The slaves, however, were a creative, vital group, and the probability is quite high that the slaves who joined in Anglo-American religious meetings influenced white Protestant music, as white evangelical music departed from traditional Protestant hymnology to include more percussive qualities, syncopation, and call-and-response patterns.[224] That slaves had ample opportunity to influence white music is evident from the practice of white masters asking their slaves to sing for them: "Our white folks ... when they have camp meeting would have all the colored come up and sing over the mourners."[225]

The example of music supports the hypothesis that acculturation worked in two directions in the antebellum South. It also demonstrates that African-Americans

actively adopted and recreated elements of Anglo-American music to fit their African frame of reference. Slaves created new musical forms out of existing traditions by recasting Anglo-American words and music into African patterns. Just as the slaves selectively accepted and reshaped the Christian religion and English language, so they forged an African-American music out of "many pre-existing bits of old songs mixed together with snatches of new tunes and lyrics."[226] They learned the songs primarily from Anglo-Americans around them, but they reworked them to such an extent that the songs "formed primarily in the white man's moulds ... lost all recognizable relation to" white melodies.[227] W.E.B. DuBois, one of the first African-American scholars, was ahead of his time when he asked his white audience almost a century ago, "Your country? How came it yours? Before the pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song."[228]

actively adopted and recreated elements of Anglo-American music to fit their African frame of reference. Slaves created new musical forms out of existing traditions by recasting Anglo-American words and music into African patterns. Just as the slaves selectively accepted and reshaped the Christian religion and English language, so they forged an African-American music out of "many pre-existing bits of old songs mixed together with snatches of new tunes and lyrics."[226] They learned the songs primarily from Anglo-Americans around them, but they reworked them to such an extent that the songs "formed primarily in the white man's moulds ... lost all recognizable relation to" white melodies.[227] W.E.B. DuBois, one of the first African-American scholars, was ahead of his time when he asked his white audience almost a century ago, "Your country? How came it yours? Before the pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song."[228]

CHAPTER 3: MATERIAL CULTURE

> If ... the acculturative situation be analyzed in terms of ... opportunities for retentions of Africanisms in various aspects of culture, it is apparent that African forms of technology ... had but a relatively slight chance for survival. Utensils, clothing and food were supplied the slaves by their masters, and it is but natural that these should have been what is most convenient to procure, least expensive to provide, and ... most like the types to which slave owners were accustomed. Thus ... the short-handled broad-bladed hoe gave way to the longer, slimmer bladed instrument of Europe, and such techniques as weaving and ironworking and wood carving were almost entirely lost.[229]

Surprisingly, it was not Frazier but Herskovits who reached this conclusion. Even the scholars most enthusiastic about detecting African survivals in American culture doubted that an African influence could extend to material culture. Their tendency was to assume that "in those instances where Africans did not bring African-made artifacts with them in the slave ships, there was no possibility of reproducing the ancestral material culture."[230] As with non-material culture, many researchers assumed that slavery was simply so devastating that African-Americans could not retain even scraps of their heritage.[231] Analysis of African-American language, religion and music, however, has revealed that the slaves' most fundamental retention was an African way of thinking. Even when their language and religion were Anglo-American, slaves managed to transform these artifacts into a unique, African-derived expression. Since an essentially African creative philosophy was at the root of their non-material culture, there is no reason to believe that this same mentality failed to function in the slaves' relation to the material world.[232]

The tradition of African-American syncretism existed as a "culturally determined perspective" that slaves exhibited in tangible objects.[233] The materials were necessarily Anglo-American, but the rules by which slaves put them to use were African-American.[234] This use of Anglo-American objects in an African-American context parallels the ways in which slaves used English words in West African sentence structures and reshaped parts of Christianity to be consistent with African theology.

Robert Hall provides an analogy for African-American artifacts that is also appropriate for the intangible aspects of culture.[235] He argues that the artifact type is a completely different matter than the ways slaves used these objects. Individual artifacts are analogous to the phenotype and the "ideal traditional form" to the genotype: "What we see is not necessarily what the worker had in his or her head. It is, rather, the end product of an interaction [between] the craftperson's image of the cultural tradition or ideal [and] the materials available to work with." The "ideal image" is a concept carried, "not in the hands ... of the African bondsmen, but in their heads."[236] The ways African-Americans considered and used materials that Anglo-Americans produced were soundly Old World. Each African-American object was the "end product of a syncretic process."[237]

The presence and strength of African skill in the antebellum South suggest that African-American material culture was a blend of Anglo-American objects and African technology. Holloway argues that traders captured Africans mainly in areas characterized by clearings and by the cultivation of rice, indigo, cotton, maize,

sorghum, okra and sesame.[238] In addition, the Ashanti and Dahomeans, who became slaves in South Carolina and Virginia, had a long tradition of work in stone, bronze and iron.[239] Slave owners were aware of the various trades and technologies that Africans practiced in their homelands, and clearly sought out slaves from specific areas according to the plantations' needs.[240] They selected the Senegambians, for instance, as blacksmiths and carpenters because they had a highly-developed metalworking and woodworking technology in Africa.[241] Similarly, they believed that the Igbo and Efik made the best field hands, perhaps because of their agricultural practices in Africa.[242]

Europeans were ignorant of the methods of herding large numbers of animals in open spaces, and Anglo-Americans relied on African experience with herding to make the American livestock industry successful.[243] Many cowboys of the American West were black, and Philips argues that the cowboy culture had African roots.[244] Cowboys' annual north-south migratory pattern is unlike the cattle-keeping patterns in Western Europe but is analogous to the migratory patterns of Fulani cattle herders. Philips argues that "many details of cowboy life, and even material culture can be traced to Fulani antecedents."[245] Unfortunately he does not identify these details, but Peter Wood indirectly supports Philips' claim that Anglo-Americans depended on African-Americans' skill with livestock. Anglo-Americans entrusted the care of their herds to African-Americans and, possibly as a result, the industry suddenly boomed in the eighteenth century.[246] Traders actively sought out Africans from the Windward or Grain Coast (the Mande and

Mano River groups) because of their knowledge of rice, cotton and indigo cultivation.[247] Traders occasionally referred to the Grain Coast as the "Rice Coast."[248] From this area, now part of Sierra Leone, traders brought Africans proficient in rice cultivation to the southern colonies, an environment much more like Africa than Europe.[249] African-Americans were the only people in North America familiar with the planting, hoeing, processing and cooking of rice.[250] Europeans, even those who had lived in the Caribbean, knew "nothing at all" about rice cultivation before importing Africans, and could have learned little from Native Americans who only gathered wild rice.[251]

The manner in which slaves in the New World processed rice was identical to African methods. They planted rice in the spring by pressing holes in the ground with their heels, then covered the seeds with their feet "in the African manner."[252] Their use of the hoe as an all-purpose implement also represents continuity with African practice,[253] as did their hoeing in unison to work songs.[254] In the fall after they harvested the rice, slaves pounded the threshed rice using mortars and pestles. Although the mortar and pestle are universal, they are not "universally used in the same way." The lowcountry slaves' manner of pounding the rice remained identical to the West African manner.[255] Finally, slaves fanned the rice with wide, flat winnowing baskets "made by black hands after an African design."[256]

The design was coil basketry, which Joyner argues had an African origin,[257] and which represents "perhaps the most noteworthy example of distinctly Afro-American craft."[258] John Michael Vlach proposes that Senegambian baskets could

be perfectly interchanged with Sea Island ones.[259] African-American fanner baskets represent direct continuity with West Africa. Unlike Native Americans' woven baskets, slaves made coiled baskets by wrapping dried palmetto fronds around bundles of sweet grass.[260] These fanners are common in mid-nineteenth-century photographs, and slaves' descendants in rural South Carolina still practice these basket-making techniques.[261]

The baskets themselves would not survive archaeologically, but the primary tool used in making these baskets could. This tool was an awl-like instrument that slaves called a "bone."[262] The bone was usually a sharpened teaspoon or a nail with a flattened end that African-American basket-makers used to push palmetto strips through the coils.[263] The bone provides an example of African-Americans reworking standard Anglo-American items in a way foreign to the dominant culture, and exhibits the African skill at improvisation. The baskets themselves also represent the slaves' syncretic expression: using traditional techniques, African-Americans wove modified fanner baskets for use as church collection plates.[264] Old World basketry resurfaced in American material culture, a hybrid of retained technology and accepted religion.

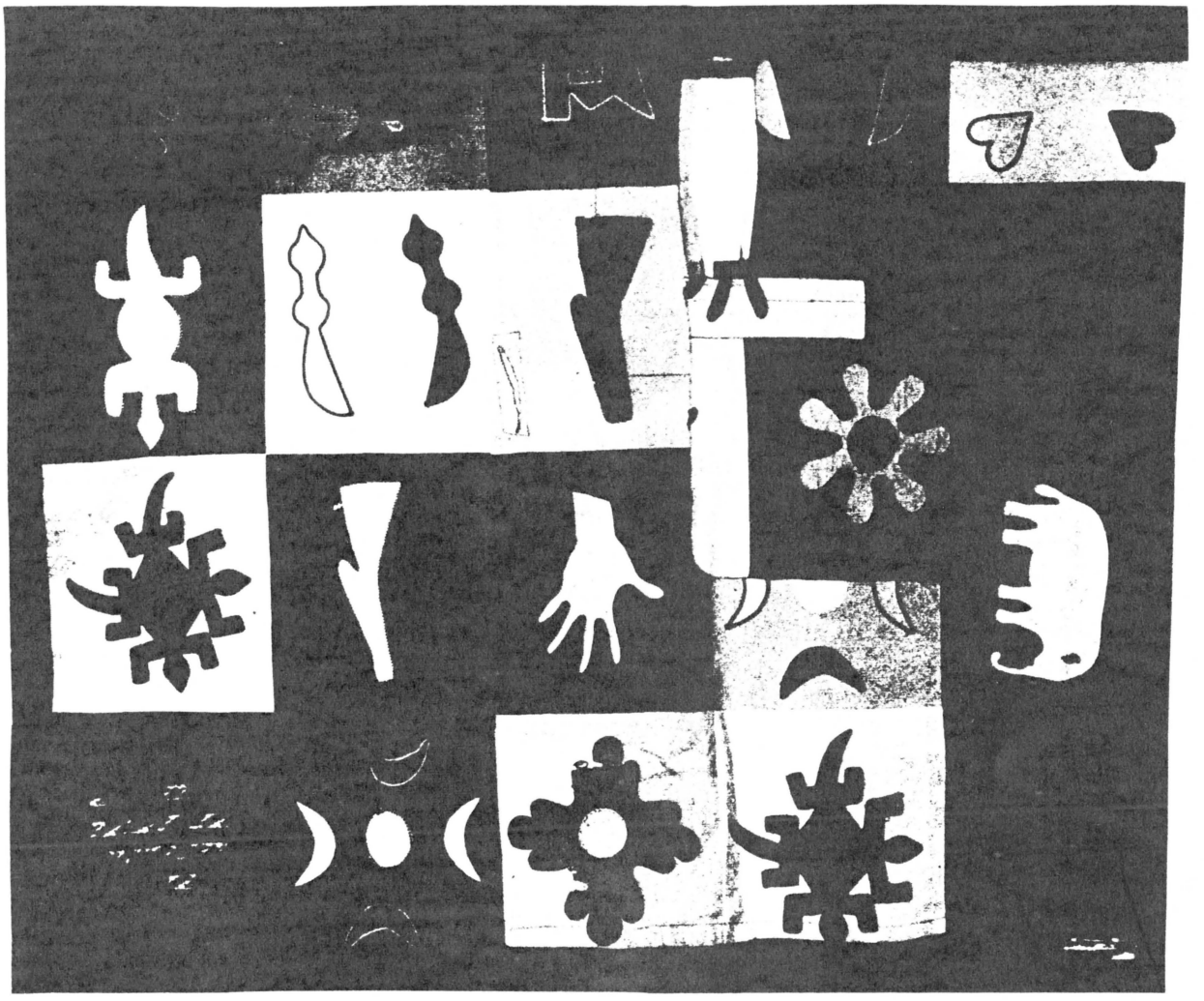
Quilts provide another example of the ways in which African-Americans transformed Anglo-American artifacts. The materials available to slaves for making quilts were undeniably Anglo-American. There was nothing African about the strips of old clothes that whites gave the slaves for making quilts. Quilting itself was a European textile form.[265] Slaves, however, accepted this tradition and the

available materials then reinterpreted them according to African canons of design.[266]

Harriet Powers, for instance, was born in Georgia in 1837, the daughter of slaves imported from Congo-Angola in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century.[267] Powers incorporated into her quilts symbols traditionally sewn into Fon tapestries: crescents, rosettes, horned animals, fish and birds (Figure 1). Because these tapestries were symbols of great prestige in the Fon culture, the possibility exists that these quilts represented more than mere blankets to African-Americans.[268]

Another significant aspect of Powers' quilts is their combination of Biblical motifs and depictions of events from her own life (Figure 2). She divides one quilt into fifteen squares, ten of which depict Biblical passages: Job praying for his enemies, Moses and the serpent, Adam and Eve, Jonah and the whale, and the animals on the ark.[269] Interspersed among these panels are images from her own memory. She explains that some of these squares depict "the independent hog which ran five hundred miles from Georgia to Virginia; her name was Betts," and the "falling of the stars on November 13, 1833. The people were frightened and thought the end of the world had come. God's hand staid the stars. The varmits rushed out of their beds."[270] Immediately after Revelation's seven-headed beast, Powers added to her quilt "Cold Thursday," February 10, 1895, a day she remembers because she saw a woman frozen at prayer and a man frozen drinking from his jug of liquor.[271] Powers' remarks and art reflect the unity with which she and many

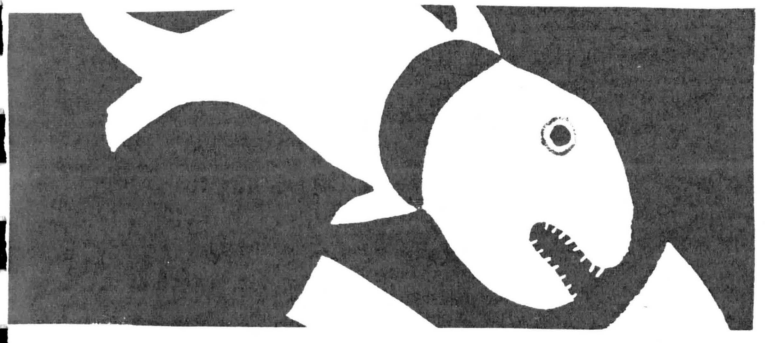
FIGURE 1A



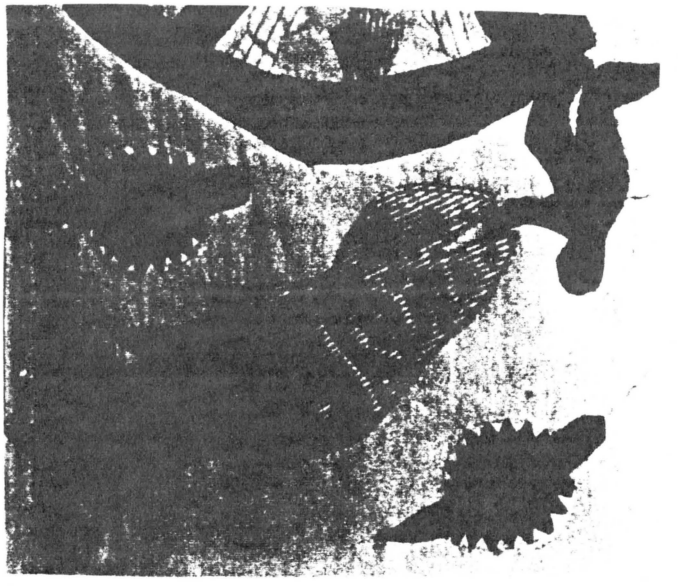
Ghana Tapestry

Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 48.

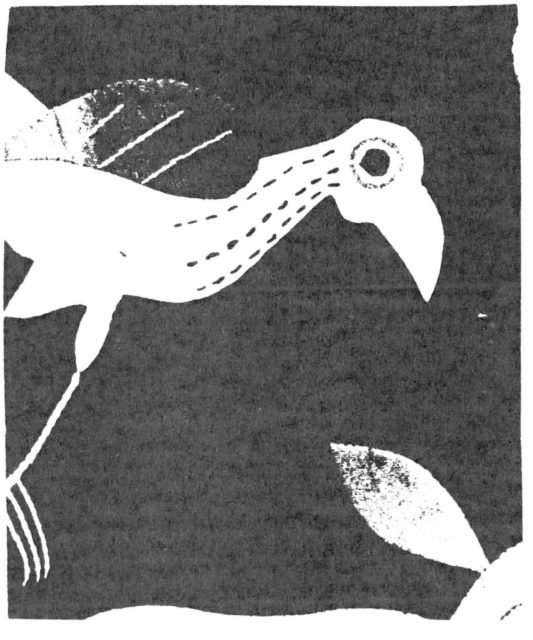
FIGURE 1B



Detail of Fon Tapestry



Detail of Powers´ Quilt

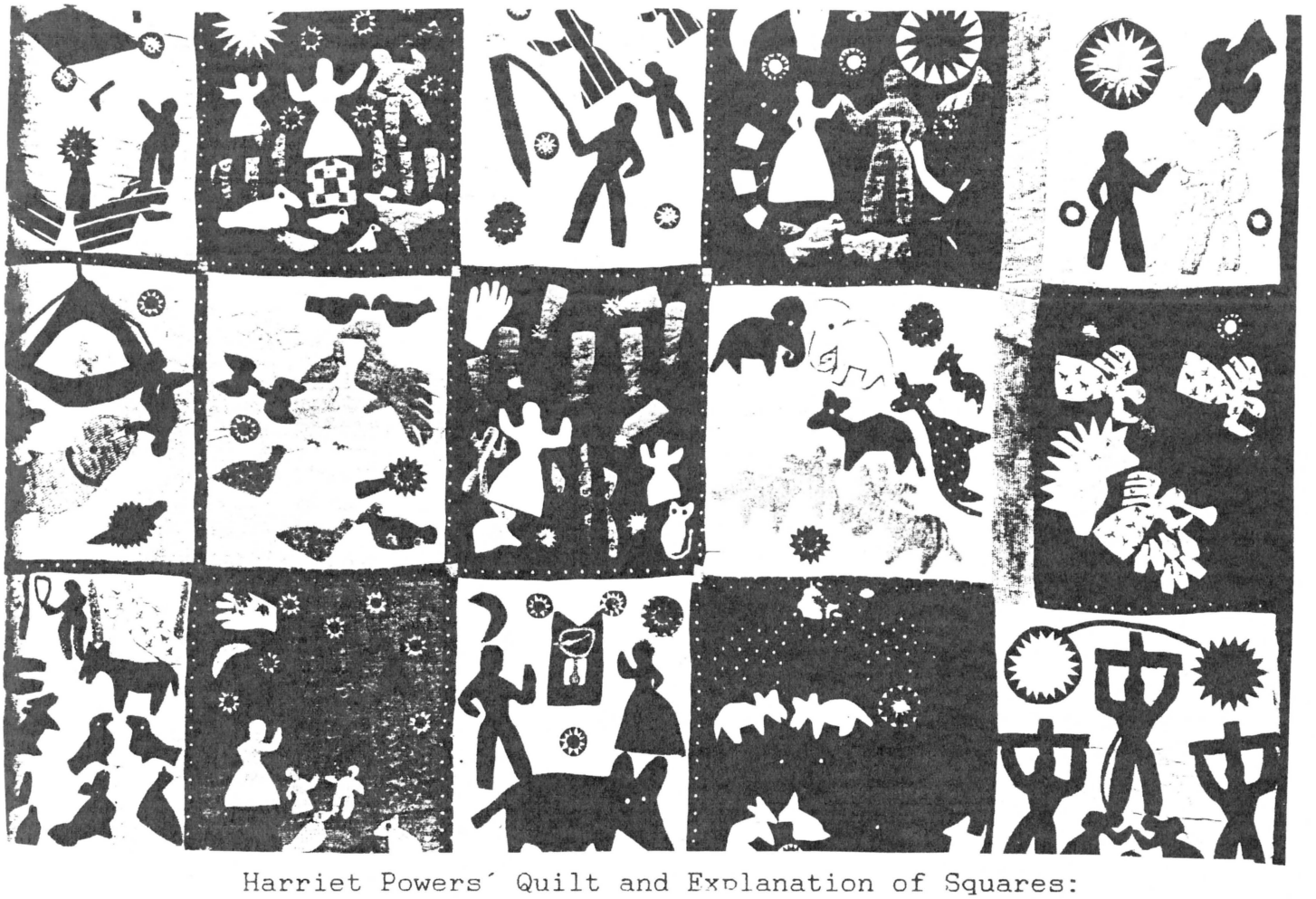


Detail of Fon Tapestry

Detail of Powers´ Quilt

Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 51.

FIGURE 2



Harriet Powers' Quilt and Explanation of Squares:

1)Job praying for his enemies. Job's crosses and coffin.
2)Dark day, May 19, 1780; all the cattle went to bed ...
3)Serpent lifted up by Moses ...
4)Adam and Eve in the garden.
5)John baptizing Christ.
6)Jonah cast over board of ship and swallowed by the whale.
7)God created two of every kind, male and female.
8)The falling of the stars on Nov.13, 1833 ... God's hand staid the stars. The varmits rushed out of their beds.
9)Two of every kind continued. Camels, elephants, "gheraffs."
10)Angels of wrath and the seven vials.
11)Cold Thursday, 10 of Feb. 1895.
12)Red light night of 1846 ... Women, children, and fowls frightened but God's merciful hand caused them no harm.
13)Rich people who were taught nothing of God ... The independent hog which ran 500 miles from Ga. to Va. her name was Betts.
14)The creation of animals continues.
15)The crucifixion of Christ.

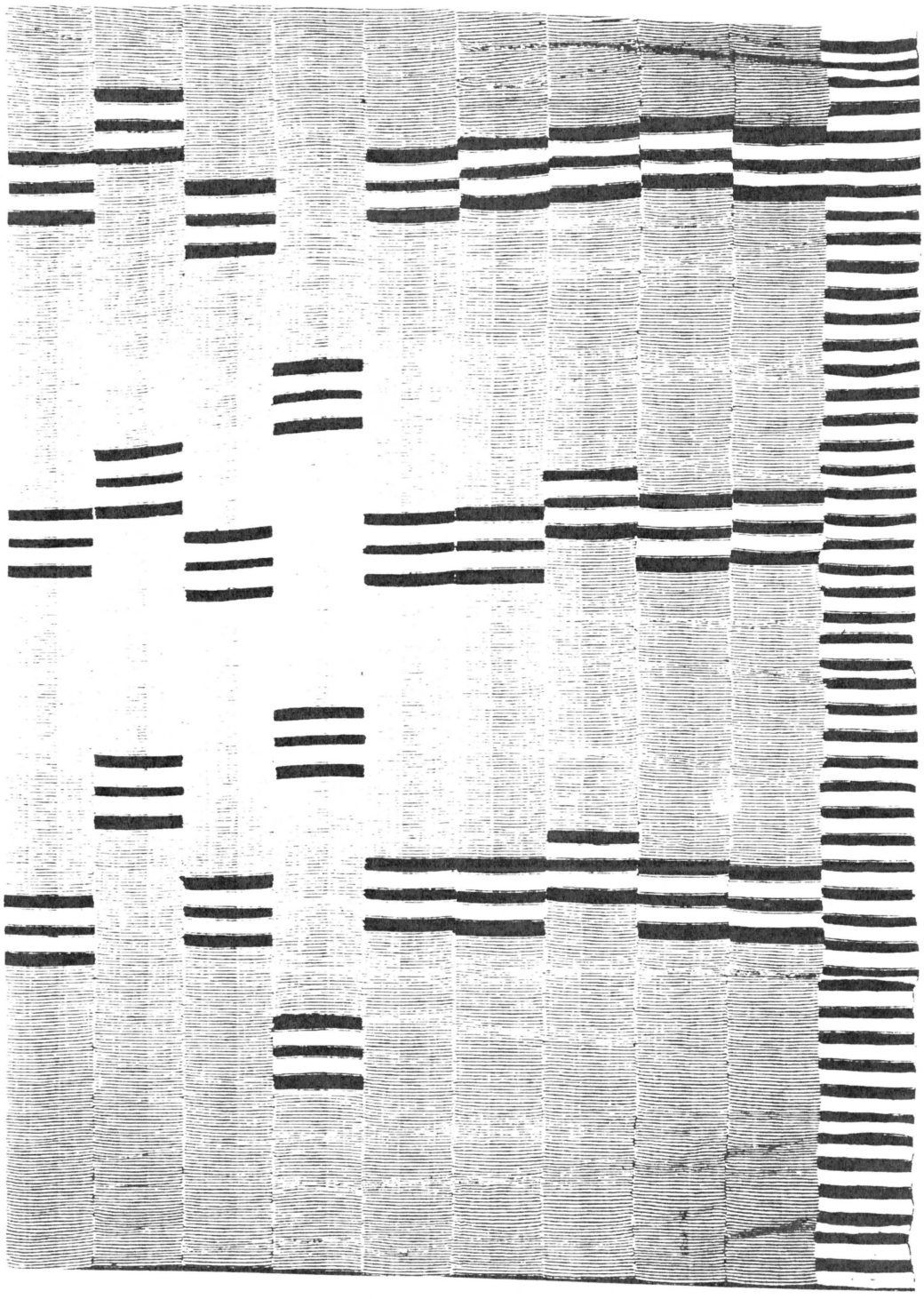
Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 47.

other African-Americans perceived the secular and the sacred. Her favoring of Old Testament themes is also consistent with observations of African-American Christianity.

Another form of African-American expression is apparent in the overall designs that slaves made on quilts. Vlach argues persuasively that African-American quilters did not attempt to produce the precise symmetrical compositions that many Anglo-Americans expected.[272] He says that quilts which African-Americans create "would never be mistakenly identified as white work" because of Anglo-Americans' insistence on "tight and ordered symmetry" and African-Americans' tendency to improvise and structure more loosely.[273] Anglo-Americans make the strips on their quilts exactly the same length and width and piece these together in an orderly manner: "geometric motifs set in blocks constitute the core of the Euro-American quilt design tradition."[274] In contrast to this "uniform repetition and predictability" are African-American strip quilts that Vlach describes as "random and wild, seemingly out of control."[275] The strips are not the same width, blocks of many colors are scattered over the quilts, and the rigid Anglo-American block patterns appear as a free-flowing strip arrangement (Figure 3).[276]

Lucinda Toomer's quilts are a "subdued example" of African-American improvisation (Figure 4). She alternates thin strips of varying width with wide strips composed of blocks of diamonds. These are symmetric and uniform in color at one side of the quilt, but become progressively less predictable toward the quilt's opposite side. The diamonds become squares in one corner.[277] Vlach compares Toomer's

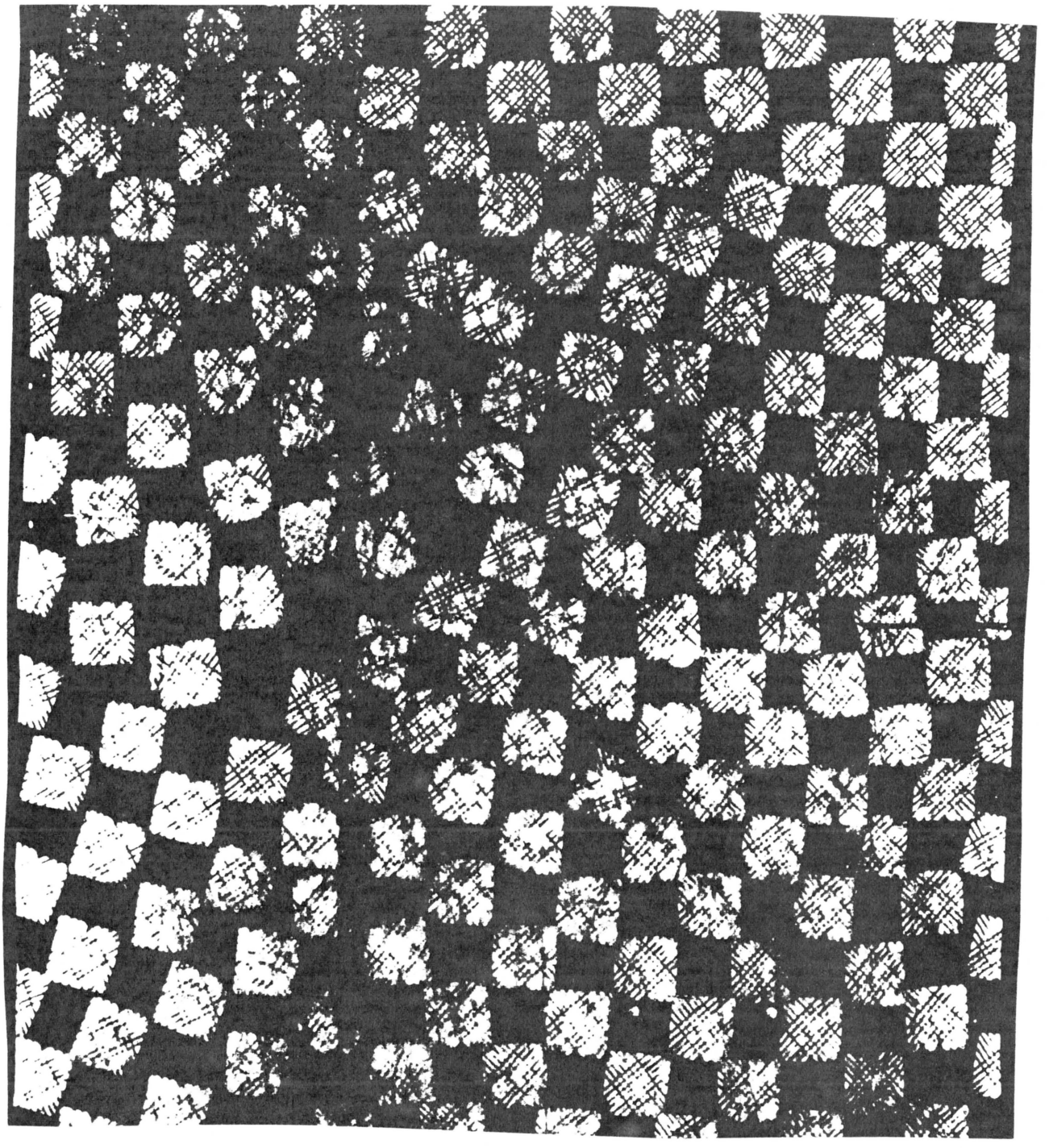
FIGURE 3A



Tapestry, Upper Volta

Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 68.

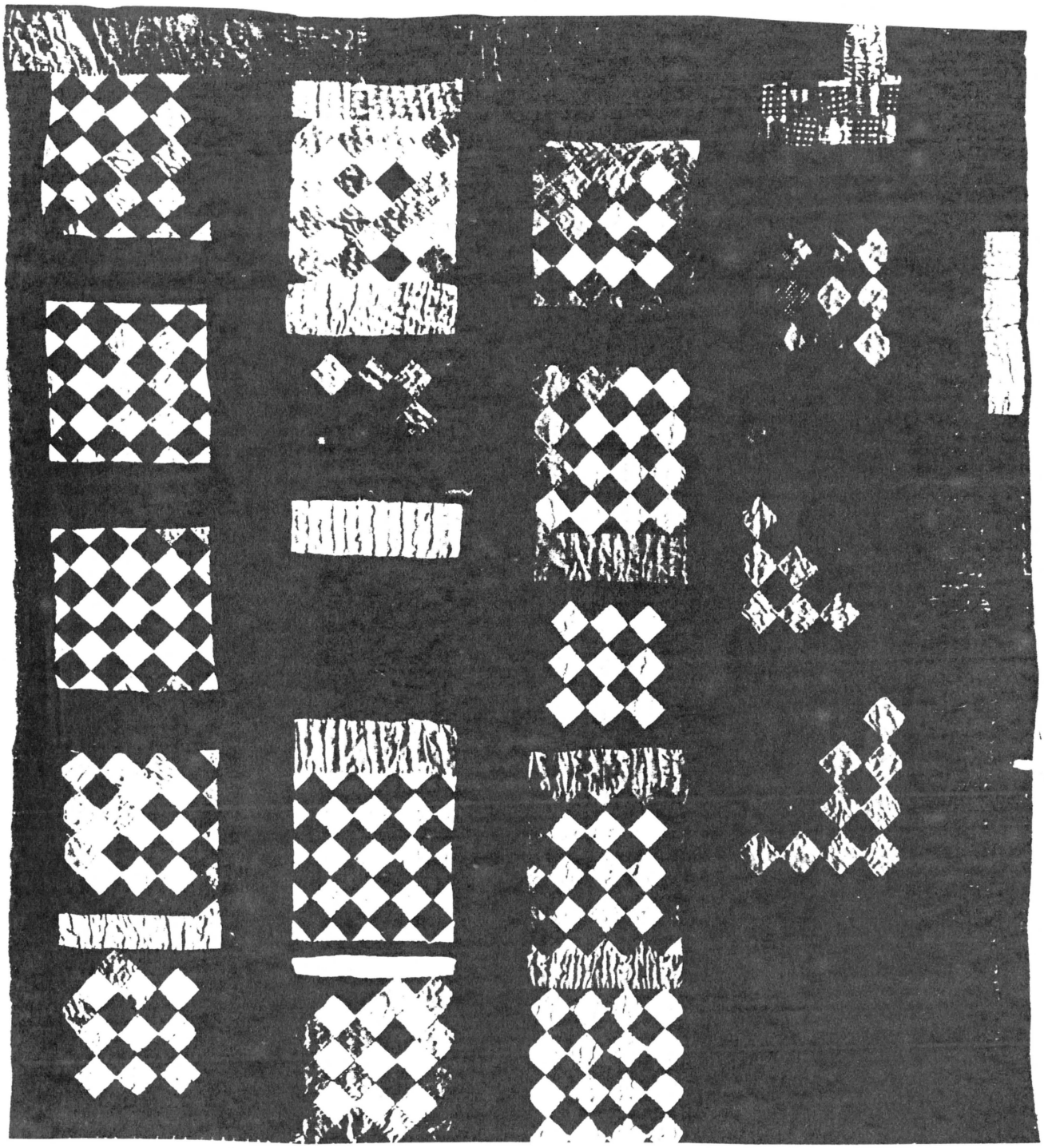
FIGURE 3B



Tapestry, Ivory Coast

Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 69.

FIGURE 4



Lucinda Toomer's Quilt

Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 66.

pattern in the quilt to musical improvisation: "having established a theme with diamond blocks and strips, Mrs. Toomer plays variations by changing a few colors and alternating the dimensions of her motif."[278] This analogy is consistent with observations about the improvisational qualities of African-American music.

African-American quilts illustrate two of the three characteristics of African-American culture that differed from contemporaneous Anglo-American thought: a unification of the sacred and secular (as seen in Powers' quilts) and the freedom of the individual to recreate extant cultural forms (as in Toomer's work). The third aspect unique to African-American ideology, as defined in this paper, is the emphasis on a communal ethic. Quilts represent this aspect of slave life as well. Slave women made the quilts communally, often gathering at night to make quilts to supplement the supply of blankets that the planters gave them.[279] They made quilting a time for social interaction as well as work and, as with singing in the fields, used this time to express and enforce their group identity. Slaves made quilts for themselves rather than for their masters, which allowed them to express African values in their art.

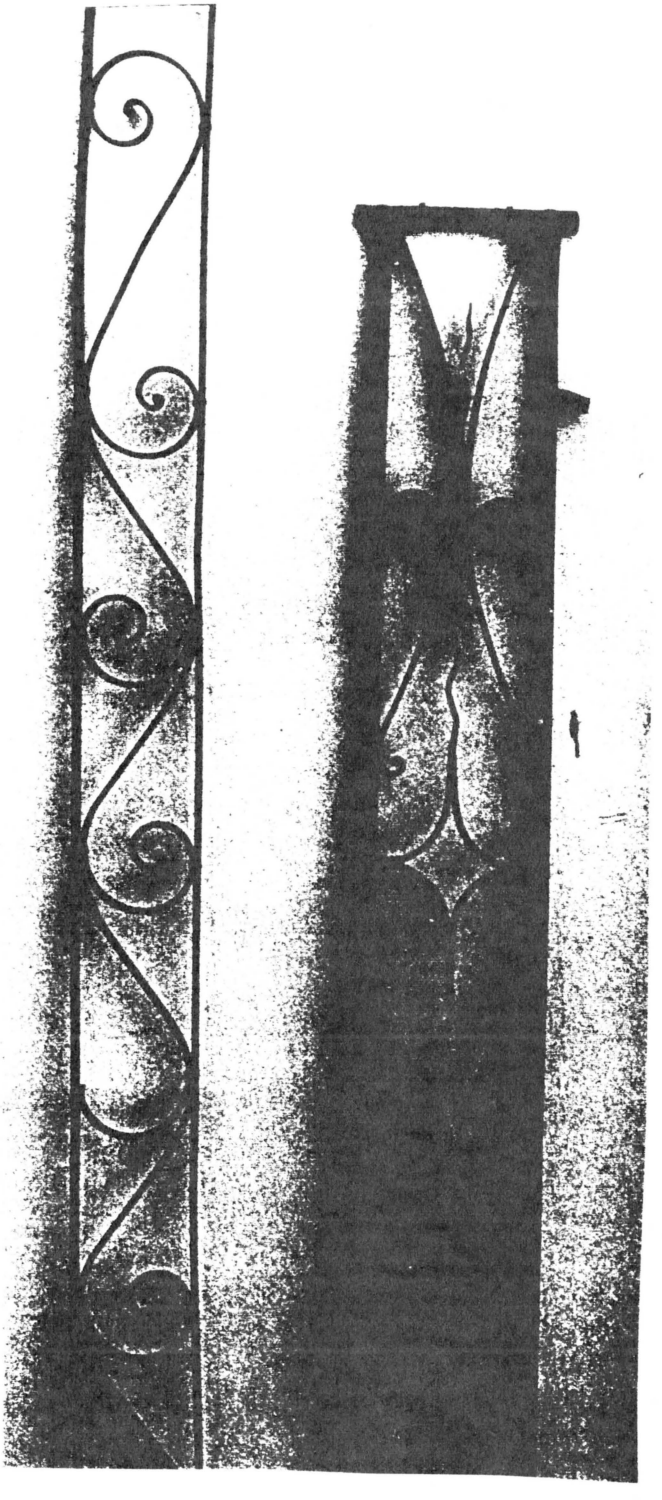
The African-American ironworking tradition follows a pattern similar to quilting. The Ashanti and Dahomeans had a long tradition of work in bronze and iron, but African-American ironwork may have had British antecedents.[280] Even if ironworking, like quilting, was essentially an Anglo-American tradition, the creations of African-American ironworkers clearly suggest continuity with African aesthetic ideals which Vlach calls a "black mode of creativity -- the aesthetic of innovation, which we must evaluate as an African heritage."[281] Retention of

African aesthetic values is apparent in the figures that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African-Americans included in the iron gates and railings they produced. European ornamental ironwork included the urn, sword, flower and lyre, which were part of the scroll and straight bar patterns.[282] At least one African-American blacksmith, however, enhanced his ironwork in Charleston with snake, egret, sun, and bass figures, motifs unknown in the European ironworking tradition but ones that frequently appear on both West African tapestries and African-American quilts.[283]

The work of Philip Simmons reflects the African-American penchant for improvisation in ironworking. Simmons worked in Charleston in the early twentieth century and learned decorative blacksmithing from Peter Simmons, an ex-slave.[284] Vlach describes Philip Simmons' creative process as one of improvisation: he molded and shaped his half-"C" scrolls, "S" scrolls, bars and leaves with a "distinct focus on allowable change." He assembled the pieces in a "loose, open-ended, experimental way ... ever ready to improvise, to try out possible variation."[285] In this way, Simmons' decorative panels are similar to Toomer's quilts. Simmons established a theme with, for instance, an "S" scroll and varied this theme beyond the bounds of symmetry (Figure 5).

This African-American proclivity for unrestricted manipulation of standard themes is often hidden in the final objects: Simmons' panels seem "solidly centered in the local traditions of Charleston ornamental iron."[286] African-American-produced artifacts, however, were not the simple result of slaves and freed blacks learning and reproducing Anglo-American technologies. Researchers should note

FIGURE 5



Peter Simmons' Decorative Panels

Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 117.

differences rather than similarities in artifacts, and should acknowledge the patterns apparent in African-American ironworking and quilting: African-Americans borrowed from Anglo-American traditions and altered them fundamentally if subtly.

As with quilting, African-American ironworking was often communal. African-American blacksmiths usually worked in small groups rather than as isolated craftsmen.[287] This circumstance helped to perpetuate an African-American aesthetic in their creations.[288] Whether this group situation stemmed from the wishes of Anglo- or African-Americans, it is nevertheless consistent with the overriding sense of community so characteristic of African-American culture.

African-Americans learned and excelled in many other trades in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,[289] and often worked in pairs.[290] At least some Anglo-Americans had confidence in the ability of African-Americans to master trades. In a letter to Joseph Morton, the governor of the Carolina colony, Edmund White encouraged Morton to allow African-Americans to learn to be "smiths shoemakers & carpenters & bricklayers: they are capable of learning anything."[291] African-Americans were frequently employed as carpenters, coopers, shipwrights and wagonwrights, and worked with wood "in one form or another as long as they have been in America."[292]

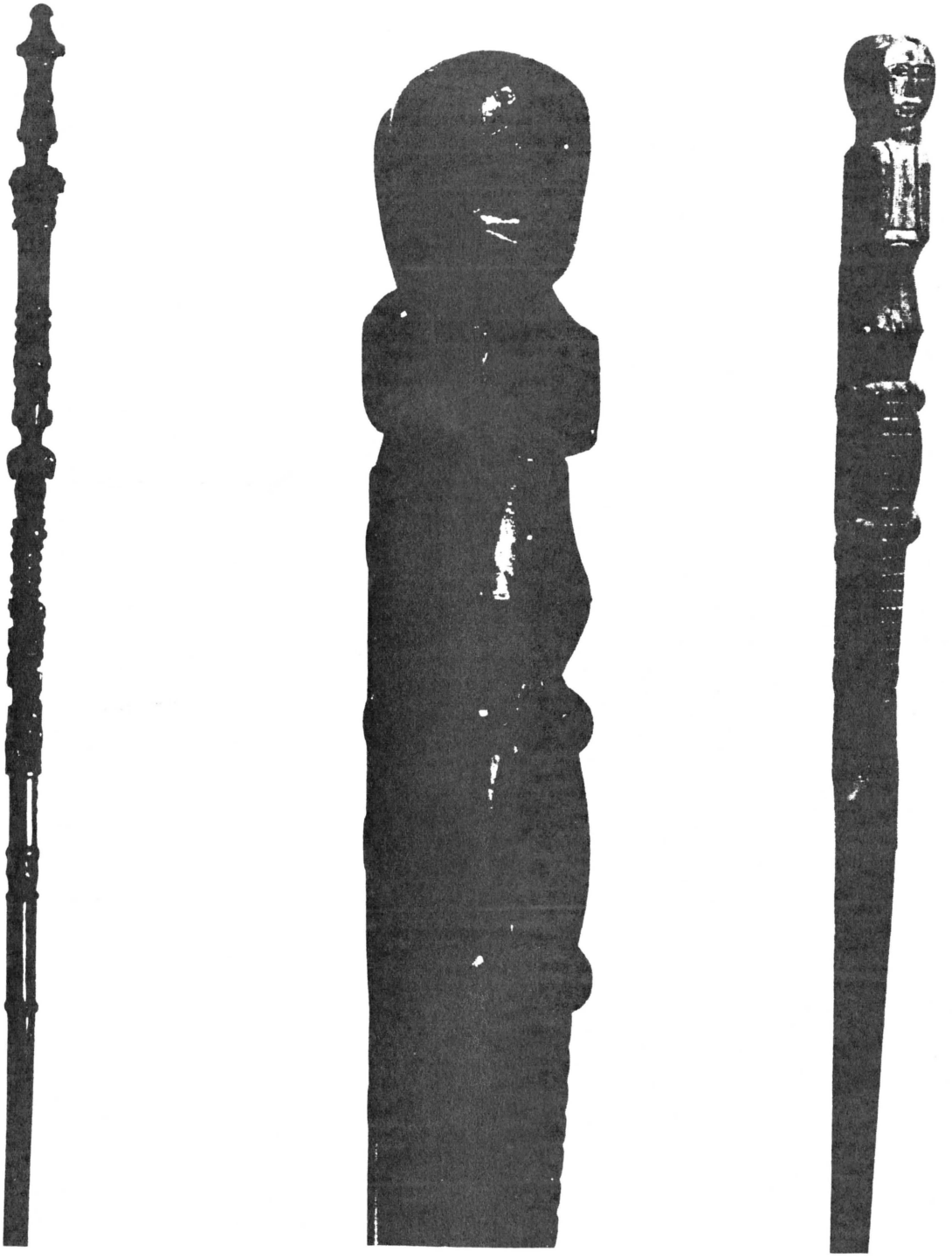
Many scholars have examined the work of Thomas Day, an African-American furniture-maker in early nineteenth-century North Carolina. Day's creations were tied into the styles of his time, since his clientele was exclusively white,[293] and he had "no apparent knowledge of African forms."[294] An "African spirit," however,

accentuates Day's carving, an "improvisational aesthetic system that has much in common with African art."[295] Day often carved individual pieces that fit together to form a total work rather than carving the design into the main body.[296] This treatment recalls the separate "set-in" rather than carved on eyes of some African sculpture.[297] A "rhythmic flow" also characterizes the "weave-like" concave and convex patterns that Day carved into handrails and stair posts.[298]

Much has been made of Day's apparently anthropomorphic newel posts.[299] Whether Day intended these posts as male and female figures, and whether they represent continuity with an African tradition, his work corresponds strongly to the patterns of African-American culture. Carving for an Anglo-American clientele and using materials that were not African, Day remained within the African-American creative tradition because of his improvisation: "Thomas Day fashioned his products with a decidedly different vision. No two things were ever carved the same."[300]

Another of the ways in which African-Americans used their skill in carving to express their simultaneous retention of Old World values and adoption of Anglo-American culture is in their creation of walking sticks. African-American walking sticks are similar in form to traditional West African staffs, and the two cultural items share many of the same motifs, including human figures, geometric incisions, serpentine fluting and coiled snakes (Figure 6).[301] The Mende, Senufo (of the Ivory Coast) and Baule all traditionally provided their religious and political leaders with staffs sculpted as symbols of prestige.[302]

FIGURE 6



Cheiftain's Staff, Zaire

Walking Sticks, Georgia

Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 40 and 28.

Like the relation of African-American quilts to Fon tapestries which in West Africa denoted prestige, the walking sticks may have signified to the slaves more than mere decoration. The same potential exists with African-American women's tradition of wearing headkerchiefs. This custom represents continuity with the West African tradition in which the headkerchief was a symbol of personal pride.[303]

Analysis of African-American music, language and religion has made it clear that slaves proudly and tenaciously clung to elements of their ancestral culture that still made sense to them in the New World. They expressed their cultural independence by selecting only the parts of Christianity that appealed to them and blended them with fundamental African religious beliefs. There is no reason to think that African-Americans continued to carve staffs, wear headkerchiefs and create tapestries or quilts, but relinquished the power that these objects traditionally signified. If religion, music and language are indicative, acquiescence hardly characterizes antebellum African-Americans.

Aesthetic adjustments that African-Americans made to their walking sticks further suggests that these objects which contemporary Anglo-Americans perceived as ornaments were true manifestations of African-American cultural syncretism. West Africans and African-Americans employed "mixed media techniques" in making their walking sticks. West Africans often inlaid their staffs with strips of metal, ivory buttons and brass nails.[304] No reference is apparent to similar creations in slave material culture, but African-Americans in the twentieth century have frequently topped their walking sticks with flashing objects -- rhinestones[305] and flashlights,

for instance.[306] These inclusions suggest African continuity, but also reveal a more significant trend. West Africans and African-Americans favored the use of flashing objects on walking sticks and (as will be seen) on graves because they believed that restless, roving spirits that saw the light reflected from these objects would stay away from the owner because the reflection hinted of movement to another world.[307] African-Americans used the material culture available to them (anything that glittered) to perpetuate aspects of their ancestral beliefs. The walking sticks indicate that African-American syncretism extended to material culture: the physical aspects of African-American culture inevitably reflect the spiritual lives of their producers.

A more public tradition of carving in which African-Americans excelled was the building of canoes. African-Americans were responsible for the bulk of the construction of both single- and multiple-log dugout canoes used on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American waterways.[308] The carving of the single-log canoe was a "syncretic blend" of African, Native American and Irish influences. For centuries each of these groups had produced the single-log canoe with minor variations.[309] Native American canoes were typically rounded on the ends, and the Irish carved both ends of their canoes to a point. Anglo-Americans modified the Native American craft according to "Western concepts of what a boat should look like."[310] The skill of many slaves at both carving and handling the crafts on the water was considerable. James Hornell commented on the slaves' single-log dugouts: "Here the canoe builder has dubbed out a canoe shell with bottom and sides so thin that the small craft is as light as though it were built of birch bark."[311]

The multiple-log dugout was indigenous to the Carib Indians in the West Indies. African-Americans more easily mastered the production of this craft than did the Anglo-Americans because the Africans' traditional canoes were more similar to the multiple-log dugout.[312] Both the Carib and the West African dugouts were long, slim, double-ended boats, usually without planking, which was a "New World innovation." The proliferation of multiple-log dugouts on American waterways represents a sign of African-American influence on American water travel, just as the prominence of coiled baskets on rice plantations demonstrates the impact of African agricultural technology on farming in South Carolina.[313]

One aspect of the African-American creation of multiple-log dugouts differs significantly from that of contemporary whites. Anglo-Americans felt the need first to convert the natural resource (trees) into artifacts (squared beams) before making canoes of them. African-Americans, however, accepted the natural forms and curves of the trees when they were appropriate to the end desired.[314] Though this difference might be undetectable in the product, the varying approaches clearly indicate a different perspective of media, techniques and artifacts.[315] Quite possibly, this African-American approach to carving canoes again indicates the unity with which they perceived the world. Just as they drew no firm boundaries between the secular and the sacred, nor between times for work and worship, so the slaves might have perceived no need to define an item as a cultural artifact (as opposed to a natural object) before accepting it as a cultural material. The dugout canoe

supports the idea that African-Americans perceived the world more holistically than contemporary Anglo-Americans did.

Slaves would have had ample opportunity to use both natural and cultural objects around them as raw materials for daily necessities. Planters left the procurement of many essentials to the slaves themselves, as the slaves' production of quilts indicates. One ex-slave testified that her ancestors in bondage "would make anything they needed. They made spoons, trays, buckets. They made picket and mortar and pestle from a log. ... They would make wooden cutters for some meat and vegetable and would dress some of them with pretty figures."[316] Even though these wooden artifacts would probably not survive archaeologically, the significance of her comments that masters often relied upon slaves to produce their own necessities is that slaves created objects in and around their cabins. These products should bear the marks of African-American creation -- a spirit of improvisation, a rejection of strict symmetry, and, depending on the nature of the artifact, a continuation of a communal ethic. Unlike the wooden spoons and cutters but like the basketry bones, slaves reworked many objects, both natural and cultural, to serve a purpose different from that which Anglo-American manufacturers intended. Slaves probably reworked some artifacts (metal and bone) that would survive in the archaeological record.

Another instance of antebellum African-Americans reworking objects to produce artifacts that reflected their African heritage is the creation of musical instruments. Africans in the Gambia River region and African-Americans both used

gourds as cups and pails.[317] African-Americans also dried and hollowed out gourds to serve as bodies of banjos.[318] Thomas Jefferson observed that the instrument "proper" to the slaves was the "Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa, and which is the original of the guitar."[319] No scholar now denies that the banjo is an African-American creation, though many Anglo-Americans in rural areas such as the Appalachians have adopted the banjo to such an extent that much of the American public is ignorant of its origins.[320]

The banjo is apparently one of four distinctly African-American instruments. The other three are the drum, the fife and the one-strand. The one-strand was an African-American adaptation of the West African earthbow.[321] It consists of one string or wire stretched over a surface such as a board, and played by plucking the string and running a slider along the strand to alter the sound.[322] This "minimal instrument" illustrates the ease with which African-Americans made use of Anglo-American items available to them to produce an ancestral instrument. Slaves often used tin cans as resonators, for instance, or stretched strings between two chairs or even along the side of cabins, using the walls as the one-strand's base.[323]

The drum was also an instrument of African origin. One slave ship captain reported that he allowed the slaves to unite occasionally on deck in "African melodies which they always enhance by extemporaneous tom-tom on the bottom of a tub or tin kettle."[324] The captain's statement reveals the slaves' direct retention of the African drum. He also recognizes the extemporaneous nature of the captive Africans' music. This improvisation is consistent with African-American music and

material culture. Finally, the captain indicates that these slaves used whatever objects were available as drums. On plantations, slaves used benches, table tops, doors, inverted buckets and washtubs as drums.[325] Many planters banned drumming on plantations, but slaves filled wash tubs with water to muffle the sound and placed smaller tubs in these to use as drums.[326]

Though it might be difficult archaeologically to identify a wash tub or other object as a surrogate drum, it is important that students of African-American culture realize that slaves used whatever objects they could find to serve their needs. They used frying pans to produce the sound of African metal gongs, wash boards for scrapers, and made rattles out of anything available, consistently employing objects of Anglo-American manufacture never intended for such use.[327]

The African influence on American music parallels the African influence on American architecture. Ironically, the impact of African architectural concepts has been imperceptible because their influence is so widespread: "they have been invisible because they are so obvious."[328] The two major manifestations of African architectural influence are the shotgun house and the porch.

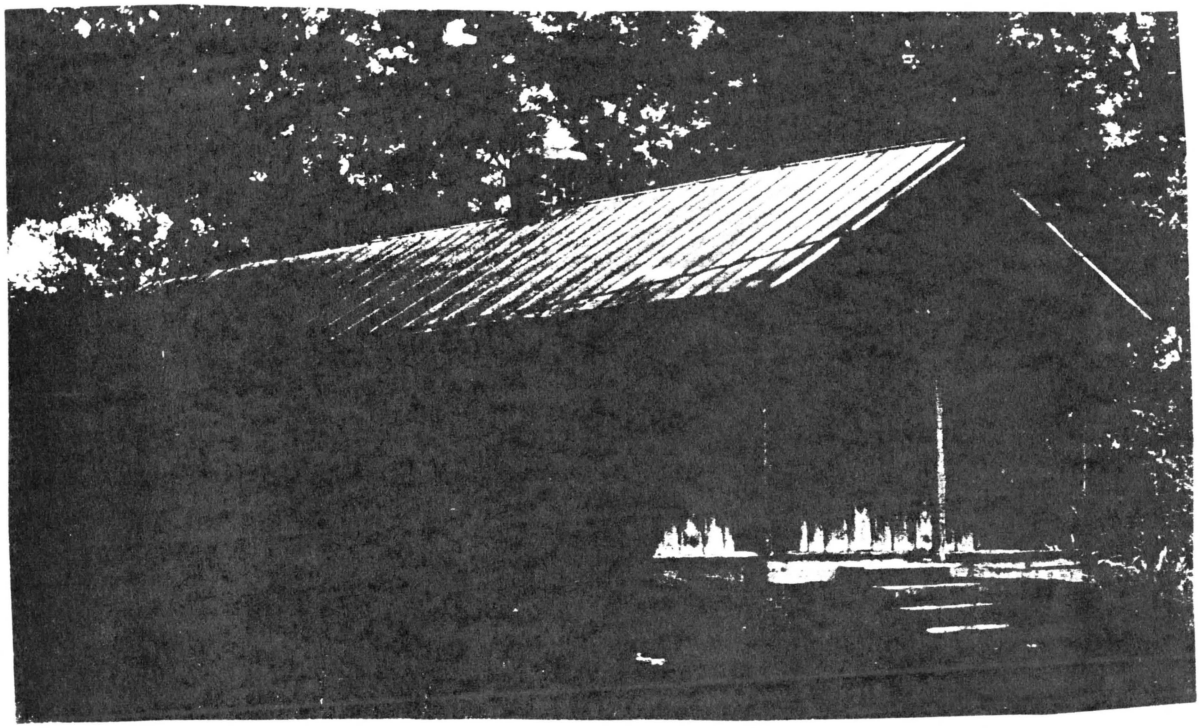
The absence of porches in Europe suggests that the "African slaves and their descendants may have taught their masters more about tropical architecture than has generally been credited."[329] Porches are practical for southern American hot, humid summers,[330] a climate much more like the one to which slaves were accustomed in Africa than that which colonists knew in Europe. West African houses typically have broad, structural equivalents to American porches that European

houses lack.[331] In the eighteenth century, open Virginia porches functioned in much the same way as enclosed British porches, as shallow, sheltered extensions of the entrance.[332] Henry Glassie, however, in Folk Housing in Middle Virginia, describes the nineteenth-century American porch as "a living space between the indoors and the outdoors, a room that stretched the length of the facade (for all the world like a veranda in Yorubaland) providing a place to escape from the inferno inside and to watch the action on the road."[333]

The porch, therefore, is very likely an African contribution to American architecture and represents the African-American cultural value of communality apparent in religion and music. It is a "zone of transition, which draws the resident and the passer-by together."[334] This space was neither strictly public nor private and encouraged a sense of community. This "grey area" parallels other loosely defined areas of African-American culture: quilts and ironwork did not have to be strictly symmetric, times did not have to be only for work or worship, and music did not have to be religious or secular.

The shotgun house also conforms to the African-American sense of communality (Figure 7). The term "shotgun" house might derive from the Yoruba "to-gun," meaning "place of assembly."[335] This phrase is especially apt because, as some occupants of one such house explained, "A shotgun house is a house without privacy."[336] The basic form of a shotgun house is three rooms connected linearly with no intervening hallway, so that a person can only pass from one room into

FIGURE 7A



Shotgun House, Alabama

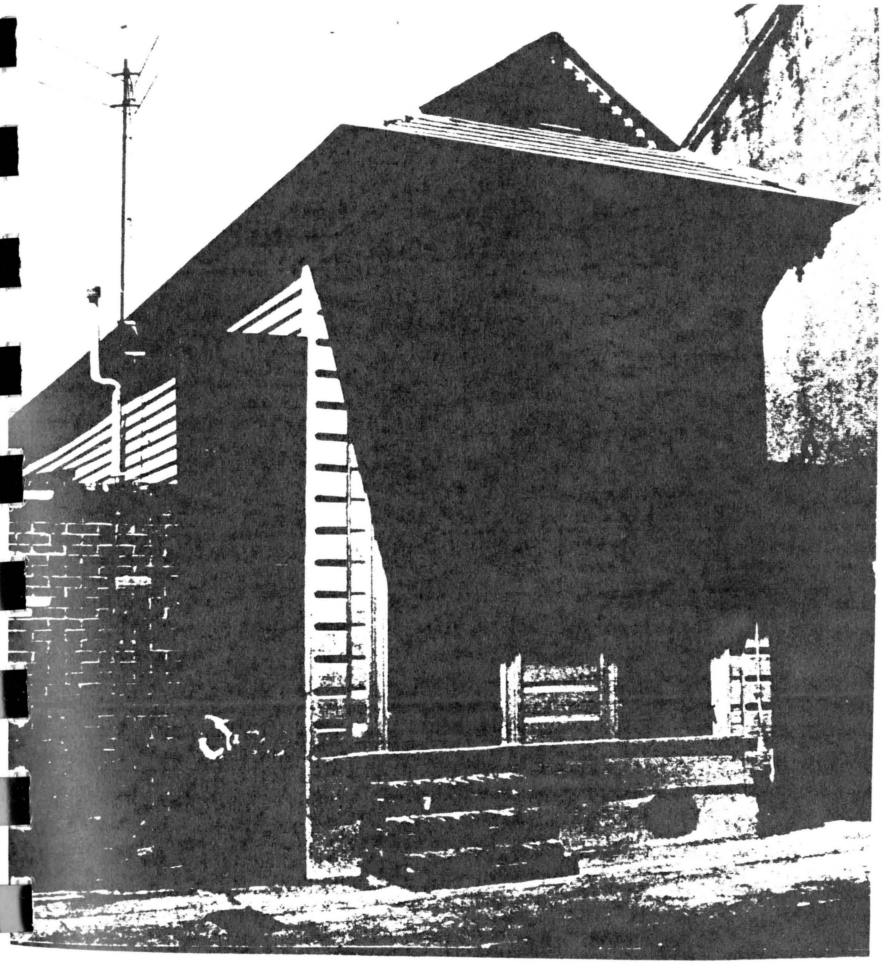
Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 123.

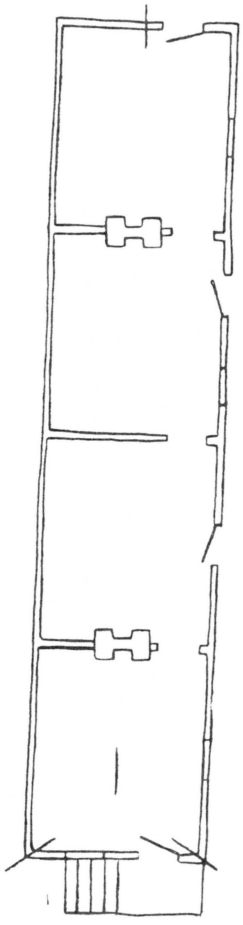
another or out onto the porch (Figure 8). This arrangement exhibits a "decided communal focus."[337]

The shotgun house represents a major break with the convention of Anglo-American housing in that its gable side, rather than its long side, faces the road. This ninety-degree shift corresponds to West African tradition.[338] West African houses are based on ten-foot square units (on the average), and two or three rooms of this dimension are connected without a hallway.[339] This basic floor plan is common along the four thousand mile stretch of coast from Senegal along the Guinea Coast to Central Africa, the principle area in which traders captured slaves.[340] As with language, music and religion, the inhabitants of this area shared basic cultural perceptions about architecture, including a preference for straight walls with sharp corners and rooms usually ten by ten feet to define their living space.[341]

Despite slavery and the adjustment of building techniques and secondary modifications, West African slaves managed to construct in Haiti houses very like their ancestral ones.[342] The Haiti shotgun design "was transported quite directly to New Orleans" during the first decades of the nineteenth century.[343] In New Orleans the ethnic identity of the shotgun house became distorted when their occupants draped the exterior with elaborate jigsaw-cut "gingerbread" decoration.[344] The shotgun form, however, "whether built with wood or bricks, roofed with shingles or tin, or sided with clapboards or board-and-batten weatherboard," still expresses a spatial context within the house that was consistent with West African and African-American preference.

FIGURES 7B and 8





(7B) Shotgun House, New Orleans (8) Shotgun House Floor Plan

Michael Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978) 123.

Many slave cabins replicate the spatial arrangement of the shotgun house. The doors on cabins are usually on their long sides, but the cabins' dimensions are comparable to those of the shotgun and West African forms (from eight to twelve feet square). Rooms that might have been tiny by Anglo-American standards nevertheless were optimal in West Africa and perhaps to the slaves as well.[345] How much control the slaves might have had over the design of their cabins is unknown. The materials available to the slaves for their cabins were Anglo-American, and planters may have exercised almost complete control over cabin architecture. One African-American from St. Simons, Georgia, said:

> Ole man Okra he say want a place like he have in Africa. So he built 'im a hut. I 'member it well. It was 'bout twelve by fourteen feet an' it have a dirt floor and he built the side like basket weave with clay plaster on it. It have a flat roof what he make from bush and palmetto and it have one door and no windows. But Massa make 'im pull it down. He say he ain' want no African hut on he place.[346]

Statements such as this one suggest that slaves had almost no control over the design of their cabins.

Even if this were the case, the dimensions of the cabins can still be interpreted as a New World restatement of African architectural values.[347] This coincidence is critical to the theory that African-Americans retained in slavery an African "cultural grammar," a fundamental understanding of the way the world was structured. Because houses "as a spatial phenomena" are important cultural expressions, and because the values that the culture depends on are in many ways derived from house form, the dimensions and design of the shotgun and cabins may represent the "continuation of an African lifestyle."[348] The Anglo-American creation of slave

cabins very possibly reinforced an ancestral African perspective. The influence of space on inhabitants cannot be underestimated: "people take very strong cues from the space around them, space can crowd or overawe. It can irritate [or sooth] and it can be designed to serve a job, a personality, a state of mind."[349] The design of slave cabins probably enabled captive Africans to preserve the essentials of their traditional culture by replicating architectural design and dimensions, thereby also reinforcing a sense of community.

The "cultural identity" of a house lies deeply within it: "changes of exterior materials cannot dislodge the primary spatial statement."[350] Plantation owners' selection of the materials and design of the cabins did not interrupt the interior spatial arrangement with which Africans were familiar. If Anglo-Americans did control the cabins' outer form, and often quickly extinguished any "visible signs of independent cultural identity," they could not prevent the slaves' incorporation of Old World spatial preferences into New World forms.[351] Many lowcountry cabins illustrate this process: outwardly they reflect European notions of symmetry and control, but they conceal interiors marked by African spatial orientations.[352]

Even if the slaves had no control over the design of their cabins and even if the dimensions were just a coincidence, slaves did have some command over the spatial arrangement inside their cabins. The control of the cabins' interior varied among plantations, but on many plantations overseers and other Anglo-Americans entered the cabins infrequently, and did so only to search for stolen goods,[353] for instance, or to occasionally inspect the cabins' sanitation.[354]

A final aspect of African-American material culture that remains above or very close to the ground surface and attests to the syncretic nature of African-American culture is grave decoration. The "common expectation" for Anglo-American cemeteries is "neat rows of stones and markers on a well-mowed green lawn."[355] This pattern is consistent the order and symmetry characteristic of Anglo-American material culture and religion: times, songs and places are well-marked as secular or sacred. Just as African-American religion, song and material culture do not conform to this expectation, however, neither do African-American cemeteries.[356] African-American friends and relatives of the deceased carefully decorate the graves with a miscellany of objects including cups, saucers, bowls, clocks, medicine bottles, spoons, oyster shells, white pebbles, toys, dolls' heads, light bulbs, flashlights, soap dishes, false teeth, piggy banks, gun locks, bits of plaster and toilet tanks.[357] These objects are both items that the deceased owned and items that are strictly symbolic. They are meant to pacify the spirits and to keep them away from the living.[358] The people placing the objects on the graves smash them to "break the chain" of death and keep other family members from dying.[359]

The persistence of this custom illustrates African-American retention of Old World beliefs. Many aspects of African-American graveyard decoration also demonstrate the syncretic character of their culture. For instance, West Africans commonly decorated graves with chlorite schist pebbles and conch shells. The significance of both was that these objects were white, a color West Africans used because they believed that deceased ancestors became white creatures.[360] The

objects that African-Americans substituted for white pebbles and shells, when they were unavailable, were bits of white china and plaster. This practice reflects the slaves' practice of using available Anglo-American objects as instruments.

Similarly, one prevalent West African funeral rite included the sacrifice of a live fowl, preferably a white chicken, to appease the spirit of the dead.[361] Glass and white ceramic chickens adorn many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African-American graves, indicating that African-Americans used the materials available to them to perpetuate ancestral beliefs.[362] Like the wash tubs and frying pans slaves used as drums and gongs, Anglo-Americans never intended ceramic chickens to evolve as African-American grave adornment. African-Americans, however, appropriated the goods of the dominant culture to continue many Old World practices.

This custom is also evident in African-Americans' use of headlights, tin foil, mirrors and glass to decorate graves.[363] These glittering objects may serve the same function that other reflective objects served in West Africa -- to remind wandering spirits of their proper place in another world, and to keep them at a safe distance from the living.[364] Many objects on West African and African-American graves, such as shells, cups and pitchers, are associated with water. Many African-Americans considered water a symbol of the transition between life and death.[365] The adornment of some African-American graves with ceramic plumbers' pipes, suggesting travel through water underground, is another example of cultural

syncretism. African-Americans employed whatever objects were available to express traditional ideology.[366]

Grave goods clearly illustrate the combination of African religions and Christianity. African-Americans frequently adorned graves with clocks or toy airplanes, explaining that the clock will wake the dead on Judgement Day,[367] and the toy will enable the soul to fly quickly to Heaven.[368] The Old World belief that grave goods affect the deceased's afterlife is a retention that African-Americans blended with the Christian ideas of Heaven and Judgement Day.

Grave decoration shows materially how African-Americans used elements of Anglo-American culture, the available "language," to express ancestral cultural beliefs, ancient "idioms."[369] Slaves and freed blacks incorporated new expressions to complete the "ancient gestures of spiritual accomplishment and power."[370] Adopting new elements into African structures is as characteristic of African-American material culture as it is of religion, music and language. Grave decoration demonstrates that the syncretic achievements observable in the intangible aspects of African-American culture cannot be separated from the slaves' material culture. African-American graveyard decoration is a physical manifestation of religious belief.[371] Because the material and the spiritual cannot be separated in African-American culture, there is no reason to believe that the syncretic process clearly observable in language, religion, music and extant material culture does not extend to the archaeological record as well.

CHAPTER 4: ARCHAEOLOGY

The pattern of reworking Anglo-American materials into African-American contexts should exist archaeologically because it is so prominent in African-American religion, language, music and material culture.** This blending process was fundamental to the way in which Africans adapted to the New World. It is impossible that slaves ceased to operate in this manner when they used material items, artifacts now preserved in the ground. It is implausible that "Africanisms" are only apparent -- or exist, as some claim -- in "intangible words, behaviors, or artifacts that were fashioned from perishable wood or fiber."[372] Plantation archaeologists should emulate the work of scholars of African-American music, language and religion, who attempt to see the world as the slaves saw it. Understanding African-American adaptive processes as essentially syncretic is one way of achieving this perspective.

Many researchers recognize the need for plantation archaeologists to be aware of relevant studies in African-American music, language and religion.[373] Theresa Singleton, for instance, argues that if archaeologists hope to contribute to the field of plantation scholarship, they must be informed of significant studies in other disciplines, and of their potential relevance to archaeological problems.[374]

** It is also prominent in story-telling, a subject pertinent to this study but impossible to treat because of time limitations.

The conclusions that most plantation archaeologists have drawn, however, indicate that they are not aware of major trends in African-American studies. Instead, many archaeologists impose Anglo-American ideals on African-American sites. For instance, no one familiar with the work of Levine and Joyner would argue that the slaves operating in white-dominated contexts "would have shown conformity to white American standards,"[375] or that no "particularly Afro-American" object appears in some slave sites because, "of course, winning favor of the masters must have been great incentive for the blacks to mimic white culture and to suppress quickly any visible African tradition."[376] The idea that slaves used attitude, sabotage, and pilfering to conduct a "petty rebellion" against their situation hardly characterizes the powerful African-American response to slavery indicated by studies of their music, language, religion and material culture.[377]

Familiarity with African-American music and religion can provide archaeologists a much-needed pool of knowledge with which to interpret African-American sites. Eric Klingelhoffer's excavation of the slave quarters on the Garrison plantation in Maryland is a case in point. He argues that these slaves reworked European manufactured goods into utensils and tools for purposes different from those for which Anglo-Americans had manufactured them. The slaves carefully chipped the edges of a glass tumbler into a sharp scraping edge and reworked at least one mirror fragment to form a cutting edge.[378] Klingelhoffer observes that in prehistoric contexts such scrapers are associated with the preparation of baskets and gourds. He concludes, however, "but these historic examples of a 'lithic technology'

are not related to a Native American cultural tradition," because these sites postdate Indian occupation of Maryland.[379]

It is unclear whether he means by this that African-Americans actually reworked Anglo-American artifacts for such purposes, or that slaves could not have used these items as scrapers because only Native Americans did so. He does not point out that West Africans and African-Americans used gourds as drinking vessels and the bodies of instruments, or that African basketry remained a tradition in the New World. Knowing that African-Americans reworked nails and spoons as "bones" for use in basket-making strengthens Klingelhoffer's observation. These glass tumblers and mirrors very possibly represent African-American reshaping of the available material culture for traditional purposes.

Similarly, Samuel Smith excavated several slave cabins at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage near Nashville, Tennessee, and found four vials still partially filled with mercury.[380] He interprets the mercury as the remnant of calomel, which many people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries considered a panacea. He remarks that archaeologists discovered these bottles standing inverted or up-right, some with their corks still in them, which suggests that slaves might have "placed (stored?)" them under the floor.[381] Smith thinks this placement is an odd pattern, but finds the significance of the vials in their corroboration of a practice "already well known to medical historians."[382]

What these vials might represent, however, is African-American reworking of the dominant culture's goods. Burying these medicine vials under the cabins' floors

might be similar to the slaves' practice of wearing "medicine," such as bulls eyes around their necks, to ward off evil spirits. Slaves placed Bibles at their cabins' front doors for similar purposes. It seems likely that they buried these medicine vials within their cabins to protect the inhabitants from illness or wickedness. This placement of the vials would represent African-American appropriation of Anglo-American objects for Old World purposes.

Another instance in which increased knowledge of African-American culture might benefit archaeologists is apparent in the debate over the significance of smoking pipes in African-American culture. Jean Howson acknowledges that planters used pipes as incentives and rewards for slave work, but that pipes were also important to the slaves as part of recreational or social activities.[383] She wonders, therefore, if pipes on African-American burial sites represent a system meant to foster obedience through "status-striving," or a system of values among slaves that encouraged burial with items the dead had used in daily life among their peers, and representing their membership in the African-American community. This focus on the slaves' communal ethic is consistent with evidence from studies of other aspects of African-American life. Howson, however, misses the greater significance of decorated graves to Africans and African-Americans: the belief that such personal or symbolic items would appease the spirit and aid it in the afterlife. The pipes represent the slaves' ability to adapt elements of Anglo-American material culture to serve Old World beliefs.

Plantation archaeologists generally seem to have overlooked the communal ethic apparent in African-American religion, music, and material culture. Larry McKee, for instance, frequently seems to impose Anglo-American values of individuality on his interpretation of African-American culture. He cites the antebellum agricultural journals in which slave owners suggested alternative forms of housing for slaves: to replace small cabins, they proposed large lodges to house a number of families "under one roof with shared heating and cooking facilities."[384] He says that such systems "may have cost less to construct, but would have undoubtably entailed increased social costs in terms of slave discontent."[385] He assumes that African-Americans preferred relatively private, individual cabins to more communal structures. If studies of African-American music, religion, and material culture are any indication of the African-American insistence on communality, this assumption is unfounded.

McKee also argues that the "biggest improvement" in slave housing and "the one over which slaves may have held the greatest influence" might have been the shift toward houses intended for the use of a single family: "the accommodation of each family in its own house may ... be the strongest African element identifiable in this architectural form."[386] Whatever the favored housing situations in Africa, the major African-American architectural manifestations -- the porch and shotgun house -- are clearly oriented toward a maximization of communality, not an isolation of the family. McKee's assumption that slaves wanted increased isolation from each other is doubtful in light of Vlach's studies of African-American architecture.

Another possible instance of Anglo-American imposition on African-American culture is apparent in McKee's conjecture about slaves' use of root cellars. He concludes that the presence of eighteen such cellars in one slave cabin on the Kingsmill plantation in Virginia might indicate that they served as the "personal vault or 'hidey hole' for individuals."[387] This is possible because slaves did have private possessions, but dividing space into individual territories is much more characteristic of Anglo-American than African-American culture.

William Kelso provides an alternative explanation of slaves' use of these cellars. Root cellars adjacent to hearths are so common on slave sites that he considers them a key part of the African-American archaeological pattern, and possibly an indication themselves of African-American occupation of sites.[388] Kelso argues that these cellars might be "more Afro-American than English" because archaeologists have not found any of these small pits adjacent to hearths on any pre-slavery American sites.[389] The typical artifacts that archaeologists recover from these pits include coins, buttons, tools and animal bones.[390] Kelso interprets this collection as possible evidence of stolen goods. Slaves would want to hide the bones of animals they had stolen from the plantation, and so concealed them beneath their own floors.[391] He also suggests that African-American superstition could have influenced the cellars' contents, because these pits were relatively safe places for slaves to store personal items that other people, if they obtained them, could use to cast spells on them.[392]

Whether or not this was the case, Kelso is at least familiar enough with African-American belief and custom to posit such a theory. He accounts for the large number of buttons in the cellars in a way that further indicates his knowledge of African-American culture. He explains that slave women typically made quilts from old clothes in front of the hearths, and that they probably cut the buttons off of the clothes and let them fall into the cellar below.[393] As Kelso indicates, this explanation would account for the number and diversity of buttons in the cellars. Perhaps, therefore, some artifacts in these root cellars do not represent slaves' possessions, but rather their refuse. Slaves might have simply discarded the buttons, for instance, under the floor because this was the most convenient option of disposal.

Other archaeologists, however, show less understanding of African-American culture in their analyses of plantation sites. Even in the last decade many have continued to search for African survivals. Frederick Lange and Jerome Handler, for instance, remark that "surprisingly," many archaeologists excavating slave sites have discovered "no derivatives from African material culture."[394] They compare this absence on American sites to a site in Barbados where archaeologists uncovered a "Ghanaian (Gold Coast) pipe and metal bracelets," which suggest to them "the African heritage."[395] They conclude that unfortunately, this heritage "does not seem to have been reflected in locally adapted patterns and traditions."[396]

Similarly, John Solomon Otto in his excavation of the Cannon's Point plantation in Georgia finds no evidence of "African-style handicrafts" such as baskets, bowls, or spoons.[397] He comments that all of the artifacts recovered from this site

were "commercial items that were based on European or Euro-American models." He points out that this is similar to the pattern that Charles Fairbanks found in his excavation of the Rayfield cabin in Georgia, where the artifacts were household items "that would appear at a poor white farmer's house."[398] Otto finally notes that at the Kingsley cabins in Florida "where African-born slaves were known to have lived," Fairbanks "surprisingly" found "no surely African elements" in the archaeological record.[399]

Analysis of African-American material culture, language, religion and music has made it clear that to expect African "survivals" is to misunderstand the African experience in the antebellum South. Retention implies a static condition and an inability to adapt to new situations, but the process characteristic of African-American culture is one of active blending and reinterpretation. Even when archaeologists find exceptional artifacts of apparent African origin, this indicates only that Africans inhabited eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, a fact quite well-established without the aid of archaeologists. Recovery of "a few African objects," such as cowrie shells and an ebony ring[400] from slave sites does not enable archaeologists to add any insight to the understanding of African-American life.

African-American culture will not be found in the exceptions, in the rare and unique artifacts. Just as scholars studying African-American music do not note single lines from songs as African survivals and proof of cultural continuity, so archaeologists cannot hope to understand the African-American archaeological record by searching for odd scraps that differ from Anglo-American material culture.

Musicologists identify African-American expression in the slaves' general approach to song. They celebrate African-Americans' ability to syncretize African melodies and European lyrics, European songs and an African proclivity for improvisation, complex rhythms and a communal ethic. They recognize, as do linguists and students of religion, that African adaptation to plantation life was a comprehensive blending of new elements and old cultural forms. Archaeologists will realize African-American culture in the material record when they understand African acculturation to the New World as a syncretic process.

Several archaeologists are aware of the syncretic process apparent in these African-American disciplines and suggest that cultural "blending" might be apparent in the archaeological record. Eric Klingelhoffer, for example, suggests that slaves' material culture might be typically both African and American.[401] They might have added West African values and beliefs to adopted aspects of Anglo-American society and created a new culture different from both.[402] Mechal Sobel and George McDaniel argue that archaeologists should not attempt to identify "survivals," but rather to understand "how and why certain elements" of African and European culture "blended."[403]

Similarly, Jean Howson argues that slave culture was "not obviated" because slaves used European goods. Slaves expressed different values through "very similar, even identical things."[404] She maintains that archaeologists should analyze slaves' material culture within a theoretical framework that allows for the change and continuity that embodied African-American adaptation to plantations.[405]

Archaeologists should attempt to understand, she says, how both the institution of slavery and their African heritage shaped the process by which African-Americans "made their world."[406]

Only a few archaeologists, however, have attempted to identify this syncretic process in the material record. On the Levi Jordan plantation in Texas, Kenneth Brown and Doreen Cooper find evidence of slaves using Anglo-American goods in African-American contexts.[407] They identify several individual objects as the products of slaves' "differential manipulation" of European-American material culture. These objects include a shell button with an "African or African-American symbol" carved into it, as well as colored glass beads and coins with holes drilled into them.[408] The slaves probably altered these objects so they could use them in ways different from those for which the Anglo-American manufacturers had intended.[409]

Brown and Cooper also find evidence of this manipulation in a broader context. In one room of double-room slave cabin, they excavated five cast-iron kettle bases, several pieces of used chalk, bird skulls, an animal's paw, medicine bottles, bullet casings put together to form a sealed tube, ocean shells, doll parts, and several spoons and knives.[410] They interpret this collection as the "ritual 'tool kit'" of a "healer/magician," and point out that Cuban creole groups descended from West Africans often used sealed, hollow metal cylinders as symbols of the healer's power, and chalk on trays in divination ceremonies.[411]

Brown and Cooper account for each of these artifacts through comparison with ceremonial models from West Africa and the New World, and so demonstrate their familiarity with African and African-American cultures. They see clearly how African-Americans appropriated the kettles, bullets and dolls for purposes different from the uses in which Anglo-Americans employed them. Their goal, appropriately, is to understand what objects meant to the African-Americans who used them.[412] Brown and Cooper conclude that the slaves' differential manipulation of goods might have been the rule rather than the exception.[413] It seems probable that syncretism characterizes the African-American material record in objects other than ones used in rituals. Reworking artifacts should be evident in many aspects of slave life represented archaeologically, including activity areas and refuse disposal patterns.

Klingelhoffer attempts to identify evidence of an African aesthetic in the New World in several spoons with geometric designs carved on them from the Garrison site near Baltimore.[414] These spoons may represent "survivals," and it is probably true that slaves on other sites manufactured "some clay pipes."[415] Archaeologists' approach to understanding African-American culture, however, must be more inclusive than this attention to unique artifacts. They must focus on patterns and the ways that slaves reworked Anglo-American materials to express an African-American consciousness.

Researchers have proposed several patterns indicative of African-American occupation. The structure of the cabins' remains, including a root cellar near the hearth, walls constructed according to the twelve foot model, and the double-room

model (with each room approximately twelve by twelve feet) might indicate African-American occupation.[416]

Another pattern that archaeologists have suggested as characteristic of African-American sites is a disposal pattern different from that of contemporary Anglo-Americans. Otto cites an antebellum journalist's comment on the "filth" of the slave cabins: "Heaps of oyster shells, broken crockery, old shoes, rags, and feathers were found near each hut."[417] Plantation owners frequently lamented their slaves' tendency to dispose of their refuse immediately outside or beneath their cabins. One person, for instance, complained about the "abundant collections of every description of putrefying trash usually to be found underneath and about these old, dirty habitations."[418] Excavations of many slave cabins indicates that this routine was indeed common practice.[419]

McKee points out that though these "scatters of trash immediately outside and completely surrounding dwellings are as at odds with modern sensibilities as they were with that of the planters," slaves might have had a reason for this refuse pattern. They "may not have sought, as the planters did, to use their home lots as a physical representation of order and control to both the outside world and themselves."[420] McKee summarizes this theory by saying that Anglo- and African-Americans might have had very different definitions of cleanliness and filth, and that their perceptions of garbage outside the cabins might have been "quite distinct."[421]

Analysis of African-American music and religion supports the idea that slaves and planters did have different perceptions of the world. African-Americans typically

did not separate aspects of culture that Anglo-Americans did, but had a more integrated world view than Anglo-Americans. Vlach's analysis of African-American architecture also reveals that this group felt free to construct "grey areas" such as the porch, neither strictly public nor private. It is reasonable that African-Americans also did not feel compelled to divide space as strictly as whites did, identifying some areas specifically for living and others strictly for refuse disposal.

Another pattern archaeologists have proposed as representative of African-American sites includes the percentages of types of ceramic vessels, and the ways people butchered animals as revealed by excavated bones. Otto argues that slaves and overseers on Cannon's Point Plantation generally ate liquid-based stews of meat and vegetables, while the planter and his family ate mainly roasted meats and vegetables prepared individually.[422] Most bones from slave cabins were chopped or roughly split for stewing, while remnants of the planters' meat typically display saw marks, indicating a more professional butchering.[423] Faunal analysis also indicates that planters generally consumed "better cuts" of meat than did the slaves and overseers. Different types of tableware were necessary for consumption of these separate meals: bowls generally predominate over plates and platters on slave sites, and the reverse is true in the planters' material remains.[424]

Vernon Baker finds a similar pattern in his analysis of the archaeological record of "Black Lucy's Garden."[425] Lucy Foster was a freed African-American in Andover, Massachusetts in the mid-nineteenth century. She left in her one-acre plot evidence of a pattern that may be characteristic African-American sites. Over

forty percent of the ceramic sherds were from serving bowls, and almost one hundred percent of the animal bones were chopped rather than sawed.[426] The meat available to African-Americans, both freed and slave, was probably not that most desired by whites, but often included skulls and foot bones.[427] These parts were most suited to stews, a dish requiring bowls. This fact probably accounts for the preponderance on some sites of serving bowls.

Stews also represent a more communal food than the individually prepared vegetables and roasted meats that the planters' families ate. These subsistence patterns might reflect a process observable in the construction of slave cabins: an unintended New World replication of Old World preferences. Just as planters constructed cabins approximately twelve by twelve feet, and unwittingly repeated the West African spatial preference, so they might have afforded their slaves only the poorer cuts of meat, necessitating the slaves' making stews -- dishes in large pots for many people to share. This forced communality probably coincided with African-American preference for group activity.

The correlation between vessel type (bowls or plates) and type of food (stews or slices of meat) seems reasonable, but caution should be observed in analyzing slave culture and status based on the types of vessels represented in their archaeological record. Singleton identifies one of the major trends in plantation archaeology as an attempt to determine material correlates of ethnicity, such as serving bowls indicating African-American occupation.[428] Some archaeologists, however, have found the opposite of Otto's observed bowl/plate pattern and so call

that paradigm into question. William Kelso found at Jefferson's Monticello a greater ratio of plate to bowl sherds in the slave sites than in the refuse associated with the main house.[429] He explains this pattern by citing Jefferson's use of pewter plates, which his family probably never threw away, broke or lost, as they would have with ceramic plates. These pewter plates are not represented in the archaeological record, but ceramic bowls are. Slaves, on the other hand, used ceramic plates, and these have become part of their material record. This use of plates of different materials accounts for the greater percentage of plate sherds in the slave quarters than in the Jeffersons' refuse.

Factors such as this one suggest the complexity of the distribution of goods on plantations. Charles Orser indicates three ways in which slaves potentially obtained their materials: planters purchased them explicitly for slave use; planters handed down their own possessions which they no longer wanted; and slaves occasionally purchased goods for themselves.[430] In addition to these options, the slaves stole items from the main house and exchanged goods with each other.[431] Great variability existed among and within plantations in the ways in which slaves actually obtained their material goods. It seems, therefore, that attempting to associate ceramic vessel type (e.g., bowls) with status and ethnicity of the different groups on plantations (e.g., African-American) might be a futile endeavor. Archaeologists probably will never be able to trace accurately the distribution of goods to the slaves, and can only draw dubious correlations between the quality of goods and status on slave sites.

Charles Orser argues that access to power, prestige, and material goods on plantations is associated imperfectly with status because some slaves had better housing, possessions and food than some poor whites.[432] In Howson's opinion, Orser shows conclusively that status "cannot possibly be inferred directly from material remains."[433] Kelso supports this proposition, pointing out that Jefferson's slaves ate on some "rather elegant" ceramics, and that there was "considerable variation" in expense of material goods in the cabins.[434] He characterizes the artifact distribution in the Monticello slave cabins as a

> blend of artifacts used by blacks and whites alike; there is no clear way to sort them.... any differences in diet between the slaves and the Jefferson family would not appear in the relative numbers of ceramics or faunal remains from the quarters.[435]

Artifact types do not work well either as cultural or status markers. A majority of plate or bowl sherds indicates nothing conclusively about the inhabitants' ethnicity.[436] The emphasis, therefore, that some archaeologists have placed on the presence of glass beads on slave sites should be regarded warily. It is true that archaeologists have often found faceted blue glass beads in slave contexts, but this fact does not mean that the apparent absence of these beads indicates that "these were actually not slave cabins."[437] Samuel Smith proposes that the absence of these beads might also indicate male occupation of the site, but to my knowledge, no one has associated these beads strictly with female slaves. Perhaps Smith's assumption that beads indicate female occupation is evidence of an Anglo-American cultural bias that associates such jewelry only with women. His first assumption is

even less grounded, since he presupposes the availability of glass beads to slaves in Davidson County, Tennessee.

Archaeologists cannot rely with certainty on artifact types in their analyses of slave life. Antebellum African-Americans were an active people, but compared to the whites around them, they had limited access to material goods. Archaeologists should attempt to understand African-American culture not through what artifacts slaves used, but rather how they used the materials they were able to obtain in a variety of ways.

Using artifact patterns appropriate for Anglo-American sites to analyze African-American sites might blind archaeologists to the real cultural developments that the slaves' material record reflects. Patrick Garrow and Thomas Wheaton propose a "distinctive slave artifact pattern" in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century South Carolina low country.[438] They use Stanley South's Carolina Artifact Pattern, including kitchen, architecture, activity, arms, clothing, personal, and tobacco categories.[439] They characterize the slave artifact pattern as having a "very high kitchen-to-architecture percentage, with a fraction of the artifact assemblage represented in groups outside of the kitchen, architecture, and tobacco pipe groups."[440]

As Kenneth Brown and Doreen Cooper argue, however, the assignment of artifacts to functional categories based on "a priori knowledge is a questionable practice even in the archaeology of European-Americans since it precludes discovery of cultural changes or adaptations."[441] Assigning artifacts on African-American

sites to categories designed for Anglo-Americans could make an accurate understanding of the slave remains impossible. For instance, automatically assigning a washboard or tub to the kitchen category might obscure its significance and use as a musical instrument. Archaeologists should critically examine the function of artifacts "within a context that is not totally dependent upon the dominant European-American behavioral system."[442]

For at least primary analysis, perhaps the most objective artifact classification system would be one based on artifact material rather than function. For instance, dividing artifacts into ceramic and glass sherds, shell, wire, and metal[443] might minimize archaeologists' imposing Anglo-American functional meanings onto African-American artifact patterns. Once archaeologists achieve this initial grouping, they can perhaps analyze the artifacts with less of an Anglo-American bias, and identify within the material remains evidence of the African-American syncretic processes apparent in other disciplines.

The African-American process of cultural blending should be apparent archaeologically on two levels. First, individual artifacts probably often reveal evidence of reworking. Because slaves used washtubs as drums, washboards as scrapers, and nails and spoons as "bones," some artifacts should bear the marks of these improvised functions. Washtubs and spoons are, of course, only examples; any object might have served a purpose different from that for which Anglo-Americans manufactured it. Archaeologists need to be alert to such possibilities.

Second, patterns of African-American reinterpretation of available materials should be apparent. Three aspects of African-American culture have consistently appeared in studies of language, religion and music: a strong sense of community; a penchant for improvisation; and a tendency to blend areas and ideas that Anglo-Americans typically segregate, such as the sacred and the secular, the public and the private. Each of these trends should be apparent archaeologically.

The slaves' holistic view of the world might be represented by a "blurring" of activity areas. If slaves divided their space strictly into areas for cooking, eating, sleeping, and recreation, it would be contrary to the patterns observed in African-American music, religion and material culture. The slaves' inclination to dispose of their garbage immediately around or under their cabins might be evidence of the unity with which they perceived space.

The strong communal ethic among the slaves might be apparent archaeologically in a concentration of artifacts in public areas, especially immediately in front of the cabins' doors. Even if a specific cabin did not have a porch, slaves probably still perceived this area as a semi-public, semi-private place and likely spent a good deal of time there. Also, a communal ethic and the idea of a hierarchy among the slaves may or may not be inimical. In a group which emphasized community, it might be surprising to find clear differences in the quality of goods among cabins on a single plantation. Of course, slaves probably differentiated among themselves according to individuals' talents, creating a hierarchy of status, and house slaves might have had better access to preferred goods than did field slaves.

Considering, however, the emphasis on community, the slaves might have had a comparatively egalitarian population among themselves. This situation might be represented archaeologically by a rather uniform distribution of the quality of goods in neighboring cabins.

The third aspect of African-American culture treated in this paper is the tendency for improvisation. This tendency might be manifested in the slaves' readiness to supplement their diet. Elizabeth Reitz, Tyson Gibbs and Ted Rathbun conclude from their faunal analysis of slaves' diets that slaves did not passively accept their allotment of food, but actively sought to procure other items by hunting, fishing and trapping.[444] McKee also emphasizes this practice, and argues that slaves reacted to their often unsatisfactory rations "not by passive acceptance but by actively attempting to better their living conditions where they could."[445] Just as slaves took the diet their masters provided them and "made it into something different and better," they also "took the society, status, and values thrust on them and made of it something new as well."[446]

The slaves' tendency for active improvisation reveals in extant material culture (e.g.,quilts and iron working) a refusal to follow strict lines of symmetry, and an insistence on the free changing of established patterns. The same trend might be apparent archaeologically in, for instance, the slaves' creation of personal gardens or pens for the animals that the planters allowed them to keep. Perhaps archaeologists should not expect to find the remains of these areas as perfect rectangles or squares, but as rather less strictly geometric areas.

These suggestions are hypothetical and may not be identifiable in the material record. Archaeologists should realize, however, that these three tendencies thoroughly characterize African-American culture in language, material culture, music and religion. They should be aware of the possibility of their presence in many forms archaeologically.

The African-American syncretic adaptation to the New World should not, of course, be the sole research focus of archaeologists, just as it is not the only theme in studies of African-American music, language, religion and material culture. It is, however, a recurrent and dominant pattern in these other disciplines, and archaeologists do their study an injustice to ignore the probability of identifying the syncretic process in the material record.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In The Myth of the Negro Past, Herskovits argues that the important anthropological question is how Africans became African-Americans, not what "survivals" slaves brought to the New World.[447] "Retention" implies stasis -- an inability to adapt and culturally survive -- and does not accurately characterize African-American culture. Rather, the slaves actively fused elements of Anglo-American culture into African structures. In the diverse fields of African-American study, this syncretic pattern is unmistakable. The slaves put English words into West African sentence structures, reinterpreted the Christian God in an African understanding, and transformed Protestant hymns into forms derived from African sources.

The pattern appears again in African-American material culture. Slaves and freed blacks adapted available objects to continue Old World practices and beliefs. They used frying pans as gongs, benches as drums, the walls of their cabins as bases of one-strings, and a variety of Anglo-American materials as grave goods to perpetuate the African belief in spirits. They adopted the Anglo-American quilting, carving and ironworking traditions as media through which to express a system of African aesthetics, including a propensity for active improvisation, an intensely communal spirit, and a tendency to view holistically matters that most Anglo-Americans segregate: the sacred and the secular, the public and the private.

Archaeologists have paid little attention to these practices. Because, however, syncretism characterizes African-American adaptation to the New World so thoroughly, there is no reason to believe that the archaeological record does not also hold evidence of these patterns.

Many scholars studying African-American culture have considered their subject monolithically, without distinctions of gender or specific African ethnicity. This approach is far from ideal, but it is unavoidable when attempting to distinguish broad aspects of African-American from Anglo-American culture. This method is partially justified because the theme of syncretism surfaces on both cultural and individual levels. Appropriating elements of Anglo-American culture for use in African structures is apparent in the broad trends of African-American music and in individuals' creations: Powers' quilts and Simmons' ironwork, for instance. The recurrence and prevalence of this pattern in such diverse aspects of culture suggests that it fundamentally characterizes African adaptation to the plantation system.

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